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*Università degli Studi di Firenze*

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA in  
"Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali"

CICLO XXV

COORDINATORE: Prof.ssa BAGNATO BRUNA

**India's Foreign Policy during Indira Gandhi's  
Second Government (1971-1977):  
The rise of a regional power**

Settore Scientifico Disciplinare SPS/06

**Dottorando**

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Anni 2010/2012



*For Andy*



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Atomic Energy Commission
AL	Awami League (East Pakistan)
BARC	Bhabha Atomic Research Centre
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BL	British Library (London)
BSF	Border Security Forces
CENTO	Central East Treaty Organization
CIRUS	Canadian-Indian Reactors – United States
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPSU	Communist Party of Soviet Union
CRP	Central Reserve Police
CSDS	Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies
DRDO	Defence Research and Development Organisation
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ENDC	Eighteen Nations Disarmament Conference
FBR	Fast Breeder Reactors
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (United Kingdom)
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GOI	Government of India
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency (United Nations)
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IDSА	Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IMF	International Monetary Fund

IPCS	Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies
JAC	Joint Action Committee (Sikkim)
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Studies (London)
ML	Muslim League (British India)
MRTP	Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices
NAM	Non Aligned Movement
NAP	National Awami Party (Bangladesh)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NMML	Nehru Museum and Memorial Library
NNPA	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act
NNWS	Nuclear Non Weapons State
NPT	Nuclear non Proliferation Treaty
NRG	Nuclear Regulatory Commission (the United States)
NSC	National Security Council (the United States)
NSG	Nuclear Supplier Group
NWS	Nuclear Weapons State
PAC	Political Affairs Committee
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PMS	Prime Minister's Secretariat
PNE	Peaceful Nuclear Experiment
PPP	Pakistan's People Party
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
SC	Sikkim Congress
SEATO	South East Asian Treaty Organization
SJC	Sikkim Janata Congress
SNC	Sikkim National Congress
SNP	Sikkim National Party
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies (London)

SSC	Sikkim State Congress
SSP	Samyukta Socialist Party
UNAEC	United Nations Atomic Energy Commission
UNEPRO	United Nations East Pakistan Relief Operations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNO	United Nations Organization
UNROD	United Nations Relief Operations in Dacca
UPIASI	University of Pennsylvania, Institute for Advanced Study of India
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program



## INTRODUCTION

In general terms this thesis examines India's foreign policy during the second government of Indira Gandhi (1971-1977). It is possible to argue that during this period of time India became, and was also recognized as, the dominant power in South Asia<sup>1</sup> both in military and political terms. *Power* in international relations is generally regarded as a combination of the economic, geographic, political and military factors<sup>2</sup>. In reality, India had always benefited from being the hegemonic state in South Asia in terms of territory, population and economic dimensions since emerging as an independent state on the ashes of the British Empire. However, after the humiliating defeat India suffered against China in 1962, its hegemonic position was challenged. As a result, soon after the 1962 war New Delhi adopted a military and political strategy aimed to strengthen its military capabilities. In the following decade it successfully exercised and asserted its power in the South Asian region. From 1971 to 1977, India in fact won a war against Pakistan for the future of East Pakistan; exploded an atomic bomb becoming the sixth state in the world to demonstrate the possession of such technology; and resolved the question of Sikkim in its favour, an Indian protectorate of great strategic importance due to its location on the border with China, annexing the state and ending its aspirations of independence. Therefore, although the Indian economy was stagnant in the Seventies, and that it would have started to grow only later, in the Eighties<sup>3</sup>, during

1 Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are generally considered as part of South Asia. The region is therefore circled in the north by the Himalayan mountains and in the south by the Indian Ocean. Kishore C. Dash, *Regionalism in South Asia: Negotiating Cooperation, Institutional Structures* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 45.

2 On this topic see for example: Felix Berenskoetter and Michael J. Williams, *Power in World Politics* (Oxon: Taylor & Francis, 2007).

3 India's economy grew from 1951 until 1965 at a rate of 4%, then it entered a period of stagnation during which the Indian economy only grew at the rate of 2,9%. This ended period only in 1980. Several explanations for such a trend are provided by literature. For an interesting analysis of them see: Matthew McCartney, *India: The Political Economy of Growth, Stagnation and the State, 1951-2007* (London: Routledge, 2009), 45.

the second government of Indira Gandhi (1971-1977) New Delhi was able to clearly demonstrate its political and military power in the regional context, and not only.

As a consequence, it is interesting to focus on the causes that allowed this development, on the ways in which the international position was affirmed, and the consequences that it brought. The historical analysis which will be carried out in this thesis aims to shed light on events through a critical study which resorts to archival primary sources. The aim is to evaluate how much the rise of India as a regional power was the result of a specific expansionist foreign policy formulated by the new Indian executive that took power in 1971, and how much the consequence of politics adopted previously, or of those external events favoured such an ascent. The final objective is to contribute to a much larger study of how the new power position held by New Delhi had effective consequences also on the regional and global balance of power.

The study of India's foreign policy during the second government of Indira Gandhi has to be contextualised within the larger picture in which the history of the Seventies and international relations has recently been re-evaluated by historians. The Seventies represented a complex phase of transition both for the developed countries and for the developing ones. The United States was facing a serious period of crisis at the political and cultural level, as well as socio-economic, which reached its apex with the Vietnam war, and caused them to revise their role in the world. In the second half of the Sixties the Soviet Union had initiated the dialogue with the West, inaugurating the phase known as of *détente* of the Cold War, in a phase when it was still appearing as economically solid and militarily strong. In 1972 the SALT I agreements were signed. In addition to regulating the development of the military forces of the two states, these agreements also sanctioned the strategic parity between them for the first time in world history. Therefore, if in the West the Seventies meant a period of *détente*, in Asia the situation was different. The Cultural Revolution in China in 1966, and the parallel definitive erosion of Sino-Soviet relations had opened a new political phase of growing tension in Asia. The rise of China and India respectively, as global and regional powers, marked the beginning of a reorganization

of international relations. The opening of a dialogue between Beijing and Washington was one sign. Another was the rearrangement of relations within the South Asian region between New Delhi and its neighbours, and between India and the superpowers. As this thesis demonstrates, in the Seventies India, exploiting Cold War rivalries and changing its historical position in the international realm, indeed seized the opportunity presented to them by the civil war that had erupted in East Pakistan to reinforce its position and to weaken its old rival Pakistan. Moreover, New Delhi did not hesitate to explode a nuclear bomb to demonstrate first of all to China, and secondly to the rest of the world, its technological, military and political power, even at the cost of eroding international relations with its nuclear commercial partners of the West. Lastly, India exercised its power over the small Himalayan state of Sikkim. It vanished its ambitions for independence and annexed it, thus demonstrating its military and political power to all the other small states of South Asia. All these events took place under the government of Indira Gandhi who, after strong internal tensions inside the Congress party, in 1971 emerged as the new national leader.

The aim of this doctoral thesis is therefore to offer a new contribution to the discipline of the History of International Relations posing India as the centre of the analysis. Focussing on India indeed allows the formulation of new reflections particularly useful today since the global political context is no more characterised by a unipolar structure, but by a multipolar system where India assumed an important position among new emerging powers. From this point of view this thesis allows to argue that the Cold War *détente* was not only characterised by the superpowers' willingness to recognise their strategic parity in order to keep the *status quo* intact, but also by the rise of new international actors, like for example China and India in Asia, which exploited superpowers' rivalry for their own interests. The Italian historiographical context regarding the discipline of the History of International Relations on the Asian continent, and specifically in India, is extremely limited. Only few and isolated works have been done until today, such as for example Mariele



Merlati's study on Indo-American relations during Carter's years<sup>4</sup>. In its introductory part Merlati's study only briefly resumes the literature assessment of the Indo-American relations during the government of Indira Gandhi, without however specifically focussing on it. More generally, some studies of Prof. Michelguglielmo Torri have been focussed on India's foreign policy, such as for example *Asia Major/Asia Maior*<sup>5</sup>, which traces on an annual basis domestic and international policies in Asian countries and thus also in India, and few other contributions<sup>6</sup>. Beyond some contributions of a more general nature, among which Torri's book<sup>7</sup>, the attention has instead been mainly given to India's domestic political dynamics, such as India's cultural traditions<sup>8</sup>, and socio-economic and political development<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, the historiographical context to which this research refers is the international one. Largely dominated by British, American and Indian works the international literature on India's foreign policy is rich and original. Nevertheless, it is characterised by two important limits. First, the scarce presence of works of historical character, in favour of an abundance of works of a political nature, such as

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4 Mariele Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan: gli anni della presidenza Carter* (Roma: Carocci, 2009).

5 See for example the articles written annually by Michelguglielmo Torri on India's foreign policy, which are almost all available at: <http://www.asiamaior.org/>.

6 See for example: Michelguglielmo Torri, "L'India indù, potenza nucleare," *Giano* 29/30 (December 1998): 47–63; Michelguglielmo Torri, "Ondeggiamenti e continuità della politica estera indiana," *Giano* 39 (December 2001): 165–184.

7 Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007).

8 See for example: Michelguglielmo Torri, "I musulmani nell'India indipendente," in *A oriente del profeta. L'islam in Asia oltre i confini del mondo arabo*, by Paolo Affatato and Emanuele Giordana (Milano: Obarra, 2005), 37–48; Enrico Fasana, *Il problema tribale in India* (Torino: Giappichelli, 1967); Enrico Fasana, *Riforma sociale e conversione nella comunità musulmana del subcontinente indiano* (Napoli: Istituto Orientale, 1976); Enrico Fasana, *Mandal e Mandir: Religion and Society in Independent India* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2002).

9 Michelguglielmo Torri, "Origine, evoluzione e trasformazione della democrazia indiana," in *Il subcontinente indiano verso il terzo millennio. Tensioni politiche, trasformazioni sociali ed economiche, mutamento culturale*, by Elisabetta Basile and Michelguglielmo Torri (Milano: Centro Studi per i popoli extraeuropei Cesare Bonacossa dell'Università di Pavia/Franco Angeli, 2002), 77–145, <http://dex1.tsd.unifi.it/juragentium/it/index.htm?surveys/rol/>; Michelguglielmo Torri, "L'India ha sessant'anni. Dimensioni e limiti di un successo," *Afriche e Orienti* 3, no. 4 (2007): 116–123; Michelguglielmo Torri, "La trasformazione del sistema politico indiano," *Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali* 7 (2008): 18–29; Michelguglielmo Torri, "I costi sociali dello sviluppo," in *L'elefante sul trampolino. L'India fra i grandi della terra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009); Matilde Adduci, *L'India contemporanea: dall'indipendenza all'era della globalizzazione* (Roma: Carocci, 2009); Antonella Rondinone, *India: geografia politica* (Roma: Carocci, 2008).

those afferent to the discipline of Political Science and International Relations<sup>10</sup>. Second, the historical literature on India's foreign policy is especially limited if compared to material which specialises in China's foreign policy, for instance. This is particularly true with regards to the period of time analysed in this thesis. Academic attention has indeed been largely focused on the Sino-American rapprochement<sup>11</sup>, rather than on events in the South Asian region. Although international attention towards India and its foreign policy increased in the years after the Nineties, much remains to be done. The fact that India internationally opened its economy, and India's economic weight became relatively more important in the world, fostered international attention to India's history. In order to understand how the historiographical context is articulated and how this thesis tries to contribute to it, here four distinct sections of literature related to the principal events of the Seventies are briefly presented.

The first specific literature to which this thesis aims to contribute is related to

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- 10 See for example: Kanti P. Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarapu, *International Relations in India: Bringing Theory Back Home* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2005); Kanti P. Bajpai and Siddharth Mallavarapu, *International Relations in India: Theorising the Region and Nation* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2005); Barry Buzan, "South Asia Moving Towards Transformation: Emergence of India as a Great Power," *International Studies* 39, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 1–24; Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India's Foreign Policy Under Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1982).
- 11 See for example: John W. Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968-1971* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982); John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); On this topic more recently several works had been published based on archival research in the American archives, such as: Y. Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 21–52; Robert S. Ross and Changbin Jiang, *Re-Examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973* (London: Harvard Univ Asia Center, 2001); W. Burr, "Sino-American Relations, 1969: The Sino-Soviet Border War and Steps Towards Rapprochement," *Cold War History* 1, no. 3 (2001): 73–112; Evelyn Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 475–502; Chris Connolly, "The American Factor: Sino-American Rapprochement and Chinese Attitudes to the Vietnam War, 1968–72," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 501–527; Zhihuan Shen, "The Great Leap Forward, the People's Communes and the Rupture of the Sino-Soviet Alliance" (Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact, The Cold War History of Sino-Soviet Relations, June 2005), <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=cab359a3-9328-19cc-a1d2-8023e646b22c&lng=en&id=108645>; Kuisong Yang and Yafeng Xia, "Vacillating Between Revolution and Détente: Mao's Changing Psyche and Policy Toward the United States, 1969–1976," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 2 (2010): 395–423; Lorenz M. Lüthi, "Restoring Chaos to History: Sino-Soviet-American Relations, 1969," *The China Quarterly* 210 (2012): 378–397.

India's positive resolution of the East Pakistani crisis of 1971, which led to the Pakistani defeat and to the emergence of Bangladesh. It can be divided into two sections. The first one is based on press reports, direct accounts, interviews, and reconstructions of events<sup>12</sup>. Among these works, of different academic values, some contributions are of crucial interest still today, such as the books written by Sisson and Rose (closer to New Delhi's point of view), Jackson (more neutral) and Zaheer (a critical account written by a Pakistani). More recently a second wave of contributions were published on the 1971 South Asian events<sup>13</sup> that rely on the analysis of the American documents recently declassified by the government of the United States. However, no Indian or other international archival sources have been consulted yet in addition to those from American. Thus, the accuracy of the interpretations that emerged from the study of the American sources have not been checked. Similarly,

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12 Marta R. Nicholas and Philip Oldenburg, *Bangladesh: The Birth of a Nation; a Handbook of Background Information and Documentary Sources* (Madras: M. Seshachalam, 1972); D. R. Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size: The Authentic Story of the 14-day Indo-Pak War* (New Delhi: Indian Book Co., 1972); Vijay Sen Budhraj, "Moscow and the Birth of Bangladesh," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 5 (May 1973): 482–495; Golam Wahed Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent* (New Delhi: Free Press, 1975); Robert Victor Jackson, *South Asian Crisis: India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Nilkanta Krishnan, *No Way but Surrender: An Account of the Indo-Pakistan War in the Bay of Bengal, 1971* (Sahibabad: Vikas, 1980); Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan: The Rise and Realization of Bengali Muslim Nationalism* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994); F. R. J. Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1997).

13 Christopher Van Hollen, "The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia," *Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (April 1980): 339–361; Roedad Khan, *The American Papers: Secret And Confidential India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Documents, 1965-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); F. S. Aijazuddin, *The White House & Pakistan: Secret Declassified Documents, 1969-1974/selected and Edited by FS Aijazuddin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969–1976, Volume XI, South Asia Crisis, 1971 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005); FRUS, Volume E–7, Documents on South Asia, 1969–1972 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005); FRUS, Volume E–8, Documents on South Asia, 1973–1976 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2007); Kalyani Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond* (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2010); Geoffrey Warner, "Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971," *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005): 1097–1118; Itty Abraham, "South Asian Events of 1971: New Revelations," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 28 (July 9, 2005): 2994–2995; Gary R Hess, "Grand Strategy and Regional Conflict: Nixon, Kissinger, and Crisis in South Asia," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 5 (2007): 959–963; Robert J. MacMahon, "The Danger of Geopolitical Fantasies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the South Asia Crisis of 1971," in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, by Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 249–268.

also the specific literature related to India's nuclear programme can be divided in two sections: the first and older one based on press sources, interviews and personal accounts of events, largely of Indian origin<sup>14</sup>; and the second and more recent one based on declassified American documents, thus having a much more international character<sup>15</sup>. Again no other archival sources have been consulted: neither Indian ones, nor British and the Canadian ones, which was one India's more important nuclear commercial partners. Differently the literature on Sikkim's merger with India in 1975 is largely biased and partial: on one hand, there is the official Indian account provided during and after the events<sup>16</sup>, which depict India as taking only a passive role; and on the other hand, there are the critical accounts produced by sources linked

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14 See for example: Shyam Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb* (Sahibabad: Vikas, 1979); Brahma Chellaney, "South Asia's Passage to Nuclear Power," *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991): 43; Brahma Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation: The U.S.-Indian Conflict* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993); Bhabani Sen Gupta and Cānakya Sena, *Nuclear Weapons?: Policy Options for India* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1983); J. P. Jain, *Nuclear India* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1974); Ashok Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option: Atomic Diplomacy and Decision Making* (New Delhi: Praeger, 1976); G. G. Mirchandani, *India's Nuclear Dilemma* (New Delhi: Popular Book Services, 1968); K. Subrahmanyam, "Indian Nuclear Policy, 1964-98: a Personal Recollection," in *Nuclear India*, by Jasjit Singh (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, 1998), 26–53; A. G. Noorani, "India's Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee," *Asian Survey* 7, no. 7 (July 1, 1967): 490–502; A. G. Noorani, "Indo-U.S. Nuclear Relations," *Asian Survey* 21, no. 4 (April 1, 1981): 399–416; Kanwal Kishore Pathak, *Nuclear Policy of India: a Third World Perspective* (New Delhi: Gitanjali Prakashan, 1980); T. T. Poullose, "India's Nuclear Policy," in *Perspective of India's Nuclear Policy* (Young Asia, New Delhi, 1978); Raja Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage, an Autobiography* (New Delhi: Viking, 1991); Narasimhiah Seshagiri, *The Bomb!: Fallout of India's Nuclear Explosion* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1975); Sampooran Singh, *India and the Nuclear Bomb* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1971).

15 George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998); Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest to Be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000); Itty Abraham, *South Asian Cultures of the Bomb: Atomic Publics and the State in India and Pakistan* (New York: Indiana University Press, 2009); Ian Anthony, Christer Ahlstrom, and Vitaly Fedchenko, *Reforming Nuclear Export Controls: What Future for the Nuclear Suppliers Group?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); B. Banerjee and N. Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008); Ashok Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond: India's Nuclear Behaviour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan*.

16 See the Indian press in almost all its entirety, and also: Awadhesh Coomar Sinha, *Politics of Sikkim: a Sociological Study* (Delhi: Thomson Press, 1975); Ranjan Gupta, "Sikkim: The Merger with India," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 9 (September 1975): 786–798; P. Raghunadha Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India* (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1978); the account provided by the Indian ex-Chief Executive of Sikkim: Brajbir Saran Das, *The Sikkim Saga* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983); G. S. Bajpai, *China's Shadow Over Sikkim: The Politics of Intimidation* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1999).

to the defeated royal family of Sikkim<sup>17</sup>, which instead accuse India of having arranged 1973 demonstrations, and later forcibly annexing Sikkim. The more impartial and authoritative literature mediates between these two different interpretations, and states that India seized the opportunity of popular discontent to intervene in Sikkim and to annex it<sup>18</sup>. However, no archival sources of any country have been consulted yet on this topic, leaving therefore space in this thesis to formulate a new contribution. The last and more general literature related to the broader analysis of India's foreign policy during the government of Indira Gandhi is more heterogeneous. Although initially the academic contributions on India's foreign policy during the Seventies were few and largely focussed on the role played by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi<sup>19</sup>, works on this topic later increased and became centred on India's rise as an emerging power in the international system<sup>20</sup>. However, a large part of these new works have remained mainly related to the specific influence of the personality of the Prime Ministers on the formulation of India's foreign policy<sup>21</sup>. Although some of them are works of crucial importance, these contributions only partially consider other important perspectives, such as the nature of the external challenges to India's power existing in the Seventies, or the influence of the Cold War dynamics. Therefore, there is the need to cover these analytical gaps and to produce an interpretation of this period that will be more complete, and also based on the archival sources available today.

As it clearly appears from this brief and concise analysis of the historiographical

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17 N. Ram, "Sikkim Story: Protection to Absorption," *Social Scientist* 3, no. 2 (September 1974): 57; the account provided by the Chogyal's wife: Hope Cooke, *Time Change: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984); the account provided by the ex-Dewan and Chogyal's friend: Nari Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1987); Jigme N. Kazi, *Inside Sikkim, Against the Tide* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Hill Media Publications, 1993).

18 Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011), 483–484.

19 Tharoor, *Reasons of State*; Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966-1982* (London: Sage Publications, 1984).

20 See for example: A. D. D. Gordon, *India's Rise to Power in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004). See also these more general works: Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004: The Gradual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Guha, *India After Gandhi*.

context, in order to contribute to the further development of the literature knowledge, this doctoral research is based on the analysis of the recent archival declassified documents. Since the literature already considered in large measures the American archival sources, it has been decided to consult Indian, and British archives on the specific issue of India's foreign policy, which had not yet been consulted. This choice was taken on the consideration that India, in recent years, had begun to declassify documents from the Seventies, and that the archives of the United Kingdom could also provide an interesting account of the events posed at the centre of this thesis. As a consequence, the *Indian National Archives* in New Delhi were visited, and the available declassified documents of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) collected<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, the Archives of the *Nehru Museum and Memorial Library* (NMML), which store private documents of important Indian politicians, were consulted. Here the papers of P. N. Haksar, who was the Principal Secretary of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, were identified as crucial and thus collected<sup>23</sup>. The MEA

21 George K. Tanham, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1992); James Manor, "Innovative Leadership in Modern India: M. K. Gandhi, J. Nehru and I. Gandhi," in *Innovative Leaders*, by Gabriel Sheffer (New York: SUNY Press, 1993); Sumit Ganguly, "The Prime Minister and Foreign and Defence Policies," in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*, by James Manor and B. D. Dua (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 138–160; George Kilpatrick Tanham, Kanti P. Bajpai, and Amitabh Mattoo, *Securing India: Strategic Thought and Practice* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1996); Jaswant Singh, *Defending India* (New Delhi: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Jyotindra Nath Dixit, *Makers of India's Foreign Policy: Raja Ram Mohun Roy to Yashwant Sinha* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2004); K. Subrahmanyam and Arthur Monteiro, *Shedding Shibboleths: India's Evolving Strategic Outlook* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2005); Ashok Kapur, *India: From Regional to World Power* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006); Harish Kapur, *Foreign Policies Of India's Prime Ministers* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2009); Sumit Ganguly, *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect* (New Delhi: OUP India, 2012).

22 MEA, HI: HI/121/3/70, HI/121/11/70, HI/121/1/72-8, and HI/121/6/72; MEA, PP (JS): PP/JS/4/8/70, PP/JS/4/2/74, PP/JS/3/3/74-I, PP/JS/4/3/74, and PP/JS/4/1/75; MEA, AMS: WII/103/2/71, WII/104/13/70, WII/103/25/71, WII/104/14/70, WII/104/15/71, WII/104/17/41, WII/104/26/71, WII/109/1/71-II, WII/109/13/71-V, WII/109/13/71-VI, WII/109/13/71-VII, WII/109/17/71, WII/121/68/71, WII/504/3/71, WII/504/4/71, WII/504/6/71, WII/121/1/72, WII/103/4/73-I, WII/104/1/73-II, WII/109/1/73-I, WII/307/2/73, WII/103/20/74-I, WII/103/20/74-II, WII/103/21/74, WII/103/27/74-I, WII/151/5/74, WII/504/2/74, WII/121/71/75, WII/162/36/75-I, WII/162/36/75-II, WII/202/6/75, WII/202/8/75, WII/125/28/76, WII/125/29/76, WII/125/31/76, WII/125/37/76, WII/104/10/77, WII/104/28/77, and WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi, India.

23 P. N. Haksar private papers (III instalment), Sub. F. N. 160, 164, 167, 170, 173, 174, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 179, 180, 200, 203, 210, 217, 220, 227, 231, 234, 235, 238, 257, 258, 259, 269, 290, 292, and (I&II instalment), Sub. F. N. 31, 55, 57, 58, Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, New Delhi, India.

documents allowed the analysis of the relations India had with the superpowers and its regional neighbouring states through the exchange of communications between New Delhi and the various Indian Embassies and Consulates. The documents collected at the NMML allowed, instead, to better understand how decisions were taken by the Indian leadership. The latter demonstrated to be more revealing than the MEA ones, especially in relation to India's policy towards Sikkim since they disclose new important details about the events. On this latter topic of crucial importance the documents declassified by the British Government have also been collected at the *National Archives* at Kew Gardens, in London<sup>24</sup>. British documents<sup>25</sup> also permitted to enrich the analysis of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war, and of India's nuclear programme.

The research done in order to write this thesis has also been largely based on the analysis of the secondary sources available. Therefore, at the initial phase research was also done at the libraries of the University of Florence and of Turin in Italy. Later the vast secondary sources available at the libraries of the major Universities of London in the United Kingdom were consulted from September 2010 to September 2011. Therefore, the library of the *School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)*, the *Senate House Library*, the *British Library (BL)* and that of the *London School of Economics (LSE)* were visited. At the British Library the author also carried out an analysis of the major Indian newspapers of the period, such as *The Hindu* (Madras), *Economic Times*, *The Times of India*, and *The Hindustan Times* (Delhi). In London some South Asian specialists were also contacted and met, such as Prof. James Manor (*School of Advanced Studies, University of London*), Prof. Mushtaq Khan, Dr. Matthew McCartney, Dr. Rochana Bajpai, Dr. David Taylor and Dr. Rahul Rao

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24 About Sikkim the documents collected about the political situation in Sikkim are: FCO 37/532, 982, 1181, 1533-1534 and 1672-1674.

25 AB 48/1613; DO 133/ 200; FCO 37/755-756, 813, 819, 829, 835, 837, 843, 990, 996, 1093-1096, 1166, 1196, 1281, 1285, 1287, 1290-1294, 1401, 1454, 1457, 1461, 1465-1466, 1474-1477, 1604-1605, 1613-1618, 1623, 1633, 1714-1716, 1719, 1720, 1723-1727, 1734, 1737-1744, 1932, 1934-1939, 1946-1947, 1949, 1972-1973, 1984, 2050 and 2056; FCO 49/ 341-343, and 717; FCO 51/249; FCO 66/743-745 and 922-924; FCO 82/367; OD 27/309 and 387; PREM 15/445; T 317/1643, 1738, 1912, 2074 and 2080; T 354/314-315, in National Archives, Kew Gardens, London, United Kingdom.

(SOAS), and Dr. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury (Fellow at the *International Institute for Strategic Studies – IISS*). From October to December 2011 the research was then carried on in India at the major libraries of New Delhi, such as the libraries of the *Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)*, *Delhi University*, *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS)*, and *Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA)*. In New Delhi the author of this thesis also carried out some interviews to those who, in the Seventies, held positions of importance in the political, intellectual and military sphere in India. Thus, for example, B. N. Tandon, who had worked in the Indian bureaucracy in the Prime Minister's Office in close contact with the Prime Minister, was interviewed. Some retired military officers, such as Gen. Ashok Mehta, Gen Jacob, and Gen. Shergill, were also met. Similarly, diplomats like M. K. Rasgotra (former Deputy Ambassador in Washington, 1969-1972, and London High Commissioner, 1972-1973), and Salman Haidar (Foreign Secretary, 1995-1997) were consulted. Also intellectuals working as journalists or editors at the major Indian national newspapers in the Seventies, such as Subhash Chakravarty (*The Times of India*), K. K. Katyal (*The Hindu*), Inder Malhotra (*The Times of India* and *The Indian Express*), Kuldip Nayar (*The Indian Express*) were also interviewed, together with contemporary political analysts like Subhash Agrawal (*India Focus*), and Sanjay Baru (*IISS*). Lastly university professors like Prof. P. R. Chari (former civil servants at the Ministry of Defence in the Seventies, by then a research professor at the *Institute of Peaceful and Conflict Studies – IPCS*), Dr. Siddharth Mallavarapu and Prof. Sucheta Mahajan (JNU), Prof. Ashis Nandy (Senior Professor at the *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies – CSDS*), Prof. Eswaran Sindharan (Academic Professor at the *University of Pennsylvania Institute for the Advanced Study of India – UPIASI*), Prof. Mahendra Singh, Prof. Achik Vanaik and Dr. Rekha Saxena (*University of Delhi*), Dr. V. Krishnappa, Dr. Smruti Pattnaik, Dr. Rajiv Nayan and Dr. Vinod A. Kumar (research fellows at the *IDSA*), and Prof. Bharat Wariavwalla were consulted. These interviews were useful since the interviewees generally had detailed and fresh recollections of that historical period. Therefore, they helped the author of this thesis to understand how the decision-making process was organized in



Indira Gandhi's government, and what are the perceptions and evaluations shared by the Indian political and intellectual elite were with reference to the events analysed in this thesis.

The research developed in this thesis has allowed the author to provide some interesting results in relation to the literature consulted, which are illustrated in each chapter of the thesis, and also restated in the conclusion. The first one is that this thesis, analysing 1971 events, demonstrates that India decided to take a supporting position towards the East Pakistan rebels from March 1971, when the civil war began. It also re-dimensions the importance given by the literature regarding Nixon's announcement of Kissinger's trip to China in July 1971 in triggering the Indo-Soviet alliance, arguing that the decision by that time had been already taken and that this news only confirmed the necessity to continue on that path<sup>26</sup>. The consultation of Indian archives indeed had allowed the discovery that the Indian leadership had considered signing a treaty with the Soviets even before Nixon's announcement. In fact, to solve the complex situation created in East and West Bengal India had realized that a war had to take place, and that a treaty with the Soviet was thus necessary to avoid the risk of a UN intervention. In relation to India's nuclear program this thesis again permits the re-dimension the United States' role recognised by some literature<sup>27</sup> in influencing India's nuclear program and its decision to explode a bomb in 1974. The analysis developed here suggests instead that the rivalry with China was the more realistic and far more important factor that led India to take the decision to develop the technology necessary to explode a nuclear device. Moreover, in relation to Sikkim's merger with India in 1975, the research developed in the following pages allows one to cast serious doubts about the official version provided by India which depicts the merger as a spontaneous and democratic choice made by

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26 See for example the literature cited in note 13.

27 See for example: Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993); Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan*. Similarly also some press articles tends to overrate the importance of Nixon's tilt towards Pakistan and China in leading India to its first nuclear test misinterpreting the online available American archival sources. See for example: "Nixon's tilt towards Pak, China led India to 1st nuclear test" in Times of India, 6 December 2012, available at: [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-12-06/us/30481315\\_1\\_nuclear-test-nuclear-device-nuclear-capability](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-12-06/us/30481315_1_nuclear-test-nuclear-device-nuclear-capability).

the people of Sikkim. The documentation consulted at the Indian and British archives indeed reinforces those critical interpretations that talk of New Delhi's manipulation of the events. Finally, in a much broader manner this doctoral thesis also allows the identification of those elements that mainly influenced India's foreign policy during the period analysed (1971-1977). The more influential factor appears to be the Sino-Indian rivalry. It had indeed led India to adopt a plan of military modernization after the defeat inflicted by the Chinese in the 1962 war, and to formulate a project for the explosion of the first Indian nuclear device (even if only for peaceful purposes) in the wake of the first Chinese nuclear explosion in 1964. External factors were also of crucial importance, such as the East Pakistan crisis, and the opposition of the Sikkimese royal family in favouring a democratization of the political institutions of the state. These events created the opportunity for India to intervene in these issues, to exploit the weaknesses of its neighbouring states, and to take advantage by exercising its military and political power. Also the new international developments and Cold War dynamics had their importance, allowing India to balance the Pakistani-Chinese-American axis, which would have meant real isolationism for New Delhi, through the alliance with the Soviet Union in 1971. Lastly, the small political group of advisers that circled the Prime Minister played a crucial role in formulating India's foreign policy, which also clearly and directly influenced the events due to the highly centralised and authoritarian decision-making process.

The analysis of this thesis is organised in four chapters in which events are evaluated in a chronological order. Therefore, the first introductory chapter presents the domestic and foreign situation that the new government of Indira Gandhi was facing in 1971. The aim of this chapter is to help the reader to contextualise India's political dynamics in a historical perspective, highlighting the challenges and the opportunities that the new government had to deal with in 1971. The second chapter analyses the East Pakistan crisis that ended with a war between India and Pakistan. The aim is to underline the role played by India in the events since by, winning the war and resolving the East Pakistani crisis in its favour, India demonstrated its new political and military power within South Asia and beyond. The third chapter

focuses on the Indian nuclear programme and on New Delhi's decision to explode the first Indian nuclear device in 1974. The aim here is to evaluate the reasons behind which led New Delhi making that choice. Although defined as peaceful, the explosion was a clear demonstration of power both at the regional and at the global level that triggered several punitive actions against India. The fourth chapter analyses the last important event of the Seventies for India's foreign policy, the 1975 merger of Sikkim with India. Again the aim of the chapter is to focus on the role played by New Delhi in such an event. From being an autonomous protectorate of India but with some independence ambitions and situated along the most important communication route with China, Sikkim was annexed by India in a short lapse of time without anyone in the international community seriously questioning the event. Annexing the small Himalayan state, India again indeed demonstrated to all the other small neighbouring states of the region its major military and political power. Finally the conclusion aims to resume the analysis developed in all four chapters and to suggest some conclusive remarks about India's rise as a regional power in the Seventies. An evaluation of the innovative contributions formulated by this thesis in relation to the literature, and of its limits, is also proposed.

**FIRST CHAPTER:**  
**THE CONGRESS' RISE TO POWER AND INDIA'S**  
**POSITION IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM**

*1. Introduction*

The study of a country's foreign policy is always a walk on slippery terrain, since both the international constraints that influence the state's behaviour, and the roots of the domestic policies undertaken must be taken into consideration. The analysis of India's foreign policy during Indira Gandhi's second government, such as all other studies of this type, requires a precise political and historical contextualisation in order to be carried out correctly. This introductory chapter will sketch out the political situation, including its constraints and opportunities, facing the Indian government in 1971. The goal is to draw a broad picture that will allow a focus upon specific themes in the following chapters. Therefore in this chapter, the eagle eye view will first span across the electoral victory of the Congress party and on the domestic political situation. The Congress, gaining an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha (the lower chamber of the Parliament), installed itself in a powerful position strong enough to freely determine both the domestic politics and the national foreign policy. However, the new government suffered because of some weaknesses that will be also highlighted in this chapter through a brief historical presentation of India's

domestic political evolutions from 1965. In the second part of this chapter, the international situation India was facing in 1971 will then be presented. The growing collaboration with the Soviet Union will be also analysed as the result, firstly, of the Cold War dynamics that were shaking the political equilibrium in Asia at the beginning of the Seventies (e.g. the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-American rapprochement); and secondly, of the specific challenges and opportunities India was facing in its relations with its regional rivals.

## ***2. The new Congress government and the domestic situation***

Led by Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, the Indian National Congress won the 1971 elections with the largest majority since 1962. It obtained 43,05% of the votes and 350 seats out of the 518 in the Lok Sabha. Nehru's daughter emerged as the first national leader, and as the real inheritor of the historical Congress' leadership, which had led the fight for Independence against British rule<sup>1</sup>. The landslide victory put the word end to the rivalry between the two parties<sup>2</sup> that emerged from the division of Congress in 1969, which, still in 1971, were both claiming to be the real heir of the historical Indian party. The Congress led by Indira Gandhi harshly defeated the opposition organized in a large anti-Congress coalition (the so called *Fourth Party Alliance*), and freed itself from the necessity to rely on the support of other parties<sup>3</sup>. The communist parties in the 1971 elections, despite their positive electoral performance, indeed lost the strategic political position they

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1 David H. Bayley, "India: War and Political Assertion," *Asian Survey* 12, no. 2 (February 1972): 87.

2 Congress (R – for Revisionist, later called I – for Indira) led by Indira Gandhi, and the Congress (O – for Organisation) led by Moraji Desai, a conservative senior politician. To simplify naming conventions in this document, the Indira Gandhi – led Congress Indira Gandhi will be referred simply as "Congress".

had been detaining for two years<sup>4</sup>. In 1969 the split in Congress had indeed left an Indira Gandhi-headed national government without the numbers to control the Lok Sabha, and without any option but to resort to the external support from other parties in order to continue governing. The decision to go to the polls was taken in December 1970 by Indira Gandhi and her advisers, fourteen months before the end of the governmental regular term, with the precise aim to gain broader support from the people that would allow the Congress to rule in autonomy. The success of this strategy was confirmed by the electoral results that ensured the Congress an absolute majority. Therefore, the new government took office in a strong position that seemed to free up its hands to govern and implement the policies it promised during the electoral campaign.

In spite of its large parliamentary majority, the Congress government was faced with some weaknesses. The first naturally came from the fact that it won with a political program of radical social changes that was difficult to be put into practice. There was a legitimate belief that such programme had been put in place to gain electoral support rather than promote redistributive policies. This perception was reinforced by the fact that among the groups that gave their support to the Congress in the 1971 elections, there were also some sections of Indian society that were clearly not interested in the radical social reforms it promised. The second challenge was represented by the fact that the new government was an example of a weak

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3 The coalition regrouped the three Indian “right” parties, the Congress (O), the Swatantra Party (a classical political liberal party founded in 1959 by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari and N. G. Ranga), and the Jan Sangh (a right-wing Hindu party founded in 1951, later succeeded by the Bharatiya Janata Party – BJP), together with the only left party to directly run against the Congress, the Samyukta Socialist Party – SSP (a socialist party born by a split with the Praja Socialist Party – PSP in 1964, which later reunited to the PSP in 1972). At the polls, Congress (O) suffered a significant loss, gaining less than 10% of the votes and passing from 65 to only 16 seats. The Swatantra and the SSP similarly registered a poor result; the Jan Sangh contained the losses and passed from 35 seats to 22. Bayley, “India.”

4 Among the left parties, the Communist Party (Marxist) – CPM – became the second national party in the Lok Sabha with its 25 seats, though its base was just limited to West Bengal. The Communist Party of India (CPI) confirmed its previous position, winning 23 seats and losing just one, but its support was secured just in those areas where it was not opposed by the Congress. W. H. Morris-Jones, “India Elects for Change -- and Stability,” *Asian Survey* 11, no. 8 (August 1971): 735–737. The existence in India of the Communist Party (Marxist) – CPM – and of the Communist Party of India (CPI) reflects the ideological division then existing in the international communist movement: the CPM supported China, the CPI the Soviet Union.

party, the Congress with its frail structure and organization. It had emerged just two years before from a split that, although was formally justified as the results of ideological divergences, was principally due to the struggle for power between Mrs. Gandhi and the old guard of the party. An additional weakness was represented by the fact that, since Indira Gandhi rose to power in 1966, the Congress had been interested in the centralisation of power that further undermined its organizational strength and the representative character of the party. The 1971 elections witnessed a further acceleration of this process caused by Indira Gandhi's decision to de-link national elections from the state ones<sup>5</sup>, and to personally supervise the party candidate selections. For understanding this situation it is necessary to contextualise the 1971 elections and to briefly consider the political events that took place from 1965.

The Indian National Congress had been the main actor on the stage of the Indian "dominant party system" since independence in 1947<sup>6</sup>. However, the party's political strength and its solidity began to decline at the beginning of the Sixties when growing frictions emerged within the party between a group of conservative politicians and the congressmen loyal to Nehru. In 1963 Nehru's government suffered its first no-confidence motion in Parliament<sup>7</sup>, leading to what was then called the *Kamaraj Plan*: a political purge carried out at the highest offices of the

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5 From Independence until 1967 national and state elections had been held at the same time. The decision made by Indira Gandhi to go to the polls in 1970, anticipating the scheduled elections by almost one year, broke the mechanism. In 1971 in just 3 states the elections were held together with the national one: West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. This happened because West Bengal was under President's Rule and elections had to be held, and the chief minister of Tamil Nadu dismissed its government in parallel to Mrs. Gandhi's national decision to anticipate elections at the national level. Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004: The Gradual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 457–459.

6 Although this system could appear undemocratic in the eyes of a person unfamiliar with Indian politics, it is interesting to note that, according to literature, India's party system in 1964 was described as one where "political competition was internalized and carried on within the Congress" and where "... an intricate structure of conflict, mediation, bargaining, and consensus was developed within the framework of Congress", assuring a certain level of democratic confrontation. Rajni Kothari, "The Congress 'System' in India," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 12 (December 1964): 1163.

7 The non-confidence motion was, on one hand, the visible result of the emerging of a growing opposition within the party on the socio-economic policies implemented in the agrarian sector during the first three five-year plans by the Indian governments. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 223.

government<sup>8</sup>. The following year, the death of Nehru – considered the *father of the nation* – left the Congress, and the entire Indian political system in a dramatic political vacuum, opening the scene for a direct fight for the political succession between the group faithful to Nehru, called the Syndicate, and the conservative wing<sup>9</sup>. The purge fostered by the Kamaraj plan had put the Syndicate in a dominant position, allowing it to select as Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, a politician close to Nehru's group. Following Shastri's sudden death in 1966, the Syndicate decided to replace the deceased Prime Minister with Indira Gandhi in order to oppose the emergence of a figure from the conservative wing again<sup>10</sup>. Nehru's daughter was perceived as a weak political figure, easy to manipulate<sup>11</sup>, but useful for gaining consensus because of her family affiliation to Nehru could provide some means of continuity with Congress' politics.

During these years the political struggle within the Congress was fought more on personal rivalry, than on ideological bases. Clear evidence of this can be demonstrated by the fact that both the Shastri (1964-1966) and Indira Gandhi (1966-1967) governments, which opposed the conservative and liberal position, according to Frankel, took “exactly the opposite route that the one chartered by Nehru in the last years of his life” in the field of planned economic policies, promoting liberal policies, and moving away from the socialist Nehruvian path<sup>12</sup>. The two Prime

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8 The Kamaraj plan, exhorting first-ranking ministers and the Chief Ministers to leave their positions of government for taking care of the revitalization of the party organization, was the evidence that an internal struggle was already on going in the Congress party. The plan had been conceived in the wake of the negative by-elections results of the previous spring in order to contrast the growing internal dissent. Partha Chatterjee, *State and Politics in India* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14. Its aim was to favour the formation, around the figure of Kamaraj, who later became the Chief Minister of Madras and the party president of the Congress of a group of politicians loyal to the Prime Minister Nehru. Accepted by the All India Congress Conference in August 1963, the plan was hence the instrument with which the Prime Minister purged its Cabinet, and the state level politics from his most powerful conservative critics. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 229.

9 Chatterjee, *State and Politics in India*, 22.

10 Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011), 404.

11 She started her political career in 1955 when she inducted in the Congress Working Committee, the Central Election Committee, and the Central Parliamentary Board. In 1959 she was also elected Congress president, although she did not have any independent base of power either inside or outside the party.

12 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 246.



Ministers faced a serious economic crisis, linked to the scarce agricultural production<sup>13</sup> and to the dramatic food crisis of 1965-66<sup>14</sup>. Responding to the pressure from the aid-donors, like the World Bank (WB), and International Monetary Fund (IMF), they indeed resorted to a new set of “technocratic” policies, later called the *Green Revolution*<sup>15</sup>, without associating them with any social reforms aimed to reduce rural economic imbalances. Moreover in 1966, in order to immediately contrast the deepening economic crisis that, in some parts of the country, had triggered a situation of famine, the Indian government turned to the United States asking for a further increase in their assistance under the existing PL480 legislation. The American aid allowed New Delhi to weather the crisis<sup>16</sup>, but it attached conditions to it, such as the devaluation of the currency, and the liberalisation of the trade regime that were in harsh contrast with the Nehruvian policies undertaken until that time<sup>17</sup>.

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13 The crisis was probably the consequence of the fact that the agrarian production had been neglected during the first two Five-Year economic plans, due to the fact that public investments had gone largely to sustain the industrial sector. For further information on this topic see: Jagdish N. Bhagwati, *India in Transition: Freeing the Economy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Sukhamoy Chakravarty, “On the Question of Home Market and Prospects for Indian Growth,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 14, no. 30/32 (August 1, 1979): 1229–1242; Frankel, *India’s Political Economy, 1947-2004*; Stuart Corbridge and Dr John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2000); Matthew McCartney, *India: The Political Economy of Growth, Stagnation and the State, 1951-2007* (London: Routledge, 2009).

14 Two consecutive years of severe drought indeed caused a serious shortage of food that in turn resulted in a rise in food prices of 32%, which dramatically hit the poor sections of Indian society, worsening the already difficult economic situation. The national GDP annual growth diminished by 4-5%, while the food crisis also highlighted the vulnerability of the Indian economy, still heavily dependent on foreign import of food grains. Frankel, *India’s Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 293.

15 Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), 244.

16 India imported 15 million tonnes of American wheat during both 1965 and 1966. Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 409.

17 Sumit Ganguly, “The Prime Minister and Foreign and Defence Policies,” in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*, by James Manor and B. D. Dua (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 147; although Johnson promised annual commitments, during 1966 the release of the food aid was made on a monthly base, annoying and frustrating the Indian government. Kux, *India and the United States*, 255–259. Moreover, the help would have been contingent to the ending of India’s criticism over the American position in Vietnam, to the devaluation of the over-rated Indian rupees, to the adoption of some policies to boost India’s economy like the opening of the domestic market to foreign competition, and the continuation of the agrarian reforms already initiated by Shastri’s government.

It is possible to argue that the specific economic crisis that hit India in the second half of the Sixties and the impact of those policies implemented by the Congress to face it in 1965-66 partially favoured the return of the Congress toward left. They indeed exacerbated the socio-economic tensions already present in the Indian society, and enhanced the general awakening of the Indian society, already triggered by the modest but constant economic growth India had experienced since Independence<sup>18</sup>. Social aspirations and interests for political spoils grew among all ranks of the society that became more active and organised. Moreover, growing disparities, food shortages, and rising prices degraded the political stability achieved. The impact of the *Green Revolution* stressed some existing inequalities in the Indian society and enhanced the mobilization strategies of some groups<sup>19</sup>. In order not to damage the interests of the landed groups, which were the mainstay of the Congress system of power, the new agricultural strategy did not dictate any redistribution of land to the poor, but only provided incentives and subsidies for technical innovation in some specific areas and productions. Therefore, although agricultural production increased overall soon after these policies were introduced<sup>20</sup>, only the large and middle sized landowning groups benefited from them<sup>21</sup>. The growing disparities in the countryside fuelled social aspirations and popular discontent among those who remained at the edge of development. Therefore, sections of the population, normally quiescent, were mobilized along several and different regional, communal, socio-economic, and ethnic cleavages. In addition, the devaluation of the rupee, decided by Indira Gandhi's government in 1966 to face the growing deficit of the Indian balance of payment and to answer the American pressures, worsened the domestic political situation because it had a catastrophic impact on the inflation rates and on the prices

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18 Since Independence and up to Sixties the GDP grew at a rate of 3,5%, which was significant especially if compared with the negative growth registered during the British rule. McCartney, *India*.

19 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 336.

20 World Bank data registered a percentage increase in agricultural production of 6 and 7% during the 1969 and 1970 years. Available at: <http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do>

21 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 275–276. The majority of the farmers lagged behind and, according to some studies, the overall rate of people under the poverty line remained unchanged.

of first necessity goods. This damaged the political position of the Congress government, and the opposition parties benefited from the popular discontent in several states: communist parties saw their consensus growing, as well as regional and communal parties<sup>22</sup>. This resulted in the Congress' worst performance ever in the 1967 national and state elections: not only was the Congress returned to central power with a much reduced majority, but it lost to the coalitions of opposition parties representing eight Indian states<sup>23</sup>. Also, the frequency of defections from the Congress party reached a new and impressive level<sup>24</sup>. In a situation where growing sections of the Indian society were asking for more redistributive policies, and opposition parties were augmenting their consensus, it is not surprising that the Indira Gandhi led government decided to turn to leftist policies to contrast this trend, and to re-gain popular consensus soon after the 1967 elections. The Indian Prime Minister started depicting herself as a socialist, and adopting a much more leftist and anti-imperialist rhetoric that anything she had ever used before<sup>25</sup>.

However, it has also to be noted that Indira Gandhi's decision to politically move towards the left was also functional to the struggle which had developed within the Congress, soon after Mrs. Gandhi's appointment as Prime Minister in 1966, and triggered by the Prime Minister's unwillingness to follow the Syndicate's political indications. This struggle had taken the shape of a generational rivalry between Indira Gandhi and the Syndicate, which from that moment began to represent the old

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22 North-East border regional groups, tribes, and minorities became also organised, while the communal oriented Jan Sangh started to gain consensus among the Hindus majority thanks to its specific cultural and political programmes. On this topic see, for example: Ibid., 341–387; Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 405–408.

23 Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 416–437.

24 In the entire 1957-1966 decade, the defections of politicians from one party to another were 542; however in 1967 they shot up to 438. Chatterjee, *State and Politics in India*, 17 It is important to note that the growth of the regional parties was not only a sign of the new weakness of the Congress, but also of the emergence of a more pluralistic political system in India. However, 1967 did not mark the end of the Congress dominance since regional parties were not able to produce a real organizational alternative at the national level, and the governments they formed did not last. After several changes in the composition of the coalitions governing 10 of the 17 states in which the Indian Union was then divided, President's rule was imposed in 5 states (Haryana, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab).

25 Zoya Hasan, "The Prime Minister and the Left," in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*, by B. D. Dua and James Manor (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 216.

guard of the Congress. The rivalry was further enhanced by the 1967 election results due to the fact that the Syndicate representatives within the Congress registered a clear set back, as many of them, including Kamaraj, the acknowledged leader of the group, lost his seat at the Parliament. Indira Gandhi, on the contrary, strengthened her political position as, for the first time, she rallied in a constituency, winning, and emerged as the national leader of the party, shaking the unstable equilibrium existing within the Congress<sup>26</sup>. Feeling strong as a result of her personal electoral result, Indira Gandhi continued in her policy of asserting her autonomy vis-à-vis the old guard, which she had already undertaken during her first term<sup>27</sup>. The old guard of the party promptly reacted by promoting a rapprochement with the conservative members of the Congress. Indira Gandhi, in turn, responded by gradually aligning herself with the Socialist Forum, an internal organization of the Congress historically regrouping long standing socialists and Gandhians, but dominated at that time by a group of young radicals<sup>28</sup>. In doing that, Indira Gandhi tried to build her personal base of power, and to gain support among the people. In this way the generational rivalry between her and the Syndicate, the old-guard of the Congress, was transformed into an ideological struggle.

This resulted in several political advantages for Indira Gandhi. On one hand, this political shift allowed Nehru's daughter to reassert herself as the progressive leader within the Congress. On the other, this political manoeuvre allowed the Prime Minister to repair the damaged political relations with the left parties, and to enlarge her political support inside the Parliament. All these evolutions made Nehru's daughter strong enough to declare an open war to the Syndicate which eventually caused the Congress to split in 1969. The Congress led by Indira Gandhi remained indeed in power, while the other wing of the Congress, led by the Syndicate and the conservatives, joined the opposition. In order to keep the majority of the Parliament and to be able to continue governing, Indira Gandhi's Congress turned to other

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26 Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 305–6.

27 Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Hodder, 2010), 52.

28 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 404.

parties, receiving the support of both the Communist Party of India (CPI), willing to share the power with the new *socialist* Congress, and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a regional Tamil party founded in 1949 in the Madras constituency. In this way, Indira Gandhi's government remained in power for around one year, during which it was able to carry out some of its highly publicised social project reforms: the promotion of some special credit policies in the wave of the nationalisation of the 14 larger commercial Indian banks done in July 1969, the legal battle for the abolition of the privy purses<sup>29</sup>, and the imposition of the state control over larger private industries<sup>30</sup>. In December 1970, Indira Gandhi called for new elections. Campaigning with a political program of radical social reforms and with the political slogan "Garibi Hatao – Let us get rid of poverty" Mrs. Gandhi's Congress won the support of the masses and gained an absolute majority in the Parliament<sup>31</sup>.

With this broad picture clear in mind, it is now easier to comprehend what were the factors challenging the new Congress government, which emerged from the 1971 elections. The observation that the shift to the left of the Congress was probably more of a strategic calculation used to win the elections can now be better appreciated. Legitimate doubts emerge about her and her party's new commitment towards socialist politics. Moreover, the fact that the 1969 split was not triggered by a mobilization from the lower ranks of the party, proves the unimportance of the ideological factors in that political process<sup>32</sup>. The shift towards the left could be done to seize the opportunity to enlarge the Congress support among the masses, which were asking for redistributive policies, and to win the power struggle of Mrs. Gandhi against the old guard of the party. The fact that the reforms implemented by the Indira Gandhi government in the years 1967-1970 were not so radical as they

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29 These were the allowances that the Indian government had offered to the princes after Independence, in exchange for the merging of their states in the Republic of India.

30 This was done in 1969 through the promulgation of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP), a law that re-established the obligation for 41 larger national industries to obtain state licenses to carry on with their economic activities.

31 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 638.

32 Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), 670.

appeared further reinforces the doubts about the real political intentions of the Congress government. The socialist policies implemented by Indira Gandhi's government until 1971, such as the nationalisation of the banks, the credit politics, the abolition of privy purses, and the imposition of the control over private industries, indeed did not damage the interests of those influential groups that had supported the Congress since Independence – such as the middle and large landowners and entrepreneurs, in spite of their socialist appearance<sup>33</sup>. Despite the new aggressive and populist rhetoric, it is therefore credible to argue that Indira Gandhi in 1971 had not lost the support of the historical social base of the Congress party<sup>34</sup>. However, using the new socialist image to appear “as the party of the progress, against an alliance of reaction” the Congress also gained the votes of the poor, the landless and the lower castes<sup>35</sup>. The fact that the interests of those groups that actually supported the Congress in 1971 were not uniform, but rather in conflict among each other, casts further doubts on the possibility of the new government maintaining its electoral promises of social change.

The second aspect that challenged the ability of the new government to carry out its programme of social change was the process of growing centralisation of power, on-going within the Congress since Mrs. Gandhi's rise to power in 1966. The concentration of power in the hands of the Congress leader indeed contributed to eroding the party structure and organization, making it less able to represent the Indian society and to respond to its needs<sup>36</sup>. The same Mrs. Gandhi conduit of the 1971 electoral campaign, which decided to de-link national elections from the state ones, and to centralise the selections of party candidates, further reinforce that

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33 Michelguglielmo Torri, “Factional Politics and Economic Policy: The Case of India's Bank Nationalization,” *Asian Survey* 15, no. 12 (December 1975): 1090–1096; Torri, *Storia dell'India*, 667–679.

34 Although the Congress traditionally represented a vast range of interests within the Indian society, in the party some interests were more important than others. James Manor, “Anomie in Indian Politics: Origins and Potential Wider Impact,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 18, no. 19/21 (May 1, 1983): 725–726; the urban middle classes and the dominant rural groups were over-represented, since their support was indeed a key element in strengthening the political power of the Congress at the national and the local level. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 28–70. Accordingly, the need to obtain their support had directly influenced the political choices of the party since Independence.

35 Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 446.

process weakening the organizational strength of the party. The fact that the fifth Lok Sabha elections were indeed the first ones in the Indian history de-linked by the state elections explains the adoption of a populist appeal by all the contestant parties. This specific aspect made indeed all the political parties suddenly less dependent from the state level politics, personalities, issues and structures for their electoral campaign<sup>37</sup>. As a result, during the electoral campaign the Prime Minister's image was directly used by Congress to win votes from the population of the vast Indian rural areas, instead of the party organization itself with its local leaders. Its entire campaign was thus organized to trigger an emotional wave: for example through the extensive use of posters and political propaganda in both large urban centres and villages, and through Indira Gandhi's electoral tour, impressive in its length (41 days) and numbers of public meetings<sup>38</sup>. Transformed into the symbol of a generational change, Indira Gandhi's figure enabled her Congress party to gain the support of the poorest classes, and of the youth<sup>39</sup>. The same electoral slogan adopted by the opposition – “Garibi Indira/get rid of Indira” – perfectly represents the high level of personalisation of the political campaign<sup>40</sup>. Only running at the national level allowed Mrs. Gandhi to by-

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36 See for example: Stanley A. Kochanek, “Mrs. Gandhi's Pyramid: The New Congress,” in *Indira Gandhi's India: a Political System Reappraised*, by Henry Cowles Hart (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976), 95–102; Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Hasan, “The Prime Minister and the Left”; Manor, “Anomie in Indian Politics.”

37 Rajni Kothari, “Voting in India: Competitive Politics and Electoral Change: Introduction,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 3/5 (January 1, 1971): 229–230.

38 Romesh Thapar, “The Election Scene,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 9 (February 27, 1971): 514.

39 *The Statesman*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1971.

40 The game of bargaining with the alliances further complicated the capabilities of the opposition to run a convincing political campaign, resulting in direct opposition to Indira Gandhi as a person, which further contributed to the personalisation of politics. In addition, Indira Gandhi's decision to go to the polls in 1971 caught the opposition parties by surprise, though they had been asking for elections since 1969, when the split of the Congress occurred. Moreover, the short notice given for the electoral campaigns (two months), gave yet another advantage to the party in power, thanks to its greater organizational and financial capability to rapidly organise its electoral campaign. The 1971 elections were characterised by probably the most expensive electoral campaign since independence (*The Statesman*, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1971). It was reported that the Congress spent more than all the other parties put together and that, facilitated by its advantageous position in power, abused of the government machinery and facilities, even recurring to illegal methods, like offering industrial licences in exchange for votes. Morris-Jones, “India Elects for Change -- and Stability,” 723–724.

pass the hostile intermediate structure of the party, which at the state and local levels was still independent from the control of the new leadership which emerged from the 1969 split, and to centralise the power into her hands<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, the short time given for the electoral campaigns further favoured the centralization of power within the Congress. In fact, the party's machine did not work properly during the candidates' selections, and the selection was rather made from above, personally by Indira Gandhi<sup>42</sup>. This dramatically damaged the party's organization and structure, especially at the grass roots and regional levels, since mechanisms different from the representational ones were adopted. Several explanations had been provided to explain this phenomenon: some relate it to Mrs. Gandhi's personality, others to the same organizational crisis of the Congress party, others to the socio-economic context that facilitated the rise of a strong man in politics<sup>43</sup>. What is important here is to highlight that in the short run, these centralising manoeuvres favoured the Congress's victory, but they also clearly undermined the long term party capability to properly work like a representative structure of the Indian political system.

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41 Hindustan Times, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1971.

42 Indira Gandhi was "believed to have had the decisive voice" in the selection of the candidates in the United Provinces, Punjab, Haryana, and Kashmir, whereas Jagjivan Ram, a man close to her, who had been the Union Minister for Defence in her previous government, was held to have taken care of the Bihari selection and of the lists of scheduled candidates in all the states. Morris-Jones, "India Elects for Change -- and Stability," 724.

43 All these explanations will be carefully analysed later in this thesis since the centralisation of power in the Prime Minister's hands became evident during the 1971 even in the foreign policy decision-making process.



### ***3. The international situation: the Cold War and the South Asian context***

At the beginning of the Seventies South Asia was significantly pervaded by Cold War tensions. Since the second half of the Sixties the global order had indeed taken a new shape. Although the dominant interpretations among the historians of international relations tend to view this period as being characterised by a general phase of détente, referring to the relaxation of the United States' relations with Soviet Union and China<sup>44</sup>, in Asia this definition appears debatable. Instead, those years were tumultuous. A lot of tension emerged among the states, while the political equilibrium was being completely re-designed.

Clear evidence of this re-organization of the regional and global relations was the Soviet Union being the first country in the world to welcome Indira Gandhi's electoral victory in 1971<sup>45</sup>. Radio Moscow celebrated the electoral result as a clear shift to the left, declaring: “the elections in India should be regarded as the beginning of a real change to do away with the remnants of feudalism inherited from the colonial era, to end the economic and political domination of Indian monopolies and to improve people's living standard”<sup>46</sup>. India and the Soviet Union had always had a good relationship, but in 1971 they were closer than ever. Two important historical

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44 On the Cold War politics in general see for example: John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2011); Ennio Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali: dal 1918 ai giorni nostri* (Bari: Laterza, 2008); Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2002* (London: McGraw-Hill, 2004); John W. Young and John Kent, *International Relations Since 1945: A Global History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); John W. Mason, *The Cold War: 1945-1991* (London: Routledge, 1996); Wayne C. McWilliams and Harry Piotrowski, *The World Since 1945: A History of International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Pub, 2009); Federico Romero, *Storia della guerra fredda: l'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009); Robert S. Ross, *China, the United States, and the Soviet Union: Tripolarity and Policy Making in the Cold War* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993).

45 Golam Wahed Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent* (New Delhi: Free Press, 1975), 203.

46 Hemen Ray, *The Enduring Friendship: Soviet-Indian Relations in Mrs. Gandhi's Days* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1989), 34.

events contributed to the Cold War tensions during the second half of the Sixties, triggering this evolution even if it was in different ways: the Sino-Soviet rupture, and the Sino-American rapprochement. The closer relationship with Moscow can be considered a positive evolution for New Delhi that, since the war lost against China in 1962 was in a situation of international isolationism, due to its eroded relations with the other Asian giant and its neutral position with both the superpowers.

However, the Indo-Soviet rapprochement was also posing a direct challenge to India's historical position of non-alignment. Moreover, the same new Soviet position was indeed contemporary to the Sino-American rapprochement that involved Pakistan. From 1969 Islamabad was a crucial strategic player in the eyes of the American administration, representing the secret channel through which the diplomatic relations with Beijing were established and carried out. Even if India, in the spring of 1971, was not aware of the role played by Pakistan in the Sino-American rapprochement<sup>47</sup>, the convergence of the Sino-American-Pakistani interests represented a potentially dangerous situation for New Delhi, as consecutive events then clearly demonstrated.

In order to understand the challenging situation India was facing in March 1971, in the next paragraphs the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-American rapprochement will be analysed, and later, attention will be given to how these events affected the South Asian context.

### ***3.1 The Sino-Soviet split and staging of the Sino-American rapprochement***

Divergences between the two most populous countries of the communist world already surfaced in the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956 when the new Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev promoted

<sup>47</sup> See “Note on China's relations with superpowers dated 1968”, “Note on East Asian Division to JS (PP) sent on the 21<sup>th</sup> Feb 1970”, in MEA, PP(JS)/3/3/74-I; and “Note on Sino-American relations made on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1971”, in MEA, AMS, WII/104/34/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

the process of de-Stalinisation, and proclaimed the possibility of a *peaceful coexistence* with the West<sup>48</sup>. Some years later diversity between the two countries became increasingly significant even in the economic field<sup>49</sup>. Tensions then also grew on military projects of cooperation, as in the case of nuclear cooperation, the construction of a radio station transmission centre in the Pacific, and the establishment of a joint submarine fleet<sup>50</sup>, and at the ideological level. While in 1960, *People's Daily* published “Long Live Leninism”, which was a clear attack on the theoretical and practical Soviet communism, on the pages of *Pravda* condemnations of China had become common since 1963<sup>51</sup>. It was therefore not surprising that, during the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the Soviet Union did not support China, but

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48 The political decision taken by Khrushchev to question the principles of authority, in that context represented by Stalin, worried Beijing since the Chinese political elites feared the risks this actions could rise, not only in the Soviet Union (where growing protests were already taking place), but in the entire communist bloc, and therefore also in China. Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 67–71. The angles at which the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union were looking towards the West at the end of Fifties were also different. China perceived the United States as a threatening presence in Asia, whereas the Soviet Union was aiming at enhancing the dialogue with them in order to freeze the distribution of power in the world and to be recognised as an equal at a strategic level by the United States. In reality the United States intended the process of détente more like a way to contain the economic costs of the nuclear and space competition between the two superpowers Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 1164; More in general on Soviet Union foreign policy see Geoffrey K. Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics: Coexistence, Revolution, and Cold War, 1945-1991* (London: Routledge, 1999); Clement J. Zablocki, *Sino-Soviet Rivalry: Implications U.S. Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 64–84; William V. Wallace, “Sino-Soviet Relations: An Interpretation,” *Soviet Studies* 35, no. 4 (1983): 457–470; Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010); John King Fairbank, Albert Feuerwerker, and Denis Crispin Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China: Republican China 1912-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

49 In 1958, Beijing promoted the Great Leap Forward campaign, which, being focused on the development of the countryside diverged completely from the Soviet policies, which, in line with orthodox Marxist thinking, considered the industrial sector as the motor of development. The Great Leap Forward was conceived and carried out with the use of an aggressive rhetoric, which included some ideological attacks towards the Soviet strategy of growth and development. This, in turn, resulted in harsh criticism from Moscow Zhihua Shen, “The Great Leap Forward, the People's Communes and the Rupture of the Sino-Soviet Alliance” (Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact, The Cold War History of Sino-Soviet Relations, June 2005), <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=cab359a3-9328-19cc-a1d2-8023e646b22c&lng=en&id=108645>.

50 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 73–75.

51 Wallace, “Sino-Soviet Relations,” 466. The People's Daily is the official newspaper of Communist China, and the Pravda was an official organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and one of the leading newspapers of the Soviet Union. Thus they can be considered quite reliable sources for interpreting the two government's stands.

preferred to remain neutral. The Chinese nuclear test in 1964 further boosted tensions and suspicions between the two countries, which had cooperated in the technological nuclear field since 1959. Beijing was indeed identified by Moscow as a direct challenge to the conservation of the bipolar world the Soviet Union was instead interested in keeping.

The nadir of the relations between Beijing and Moscow was reached during the first years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76)<sup>52</sup>, when Moscow was blamed for its “counter-revolutionary” character, and accused of “social-imperialism”<sup>53</sup>. Then the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 spurred China to view the Soviet Union as a hegemonic and imperialistic power threatening the Chinese national security. It also enhanced concerns over the modernization program of the Soviet Army undertaken by Moscow with the aim of reaching strategic parity with the United States. In 1968 Beijing's choice to re-open the border dispute with the Soviet Union, denouncing the past treaties as *unequal*, further deteriorated the bilateral relations<sup>54</sup>. Both the Soviet Union and China started deploying troops along their common border during the spring and summer of 1969, resulting in several clashes along the frontier and making the division of the communist bloc obvious to the whole world. A new era began, where the international system was characterised less rigidly by bipolarism, and more with a new emerging multipolarism<sup>55</sup>.

After 1969 border clashes, China's fear of the Soviet Union became the platform on which the Chinese political elites conceived their move towards the United States<sup>56</sup>. China indeed began to consider the political *détente* with the United States

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52 Although the Cultural Revolution was mainly a domestic political phenomenon and a struggle for power within the Communist party, it led China to an almost complete international isolationism.

53 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 243.

54 On the Sino-Soviet border clashes see: Thomas W. Robinson, “The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes,” *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 4 (December 1972): 1175; Y. Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 21–52; W. Burr, “Sino-American Relations, 1969: The Sino-Soviet Border War and Steps Towards Rapprochement,” *Cold War History* 1, no. 3 (2001): 73–112.

55 China and the Soviet Union during the Seventies supported different factions and were opposed to each other in several African contexts, such as Rhodesia, Ogaden, Angola and Zimbabwe.

as an option that could bring several advantages to Beijing<sup>57</sup>. This policy was gradually conceived during 1969 also thanks to the United States' contemporary reformulation of their entire Asian strategy<sup>58</sup>.

The United States had started experiencing an economic crisis in the second half of Sixties, which peaked in the following decade, when the dollar was de-linked by the gold standard<sup>59</sup>. From 1965, Washington gradually came to realize the unsustainability of the containment strategy that had moved the American role into the Third World for almost a decade and found expression in the *developmental strategy*<sup>60</sup>. The economic growth experienced by the European states and Japan after the Second World War thoroughly started to cause competitiveness problems in the

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56 Although the border dispute was brought to an end the year after, when the leaders of the two countries found an agreement on the settlement of their borders, the Sino-Soviet rivalry did not end there. For the Sino-American opening see: Kuisong Yang and Yafeng Xia, "Vacillating Between Revolution and Détente: Mao's Changing Psyche and Policy Toward the United States, 1969–1976," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 2 (2010): 395–423; John W. Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968–1971* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982); Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969"; Burr, "Sino-American Relations, 1969."

57 This rapprochement could have several positive outcomes for Beijing: the withdrawal of the Seven fleet of the United States, and thus also of the Soviet fleet, from its seas, the possibility to be accepted within the United Nations, and technological advantages that the opening of commercial links with Japan and the United States would bring.

58 Lorenz M. Lüthi, "Restoring Chaos to History: Sino-Soviet-American Relations, 1969," *The China Quarterly* 210 (2012): 378–397; Wallace, "Sino-Soviet Relations," 467.

59 On this topic see: Romero, *Storia della guerra fredda*, 188–196; Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 1195–1210.

60 During the "decade of development" the United States engaged themselves actively in Third World policies in order to contain the Soviet influence over the area. The Third World indeed became the arena of the rivalry between Moscow and Washington and their different models of development and world visions. Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 257. According to the definition by (Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 3), the Third World is considered to be those states that were previously subjected to European or Pan-European (Russian and American). In theory, the American strategy consisted of the attempt to bring the new independent countries towards the path of freedom and democracy, away from the socialist model of development, through the injection of large capitals for promoting the socio-economic development. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 224. This idealistic vision was however translated in policies that ended with supporting authoritarian regimes in order to restrain the internal revolutionary forces, and in a search for stability even at the cost of development, like for example in the Pakistani case where a military regime was actively supported by the United States. David F. Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 264.

American economy<sup>61</sup>. As a result the United States gradually became unable to balance between the growing costs of its global strategy with its reduced revenue from exports. The balance of payment worsened and gold reserves became inadequate to maintain trust in the dollar<sup>62</sup>. In addition, the war in Vietnam further weighted both in terms of high military expenditures, and in terms of declining popular support. Indeed the protracted conflict had also unmistakable political, social, and cultural aspects that favoured a growing dissent among the American youth<sup>63</sup>.

The new American administration led by Richard Nixon – who won the presidential elections in 1968 and began his mandate in 1969 – tried to formulate an answer to this profound crisis. From the first months of his presidency, Nixon presented a new strategy based on the disengagement from much of the previously undertaken world commitments. As a consequence a withdrawal from direct involvement in the politics of the US allies was decided. This strategy was based on commissioning the political stability of peripheral regions to regional friendly powers, such as Brazil in Latin America, and Iran in the Middle East. In Asia this policy, known generally as the *Nixon doctrine*, was enunciated by the American president in Guam on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1969. Based on the gradual retreat of the American troops from the Asian continent, and on the decision to leave more space to the American-Asian allies for dealing with their own internal politics and problems, in 1969 this strategy led the United States recognising China as the

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61 On the European growth see: Nicholas Crafts and Gianni Toniolo, *Economic Growth in Europe Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Herman Van Der Wee, *L'economia mondiale tra crisi e benessere (1945-1980)* (Milano: Hoepli, 1989); Barry Eichengreen, *The European Economy Since 1945: Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008); Shigeto Tsuru, *Japan's Capitalism: Creative Defeat and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

62 On the monetary system see: Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958-1971* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2004); Harold James, *International Monetary Cooperation Since Bretton Woods* (Oxford: International Monetary Fund, 1996); Barry Eichengreen, *La globalizzazione del capitale* (Milano: Dalai Editore, 1998).

63 On the social protest see: Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, C.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).

regional actor with which they had to deal and could not ignore any longer<sup>64</sup>. The real aim of the American actions in Asia was to free the United States from the Vietnam crisis and its costs<sup>65</sup>, to try to exploit the Sino-Soviet rivalry in order to boost the process of détente with the Soviet Union, and to obstruct the Soviet influence in Asia<sup>66</sup>. Therefore, in this scenario the Sino-Soviet rupture made room for an opening towards Beijing which could have been strategically quite advantageous for Washington.

Nixon's intention to open up the dialogue with China, had already been contemplated by him in an article he wrote in 1967<sup>67</sup>, when he was not yet the United States president. Also in his first presidential address in 1969, once again, Nixon had stated his intention to develop relations with all countries, thus also China<sup>68</sup>. During the same year, pushed from specific interest of the American business, and cultural circles, some first concrete steps were taken by the Nixon administration to relax Sino-American relations: for example the American travel and trade restrictions on

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64 MEA, AMS, WII/104/13/70, 1-4, in National Archives, New Delhi. On the topic of Sino-American relations see: Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*; John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Robert S. Ross and Changbin Jiang, *Re-Examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973* (London: Harvard Univ Asia Center, 2001); Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World* (Paw Prints, 2010).

65 On Nixon's administration policy towards Vietnam see: Jeffrey P. Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Evelyn Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971-1974," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 475-502; Jussi Hanhimaki, "Selling the 'Decent Interval': Kissinger, Triangular Diplomacy, and the End of the Vietnam War, 1971-73," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14, no. 1 (2003): 159-194; Ken Hughes, "Fatal Politics: Nixon's Political Timetable for Withdrawing from Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 (2010): 497-506.

66 "Memorandum from Nixon to Kissinger, 1st February 1969", in FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. XVII, p. 7. On the American-Soviet relations see: Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington D. C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1994); Wilfried Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War: A History of Détente, 1950-1991* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). On Nixon's strategy see the documents in FRUS, 1969-1976, vol. 1, Foundation of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972 (available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/i>, consulted on 14 June 2012), William P. Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1998); Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert J. MacMahon, "The Danger of Geopolitical Fantasies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the South Asia Crisis of 1971," in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, by Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 249-268.

67 Richard Nixon, "Asia After Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 111-125.

China, which since the Korean War had been imposed, were suppressed<sup>69</sup>. However, it was only after the Sino-Soviet border clashes of the summer of 1969 that America's efforts to favour the establishment of a direct communication channel with China became consistent<sup>70</sup>.

The ambassadorial talks between the United States and China, which had been held in Warsaw since 1954 and suspended in 1968 by the Chinese government due to the Cultural Revolution, were renewed in late 1969 thanks to the mediation of Yahya Khan, the Pakistani president (one of America's closest allies in Asia)<sup>71</sup>. The consultations, however, did not last since Nixon, in February 1970, decided to try to bring the contact to a higher political level (namely to the governmental top level) in order to by-pass the bureaucratic nature of the talks<sup>72</sup>. On that occasion, the American president conveyed again, through Yahya Khan, the United States' intention and availability to establish a secret direct contact with the Chinese political authorities in Beijing. Also Mao who, like Nixon, "was not happy with the 'formalistic' nature of

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68 The Chinese political elites did not ignore the speech since they ordered its translation and reproduction in the local Chinese newspapers. Chris Connolly, "The American Factor: Sino-American Rapprochement and Chinese Attitudes to the Vietnam War, 1968–72," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 501–527; Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 238–239 The text of the speech pronounced by Nixon on 20 January 1969 is available at: [http://www.nixonfoundation.org/clientuploads/directory/archive/1969\\_pdf\\_files/1969\\_0001.pdf](http://www.nixonfoundation.org/clientuploads/directory/archive/1969_pdf_files/1969_0001.pdf).

69 "Note of 16 March 1971 from Indian Embassy in Washington" attached to "Letter written by K. K. D. Joshi, First Secretary of India's Embassy in Washington, to V. V. Paranjpe, Director (East Asia) MEA, dated 23 March 1971", in MEA, AMS, WII/104/6/1971, National Archives, New Delhi. See also "Note on Sino-American relations of MAE made on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1971", in MEA, AMS, WII/104/34/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

70 Lüthi, "Restoring Chaos to History," 378–397.

71 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 252. In a "Memorandum of conversation between the American secretary and the Ministry of Information and National Affairs of Pakistan dated 30th September 1969", in Roedad Khan, *The American Papers: Secret And Confidential India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Documents, 1965-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 286–289, the American secretary asked the Ministry his opinion on the fact the Chinese had not yet answered. The Pakistani minister expressed his hopes the Chinese would answer soon. So it happened.

72 Dallek demonstrated by his recent analysis based on the American declassified documents the fact that Nixon administration generally acted independently from the State Department in foreign policy, concentrating all the powers in the hands of the President, of his aide, Kissinger, and of the National Security Council (NSC). Not surprisingly, Dallek defines Nixon administration as an "Imperial Presidency". Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 51. On the specific question of South Asia it is important to note that the State Department was against the more inclined India, while Nixon and Kissinger preferred to "tilt" towards Pakistan. All these aspects will be better analysed in the second chapter where the American policy towards South Asia in 1971 will be presented.



the Warsaw channel”, was interested in fostering a much more direct dialogue<sup>73</sup>. However, in 1970 bilateral tensions grew again in Indochina<sup>74</sup>, delaying the possibility for Washington and Beijing to officially re-open their communication<sup>75</sup>. Therefore, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November Mao finally answered Yahya Khan, who was officially visiting Beijing, conveying the availability of China to receive the US president's representative in case Washington was willing to solve the Taiwan issue<sup>76</sup>. However, the message, as requested by the Chinese leadership, reached Washington only on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 1970<sup>77</sup>. In turn, the first American reaction only arrived in February 1971, when President Nixon in his *State of the World* message to the Congress restated not only the need to establish a dialogue with Beijing, and to admit China to the United Nations, but for the first time called China with its official name, namely: “the People's Republic of China”<sup>78</sup>. In the spring of 1971 the scene was thus ready for the policy makers of both countries to really foster a direct dialogue.

Although these global evolutions did not directly involve India they significantly influenced India's relations with the superpowers and with South Asian countries: in

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73 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 254.

74 In the spring of 1970 American and South Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia.

75 Nixon reiterated his intentions later on in October 1970 in Washington to Yahya Khan who was invited to the White House for a dinner with several heads of state on the wave of the meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York Kalyani Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond* (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2010), 101.

76 Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 254.

77 The same message was also delivered to the Romanians, who were the other channel open between Beijing and Washington. However, Romania was even slower than Pakistan to convey the information and its message only reached Washington on 11 January 1969. The delay was due, as noted by Chen, to Mao's attempt during those months “to create a new image of the United States” among Chinese people. *Ibid.*, 256. American journalist Edgar Snow was invited to visit China. President Mao decided to grant him an interview in which he explained the new political situation China was facing both at the domestic level, where the Cultural Revolution was approaching its end, and internationally declaring China ready to receive the visit of president Nixon. Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 217. Even if the interview was published in the United States only in April 1971 by Snow, the message was immediately received by Washington in the fall of 1970 and interpreted as a sign of opening launched by the Chinese establishment. Richard Nixon, *Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 547.

78 “Note from Indian Embassy in Washington dated 16 March 1971” attached to “Letter from K. K. D. Joshi, First Secretary of India's Embassy in Washington, to V. V. Paranjpe, Director – East Asia, MEA, dated 23 March 1971”, in MEA, AMS, WII/104/6/1971, National Archives, New Delhi.

1971 the relations between India and the United States ended up estranged, whereas those with the Soviet Union became closer than ever.

### ***3.2 India, the superpowers and the regional context: new challenges***

The relations between India and the United States had been characterised by suspicion since Independence<sup>79</sup>. The fact that India had been one of the leading countries of the Afro-Asian cooperation, and later of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was refusing colonialism, racism and imperialism, made relations with Washington complicated. Embarking on a path of non-alignment, India chose to assume a neutral position as far as the Cold War dynamics were concerned, and to adopt an economic strategy of import substitution for industrial products<sup>80</sup>. The Indian policy had always been considered ambiguous by Washington and likely to be closer to socialism than to the United States.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, “an area of misunderstanding was growing between Washington and New Delhi”<sup>82</sup>. Nevertheless, there were no direct national conflicts of interest between the two countries. From its neutral position India established and maintained good relations with the superpowers, gaining aid from both of them<sup>83</sup>. Since the American foreign policy in South Asia was aiming at contrasting the risk of a communist evolution

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79 Although, at least initially, the Indian people considered president Franklin Roosevelt as a model for freedom and democracy, the Soviet Union came rapidly to be perceived as the anti-colonial power, whereas the United States gradually came to be seen as the ally of the old colonial powers because of the connections between them within the NATO. Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 73. Strains with Indo-American relations emerged concerning the Korean War, the issue of the Chinese admission at the United Nations, and the Kashmir question.

80 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 117.

81 Non-alignment was presented as a path of official neutrality between the two global powers; however, it has to be noted that India was actually less sympathetic to the United States than Soviet policies. In return, the URSS and its satellites expressed open support for the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), when it was set up in 1961, differently from the Western countries Rajni Kothari, *Politics In India* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1970), 424.

82 Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 75.

83 McCartney, *India*, 94.

within India's economy, the economic support to India was of higher priority. Already in 1950, with the signature of the first bilateral economic pact (result of the *Point Four Program*) American technical assistance aimed at supporting India's economy began to flow<sup>84</sup>.

What really affected Indo-American relations was the Pakistani factor. The violence of Partition, namely the division of British India into two hostile countries – India and Pakistan – worsened the already difficult relationship between Hindus and Muslims<sup>85</sup>, and strained the relations between the two new states<sup>86</sup>. Born as the state for Indian Muslims, Pakistan, the smaller state among the two<sup>87</sup>, chose a strategy of arming in order to answer the perceived Indian threat to its security. The vigorous process of armament required a flux of foreign support, which was not obstructed by the bipolar international context. The United States, already sponsoring the formation of political and military alliances in Asia and in the Middle East, such as the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact (CENTO), indirectly responded to the Pakistani needs<sup>88</sup>. Although America's sponsored alliances were officially directed to the communism containment, Pakistan actually used its

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84 “Note from K. Rukmini Menon, JS (AMS), to Foreign Secretary, dated on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1971”, in MEA, AMS, WII/103/2/71, 2, National Archives, New Delhi.

85 S. J. Burki, *Pakistan: Fifty Years of Nationhood* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), 13. British rule emphasized the differences between the two communities, and transformed them through the introduction of the separate electorates, into competing political platforms. Mazhar Aziz, *Military Control in Pakistan: The Parallel State* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 13–14.

86 Kishore C. Dash, *Regionalism in South Asia: Negotiating Cooperation, Institutional Structures* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 57.

87 The asymmetry of power between India and Pakistan brought the latter to develop a perception of constant threat. Sumit Ganguly, *India as an Emerging Power* (London: Psychology Press, 2003). The asymmetry was basically defined by the difference in population and economic size: India accounts for more than 70% of the population and the land of South Asia. Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966-1982* (London: Sage Publications, 1984), 271. Its GDP in 2010 is almost ten times the Pakistani one, while in 1960, when the Bangladesh was still a part of Pakistan, it was however much bigger, around five times greater (World Bank, 2011, <http://data.worldbank.org>, retrieved on 6 June 2012). Moreover, the lower level of industrialization of the Pakistani territories in comparison with the Indian ones, and therefore also the domestic lower capabilities of Pakistan to produce not only goods, but also weapons and military equipment, enhanced the perception of insecurity. In addition, the fact that Pakistan was divided in two wings thoroughly separated by India contributed to the perception of threat. On this topic see for example: Ayesha Siddiq-Agha, “Political Economy of National Security,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 44/45 (November 2, 2002): 4545–4549; Khalid B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).

strategic position in the area to pursue its security interests against India<sup>89</sup>. This clearly lead to India's disenchantment towards American policies, however without India feeling compelled either to enter similar alliances with the Soviet Union, or to abandon its non-alignment strategy.

It was only with Kennedy's presidency that American foreign policy towards South Asia became inspired by a new spirit of neutrality and collaboration<sup>90</sup>. The Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru welcomed the new set of policies promoted by the Kennedy administration for the development of India, initiating a phase where relations became more friendly<sup>91</sup>. When a full-scale armed war erupted between India and China in October 1962, Nehru deemed it natural to send urgent requests of military aid to both Britain, and the United States. In order to show their support, the Western allies did not waste time and promptly reacted, and the shipment of the first weapon supplies indeed reached India shortly after, by the beginning of November. However, when the Chinese troops victoriously invaded the Indian territory, the Western governments had no time to answer the desperate requests for help launched by Nehru<sup>92</sup>. In the following years American and British provisions of armaments continued to flow to New Delhi<sup>93</sup>, though in volumes low enough not to infringe the special relations that Washington and London, at the same time, were keeping up

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88 After the first years of proclaimed Non-Alignment, Pakistan in 1953 welcomed the American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' proposal to establish military groupings in the Middle East and South East Asia aimed at containing the international threat of communism. Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 82. Since 1954 the United States started providing Pakistan with weapons and two years later it became one of the closest American allies in Asia, joining CENTO and SEATO.

89 R. B. Rais, "Pakistan in the Regional and Global Power Structure," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (1991): 378.

90 India's American friends, such as Chester Bowles, Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy government, and professor J. K. Galbraith, Kennedy's economic advisor, later appointed as Ambassador to India, were in a position of power in the new administration. Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 101.

91 Kux, *India and the United States*, 186–190.

92 Nehru required the provision of 15 bomber squadrons to contain the Chinese attack on its Western friends. However, Beijing declared the unilateral withdrawal before any decision could be taken in London or Washington, leaving India and the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru humiliated.

93 The price paid by India was the acceptance of the presence of the American Seven Fleet in the Indian Ocean, *The Times*, Dec 27, 1969 cited in: Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 116.

with Rawalpindi<sup>94</sup>. In 1963 coordinated air defence exercises were carried out with the United States, whereas in the following year the American Defence Minister went to India for an official visit, and the two states, under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency, began to collaborate for the development of the nuclear station of Tarapur in the Indian state of Maharashtra<sup>95</sup>. The economic assistance continued to flow without limits, reaching the level of 1 billion dollars annually from the United States alone<sup>96</sup>.

As a result of this growing collaboration Washington remained neutral when the second Indo-Pakistani conflict exploded in 1965, imposing an embargo on weapon supplies and economic assistance to both Pakistan and India, without supporting its regional Pakistani ally. This decision indeed hit Pakistan much harder than India. Islamabad in 1971 had in fact received 1,5 billion dollars of military supplies since 1954 that covered nearly the entire stock of equipment of the Pakistani Forces. New Delhi instead got only 75 million dollars that were covering not more than 10% of its equipment<sup>97</sup>. As a consequence, during the 1965 war and onward, the Pakistani-American relations reached their lowest level since Independence: in 1967 Pakistan did not participate in SEATO and CENTO activities, and instead started to rely more on the Chinese weapon supplies<sup>98</sup> and even evaluate a rapprochement with the Soviet Union.

However, the embargo hit India as well, even if indirectly and more at an economic level. As already mentioned, the bad harvests of 1965 and 1966 had put

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94 Rawalpindi had been the capital of Pakistan until 1967, when Islamabad replaced it.

95 "Note on Indo-American relations from the Historical Division of MAE, dated 11<sup>th</sup> January 1973", in MAE, AMS, WII/103/4/73-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

96 Kux, *India and the United States*, 230–232. According to the report of the Agency of International Development, New Delhi sent to Rukmini Menon, American Division, MEA, on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1970, India received the 56.4% of the total foreign aid for development from the United States. The Soviet Union contributed just for the 5.6%. "Letter from J. Saccio, Agency of the International Development, New Delhi, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1970", in MAE, AMS WII/204/2/70, National Archives, New Delhi.

97 Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 122.

98 In 1966 Rawalpindi signed a deal worth 120 million dollars with China for the provision of tanks and aircraft Robert H. Donaldson, "India: The Soviet Stake in Stability," *Asian Survey* 12, no. 6 (June 1972): 478. For a brief but clear resume of Sino-Pakistani relations see: John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001), 187–215.

India in a difficult position, which was worsened by the restrictions (due to the 1965 war) imposed by Washington on the food trade. It was in this context that Prime Ministers Shastri and Gandhi agreed with the United States on a new set of economic and developmental policies in exchange for the resumption of the food aid. As already analysed, the negative effects of the devaluation of the rupee, which was one of the policies imposed in exchange for the continuation of the aid, resulted in a harsh rise in the inflation rate that damaged the political consensus towards the Congress government among the Indian people<sup>99</sup>. This episode directly soured the Indo-American relations and contributed, as already shown, to Indira Gandhi's decision to shift to the left.

Therefore, after 1967 the Indo-American collaboration froze and India began to openly criticise the American policies, especially concerning the Vietnamese issue, irritating Washington<sup>100</sup>. The estranged relation further deteriorated when Nixon rose to power in 1969. The new president had in fact emerged since the time he was vice-president of the United States as the one that "more than anybody else in the American hierarchy, sympathized with Pakistan's urgent problem of security and defence"<sup>101</sup>. Nixon's ascent to power obviously had the effect of strengthening American relations with Pakistan<sup>102</sup>. The estranged relations soon improved due to the fact that, as already explained, Pakistan became the strategic channel through which the Nixon administration decided to carry on the opening towards Beijing<sup>103</sup>. A clear sign of this strategic shift was the adoption in 1970 of a *one time exception* policy to the commitment, which had been imposed during the 1965 war, of prohibiting the export of lethal weaponry systems to India and Pakistan. Thanks to this new policy, the American weapon sales were promptly resumed, and in fact Pakistan, pleased, immediately accepted the offer of three hundred armoured

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99 Kux, *India and the United States*, 251.

100 See for example: "Letter from the American ambassador to the Foreign Minister, dated 17<sup>th</sup> September 1970", in P. N. Haksar private papers, III. Inst., f. n. 259, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

101 Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 86.

102 Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 2–12.

103 Nixon, during his visit to Pakistan in 1969, conveyed his message of opening towards China to Yahya Khan. *Ibid.*, 4.

personnel carriers and some aircrafts made by the American President<sup>104</sup>. On the contrary, New Delhi openly demonstrated its irritation towards this behaviour<sup>105</sup>, without even fully appreciating the fact that the weapon sales to Pakistan were functional for the construction of the strategic dialogue between Washington and Beijing<sup>106</sup>.

While Indo-American relations were negatively influenced by the American rapprochement with Beijing, New Delhi and Moscow became closer. During the second half of the Sixties, the Soviet Union was engaged at a global level in the promotion of dialogue with the West in order to freeze the *status quo* situation, and to establish strategic parity with the United States on the international scene. At the same time, in South Asia, the Soviet Union had started to play a more active role to strengthen its fading influence caused by the rupture occurred with Beijing<sup>107</sup>. Already since the post-Stalin period, India and the Soviet Union had collaborated profitably in several economic projects of development, especially in the heavy

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104Kux, *India and the United States*, 281. The final decision was communicated by President Richard Nixon to President Yahya Khan during his visit to Washington in October 1970, after that Ambassador Farland had already informally conveyed the same availability on the 20th of June see: “Telegram from Department of State to the President, dated 1st October”, and “Memorandum from W. P. Rogers, Secretary of State, dated 13th October 1970, in: Khan, *The American Papers*, 427–429.

105See for example “Record of the speech made by L. K. Lambah, Under Secretary, American Division, MAE, in the Lok Sabha on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1970 about India's protests”, and “Note for supplementaries I to III”, in MAE, AMS, WII/125/71/70, National Archives, New Delhi.

106MEA, AMS, WII/109/13/71-V and WII/104/9/70 files, National Archives, New Delhi, are significant, since they demonstrated that India had never considered this option.

107At the global level the first significant step in this direction was taken in 1968 when the two superpowers promoted at the UN the stipulation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that prohibited the official nuclear states (the United States, Soviet Union and United Kingdom) to transfer nuclear weapons to those countries that had not previously had them. This led China and France that were already developing nuclear technology, to pursue in autonomy their projects and to definitively break their relations respectively with Soviet Union and NATO. The process of control of strategic armaments continued; even if Moscow did not give up its policy of rearm. On Soviet Union foreign policy see: Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*; Adam Bruno Ulam, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Robin Edmonds, *Soviet Foreign Policy--the Brezhnev Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Vladislav Zubok, “The Soviet Union and Détente of the 1970s,” *Cold War History* 8, no. 4 (2008): 427–447; Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009).

industrial sector<sup>108</sup>. Their friendship was also consolidated by the parallel emergence of America's closer relationship with Pakistan. The Soviet decision not to support China during the border dispute which led to the 1962 Sino-Indian war was the first clear sign of Moscow's intention to promote closer relations with New Delhi.

After a first period of proclaimed friendship the Sino-Indian relations had indeed been eroded by the issue concerning the settling of their common borders<sup>109</sup>. At the end of the Fifties, misperceptions and misunderstandings resulted in the abandon of the negotiation process and in India adopting a *forward policy*, which involved forays of Indian troops inside the China controlled territories claimed by India. This defiant policy triggered the Chinese reaction: Beijing launched a large-scale offensive on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1962, that caught the Indian army by surprise, causing its total defeat. Showing all the vulnerability of the Indian defence system both at the military and the policy-making level, the war transformed China in the Indian elites' minds into the most significant Indian enemy<sup>110</sup>. This lead New Delhi to welcome Soviet neutrality, and to reformulate its foreign policy priorities, thus augmenting its spendings for defence<sup>111</sup>.

After the humiliating defeat in the 1962 war, New Delhi undertook a program of modernisation of its Armed Forces that in two years almost doubled the defence budget<sup>112</sup>. In a decade it also enlarged the military personnel from 4.000.000 to 8.250.000<sup>113</sup>, and greatly increased both weapon imports and domestic arms

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108Sanjay Gaikwad, *Dynamics of Indo-Soviet Relations: The Era of Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1990), 37–39. The Soviet Union indirectly supported India's position over Kashmir, since Independence, and over Goa, in 1961 when India sent its troops to expel the Portuguese from that part of the Indian Territory at that time still controlled by a colonial power.

109For a general historical analysis of the events see for example: Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Pantheon Books, 1970); Neville Maxwell, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 15 (April 10, 1999): 905–918; Abdul Gafoor Abdul Majeed Noorani, *India-China Boundary Problem, 1846-1947: History and Diplomacy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 301–337.

110In addition to the demonstration of military weakness, the sensation of insecurity perceived by Indians was further worsened by the feeling that no country was actually ready to help India. The American answer to the desperate call raised by the Indian Prime Minister was indeed perceived as being insignificant and consistent enough by the Indian political circles. Kux, *India and the United States*, 107–108.



production<sup>114</sup>. In this process, foreign purchase of armaments became crucial. Although the United States decided to positively answer India's requests, as already mentioned before New Delhi, in order to obtain more significant support in its arming process, it turned its attention to Moscow<sup>115</sup>. Since Soviet and Indian interests, especially after the 1964 Chinese nuclear test, were gradually converging into a strategy to contain China, Moscow embarked itself on a program of valuable economic and military assistance for New Delhi, which soon became its first Third World aid recipient<sup>116</sup>. By May 1964, Moscow indeed answered New Delhi's requests by granting military aid of 130 million dollars, which was greater than the American one<sup>117</sup>. In addition, in autumn of the same year, Moscow offered also a ten-year 140 million dollar loan to New Delhi, from which 44 MIG-21, and 55 ground-to-air missiles, tanks and submarines were provided to the Indian Army<sup>118</sup>.

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111 This had led New Delhi to keep defence expenditures below 1.8% of the national spending budget. V. Oberoi, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Trends in the Indian Army and Force Structure and Doctrine," in *Emerging India: Security and Foreign Policy Perspective* (New Delhi: IDSA and Promilla & Co., 2005), 103. This choice was not only the result of the personal views of the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which for sure played a significant role, but also of the legacy of the colonial past, that led to giving extreme importance to the value of self-reliance and autonomy. Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 153. Also the Gandhian notion of non-violence, and the historical pacific victory obtained by the Indian freedom movement against the colonial rule had a role in influencing the leadership posture in giving a secondary importance to the military power. A. Prakash, "Emerging India: Security and Foreign Policy Perspective," in *Emerging India: Security and Foreign Policy Perspective* (New Delhi: IDSA and Promilla & Co., 2005), 5. Additionally, the choice made in favour of a strategy where "soft" power had more relevance than military force was also the product of a realistic recognition of the relative economic weakness of the country in comparison to the rest of the world and the high levels of poverty diffused inside the country. M. S. Pardesi, "Deducing India's Grand Strategy of Regional Hegemony from Historical and Conceptual Perspective" (RSIS Working Papers, 076/5, 2005), 47, <https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/handle/10220/4475>. The first reliable numbers about the poverty incidence in India suggests that the 40% of the rural population, and almost the 50% of the urban one, were living in poverty. Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, 12.

112 Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 188.

113 Oberoi, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Trends in the Indian Army and Force Structure and Doctrine," 99.

114 A. D. D. Gordon, *India's Rise to Power in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 64 and 72.

115 Vinod Bhatia, *Indira Gandhi and Indo-Soviet Relations* (New Delhi: Panchsheel Publisher, 1987), 17.

116 Donaldson, "India," 478.

117 Gaikwad, *Dynamics of Indo-Soviet Relations*, 42.

118 Ibid.

The war of 1965 fought by India and Pakistan enhanced the Indian perceptions of insecurity even more, though the Indian Army successfully countered the Pakistani forces. During the conflict Beijing directly supported Rawalpindi, even if just verbally, enhancing in the minds of the Indian elites the idea that in the future, in order to feel secure, India must be able to win a two front war<sup>119</sup>. The new threat led India to carry on the modernisation of its army, and to strengthen its relations with the Soviet Union. Although the erosion of the American-Pakistani relations following the 1965 war offered space to Moscow to improve its relations with Pakistan, the Indian protests and the Sino-Soviet border clashes in the end led the Soviet Union to reinforce its relations with India and to abandon any desire to get closer to Pakistan<sup>120</sup>.

Evidence of the new orientation of the Soviet strategy in Asia was the appearance in the late spring of 1969 of an article in *Izvestitia*, a highly circulating

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119Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 23.

The demonstration of the Chinese support for Pakistan was a result of the economic and political relations the two countries had established since the second half of the 1950s. Pakistan and China in 1963 indeed signed a border agreement in which Pakistan ceded to China the part of its territory India refers to as the Pakistani Occupied Kashmir (POK), where the Chinese built an important highway for connecting Tibet to the rest of China (and Pakistan). The American decision not to directly support its local Pakistani ally during the 1965 conflict had indirectly favoured the fastening of relations between Pakistan and China. After the conflict the work for building a road connecting Pakistani Kashmir to Xinjiang began though New Delhi raised several criticisms about the project declaring it illegal for the still unclear status of Kashmir. The work was declared completed in February 1971.

120The Soviets were indeed interested in balancing the new ties that Rawalpindi established with China, and to further try to weaken the United States' alliances in Asia, e.g. CENTO and SEATO, in which Pakistan was a key member. The short warming of the Soviet-Pakistani relations resulted in Moscow playing the mediator part in the negotiation process after the 1965 war at Takshtent, and in the signature of some economic and military agreements in 1967-1968. Bhatia, *Indira Gandhi and Indo-Soviet Relations*, 24. Although it also led to the abstaining of Pakistan from participating to CENTO and SEATO meetings, the rapprochement did not however have a long life. Donaldson, "India," 478. New Delhi, which had become highly dependent upon Moscow for arms supplies, became seriously worried by this new evolution. The Indian government vehemently protested, and reacted, for example with the attempt made at the beginning of 1968 to re-open the dialogue with China on the unsolved border issue (Indian Express, 17th October 2011). Soon after the Sino-Soviet border clashes, the Soviet attempt to balance the Chinese and American influence in Pakistan ended anyway. The necessity of the Soviet Union to find a closer ally in South Asia to counter balance the Chinese influence led the Soviet Union to weaken the newly established ties with Islamabad, completely stopping its weapons supplies to Pakistan by May 1970. Bhatia, *Indira Gandhi and Indo-Soviet Relations*, 38 and MEA, AMS, WII/109/13/71-V, in National Archives, New Delhi. It is however important to note that the economic cooperation was maintained, while new economic aids were conceded on November 1970.

Soviet newspaper, which was focused on the *political vacuum* that the British withdrawal from East Suez announced the previous year had created<sup>121</sup>. In this article a general welcome to the new Asian sovereignty was launched. This, together with the Soviet decision to send six ships into the Indian Ocean in the first half of 1968, was considered by contemporary commentators as a clear sign of Moscow's readiness both to support the emergence of new independent Asian powers, like India, and to fill up the international political vacuum<sup>122</sup>. Another clear sign of the new Soviet strategy was the speech pronounced by the Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1969 at the *International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties*, in which he proposed the idea of creating a system of collective security in Asia. The speech generated strong reactions in China<sup>123</sup> and in Pakistan, where the proposal was rejected for its anti-Chinese tone; on the contrary, the answers from the others Asian countries and India remained vague and cautious<sup>124</sup>.

In March 1969 the Soviet Union had already expressed its interests in signing a security pact with India also at the bilateral level<sup>125</sup>. Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko, who was visiting India in the same month, had also assured New

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121In January 1968 the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson declared the withdrawal of the British troops by 1971 from their major military bases in South East Asia, situated primarily in Malaysia, Singapore and in the Indian Ocean. By less than one year the British withdrawal preceded the United States' formulation of a strategy of disengagement from the American world commitments previously decided, already analysed before. This was the result of the economic crisis the United Kingdom, like the United States, was going through. Both countries were in fact afflicted at that time by chronic balance of payment deficits. On this topic see: Shohei Sato, "Britain's Decision to Withdraw from the Persian Gulf, 1964–68: A Pattern and a Puzzle," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 99–117; Brian S. Oslon, "Withdrawal from Empire: Britain Decolonization of Egypt, Aden and Kenya in the Mid-Twentieth Century" (School of Advanced Military Studies, Kansas, 2008),  [\(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010\).](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:I2CjcnhVTwwJ:www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD%3DADA510241+&hl=en&gl=in&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESibLhk-A0hl5dFayB0MS6PjjTyJIQAd3Qq4hWVi_XhEnLIq6zBTVh_85t9m2nZdCoXeK7-1WnYxNy6TBa5qlWlxGEbiuHc5NDiJIPS7pllW92YRnjqYtHVj2hWN3uBLTf2XX29&sig=AHIEtbQZIRu1qy8kho7jkHXgk JrLXBo_bA; P. L. Pham, <i>Ending )

122Donaldson, "India," 481.

123Peking Review, 27, 1969: 22-23 and 32-33, cited in: *Ibid.*, 480.

124The Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi indeed declared that the Soviet premier was just referring to the Kosygin's proposal to enhance economic relations in South Asia. Bhatia, *Indira Gandhi and Indo-Soviet Relations*, 34. The future Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh refused instead to consider, even just in theory, the Soviet Union as the protector of India's security in South Asia. Donaldson, "India," 480.

Delhi of the Soviet intentions to support India in case of a new attack from China<sup>126</sup>. In April 1969, the Indian Foreign Secretary on receiving confirmation from the Soviets of their desire to sign a treaty to consolidate Indo-Soviet relations, also got the Soviet promise of an increase in arms provision in case India agreed to the Soviet proposal<sup>127</sup>. Nevertheless, India did not give a positive answer to the Soviet proposal, but instead, asked for more time to better evaluate it. The justifications provided were two: first, in 1969 India was being led at the domestic level by a minority government unable to take such a sharp turn in India's foreign policy; and second, India's government feared that the signature of such a treaty could damage the already tense relations with both China and Pakistan<sup>128</sup>. Despite India's reluctance, the economic and military collaboration between Moscow and New Delhi in 1969 were not negatively influenced: the economic trade between them during the second half of the Sixties rapidly grew to 63%<sup>129</sup>, collaboration in the energy sector also increased<sup>130</sup>, as well as the strengthening of the military links<sup>131</sup>.

In this context of growing collaboration, the fact that Indira Gandhi was the candidate at the 1971 elections who dressed the socialist mantle was pleasantly

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125“Letter from D. P. Dhar, to Kewal Singh, Secretary, Minister of External Affairs, in copy to P. N. Haksar, Secretary to the Prime Minister, dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1969”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 203, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

126Gaikwad, *Dynamics of Indo-Soviet Relations*, 61.

127“Letter from T. N. Kaul, Foreign Secretary to Foreign Minister, Secretary of Prime Minister Office, and Prime Minister, dated 7<sup>th</sup> April 1969” in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 203, in NMML Archives, New Delhi.

128“Draft letter written by India’s Prime Minister to Kosygin, Chairman of the Council of Minister of the USSR, Moscow, undated”, in Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 203, in NMML Archives, New Delhi. These worries also emerge from an official note about the Pakistani situation in 1970, where it was suggested to the Indian government to enhance diplomacy not just with the Soviet headquarters, but also with the Chinese ones in order to keep all options open. See also: “Note on Pakistan, dated 1970” in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 290, in NMML Archives, New Delhi.

129Bhatia, *Indira Gandhi and Indo-Soviet Relations*, 27 and 40.

130Several power plant projects in India were working thanks to the Soviet aid, while the two countries were cooperating in the oil extraction in Gujarat. From this point of view it is therefore not surprising that the growing Indo-Soviet collaboration raised critics and harsh comments in China. Indeed, India was attacked by the *Peking Review* – the English weekly journal considered representative of the Chinese government's position – as the “raw material reprocessing plant for the Soviet revisionism” for its growing dependence towards the Soviet Union. *Peking Review* 30, 1969: 20-22.

131Gordon, *India's Rise to Power in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, 72.

noticed by the Soviet Union. Moscow had openly supported Nehru's daughter since her shift towards the left after 1967<sup>132</sup>. The period of the internal struggle for power within the Congress, from which Indira Gandhi came out as the winner, was generally considered as the “most crucial period since Independence” in India's history<sup>133</sup>. After the Sino-Soviet rupture, a revolutionary India had become undesirable to Soviet eyes, since it would have probably resulted in the issue of which communist paths, the Soviet or the Maoist, it would have followed. It therefore seems plausible that a stable India, where a more gradual change would have been promoted, such as that assured by Indira Gandhi's Congress, appeared to be a better option to Moscow. It is therefore not surprising that the Soviet Union was the first to welcome the victory of the Congress led by Indira Gandhi: from Moscow's point of view the new Indian government would finally be free to sign the military pact Moscow had been proposing to India in the previous years.

From the analysis developed so far it is possible to state that India was facing a new international situation, which was offering some new challenges and opportunities. On one hand in fact, the emergence of China as a global power, and the convergence of American, Pakistani and Chinese interests, threatened India's position. On the other hand, the Sino-American rapprochement, also triggering the Soviet Union's interests towards India, offered New Delhi the opportunity to balance the United States-China-Pakistan axis, even this meant sacrificing India's non-alignment policy.

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132Pravda, 24th November 1969, 5, cited in: Donaldson, “India,” 486.

133New Times, 47, 1969: 6-8.

#### ***4. Conclusion***

From the analysis developed so far it seems clear that the new Indian government was facing a complex situation both at national and international levels. The Congress won the elections with a large majority that enabled its installation in a strong position of power. However, its commitment to the promises made during the electoral campaign appeared weak. Indeed, the shift to the left made by the Congress seemed to be the result of a tactical political calculation, rather than a true ideological decision. In addition, the heterogeneous coalition of interests that supported its rise to power directly undermined the possibility of the new government in implementing the radical socio-economic reforms promised. The weak organization of the Congress, further eroded by the resort to populism and to the centralisation of power, cast further doubts on the new government's strength. At the international level, the evolution of the Sino-Soviet split and the gradual alignment of American-Pakistani-Chinese interests threatened India and also explained growing Indo-Soviet collaboration. The latter could be an opportunity for New Delhi to contain China and to oppose Pakistan, even if the cost was the abandon of India's long standing non-aligned foreign policy. Despite this complex and challenging situation, the new Congress government in 1971 had a clear advantage with respect to the previous: it finally had a large majority providing the freedom to develop its foreign policy, and no longer influenced by domestic factors.



**SECOND CHAPTER:**  
**THE EAST PAKISTAN CIVIL WAR, THE THIRD**  
**INDO-PAKISTANI WAR AND THE EMERGENCE OF**  
**BANGLADESH AS A NEW INDEPENDENT STATE**

***1. Introduction***

A few days after the new Indian government took power in 1971, India's foreign policy became completely absorbed by the developments of the East Pakistani civil war. These events offered New Delhi the opportunity to support the Bengali forces that were challenging the central political power of Pakistan, but they also directly challenged India's security since millions of people poured into its territory in search of shelter. This chapter will demonstrate that India adopted policies in support of the rebels without hesitation, and that it did not alter them even when the situation became more dangerous both at local and at international levels. In fact, even if both the international community, and the normalisation of relations between the United States and China seemed to be able to undermine the position assumed by India in support of the Bengali forces during the summer, India demonstrated its readiness to change its long policy as a Non-Aligned state. Thus, New Delhi, exploiting Cold War dynamics, finalised an alliance with the Soviet Union. This decision gave India the security to initiate a war with Pakistan and to resolve several issues in its favour



through military action: resolving the question of the refugees; favouring the emergence of a new friendly state (Bangladesh); reducing Pakistan; and emerging, at least for a while, as the new undoubted hegemony power of South Asia. This chapter will infer that in 1971 New Delhi formulated its foreign policy driven by the aim to enlarge its power inside the South Asian region, even at the cost of challenging its long standing policy of Non-Alignment. In order to demonstrate this, the following paragraphs will trace events in a chronological order, showing how India reacted to the crisis of East Pakistan and to the problem of the refugees, from March 1971 to December 1971.

Therefore, the second paragraph will briefly focus on the roots of the East Pakistan crisis, and on the status of the Indo-Pakistani relations until March 1971. The aim is to demonstrate the reasons why the East Pakistan civil war assumed an international character in a short time. The third paragraph will start with the analysis of the composition of India's foreign policy decision-making process, with the aim of explaining how decisions related to the East Pakistan crisis were taken. The second part of the paragraph will present India's reactions to the initial exodus of the Bengali rebels in its territory, and to the subsequent influx of millions of refugees. The fourth paragraph will initially highlight how New Delhi began to consider the option of resolving the question of the refugees through a war. A presentation of the international challenges India faced during the summer regarding its Bengali forces, a description of the UN intervention issue, and the development of the Sino-American rapprochement will then follow. The fifth paragraph will present how India reacted to those challenges, deciding to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, and how it prepared itself for the war against Pakistan. The sixth paragraph will consider the military conflict and the developments it triggered at the international level, while the seventh will analyse the consequences of the war and the new South Asian equilibrium. Lastly, the eighth paragraph will summarize the events, and it will offer some conclusive observations about the formulation of India's foreign policy.

## ***2. The East Pakistan political crisis and the status of Indo-Pakistani relations until March 1971***

India's foreign policy in 1971 was critically influenced by the eruption of a civil war in East Pakistan on 25<sup>th</sup> March; just a few days after the newly elected government led by Indira Gandhi took power. Before then, the political crisis in East Pakistan and the civil war was just a Pakistani internal affair. It was on that very same day that the Pakistani president Yahya Khan decided to launch a military operation, called *Operation Searchlight*: the Pakistani army was ordered to violently repress the political dissent, to arrest all the suspected supporters of the Awami League (AL), the Bengali political party that had won elections in 1970, and that was demanding more autonomy for the Eastern wing of Pakistan, and to bring back order in the state. It was with the military crackdown that caused the civil war to assume an international character because, first of all the Bengali political leaders largely found refuge in Indian Territory to escape the military repression, and in a second moment a great influx of Bengali people began to leave their homes to find refuge in India from the violence of the military repression. Before going on to analyse how India's reacted to these dramatic developments, it is important to recall here, even if just briefly, the roots of the political crisis and the status of the Indo-Pakistani relations on the eve of 25<sup>th</sup> March, in order to fully comprehend why millions of Bengali decided to escape to India, and the degree in which relations between India and Pakistan were affected.

## ***2.1 The roots of Pakistan's crisis: sociological, political, economic and historical aspects***

To understand the roots of the political and social crisis which emerged in East Pakistan, it is crucial to take into consideration sociological, cultural, economic and political aspects of Pakistan as a whole.

The first evident weakness that Pakistan inherited from the end of the colonial rule was that it was the first state in world history to have emerged with two different territorial wings, divided by nearly 1.610 km of Indian territory<sup>1</sup>. Because of the antagonism with Indians, the difficult communications between the two wings of Pakistan were also complicated by the fact that the East and the West were connected by air or sea communication lines only along routes much longer than the effective line of sight.

The physical distance contributed also to obstruct the creation of a sense of national identity fundamental to bridge the religious and regional differences. Following the Partition<sup>2</sup> indeed East Pakistan resulted to be the smaller wing, but with the larger portion of the entire Pakistani population, and with 23% of Hindu population, a much greater proportion than the 3% in West Pakistan<sup>3</sup>. The polarisation of religious identities in competing groups, as Hindus and Muslims, had begun earlier during the colonial era, like for example when in name of efficiency the Muslim districts of the Bengal presidency were divided from the Hindu ones, and unified to Assam to form a new province in 1905<sup>4</sup>. Religious identities had been later further reinforced by the communitarian violence experienced by the population of Bengal during Partition. These events surely did not help to build a cohesive state

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1 Jyotindra Nath Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond: Indo-Bangladesh Relations* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1999), 9.

2 On Partition see for example: Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), 573–616.

3 E. H. Slade, *Census of Pakistan, 1951, Pakistan Reports and Tables Vol. I* (Karachi: Manager of Publications, Government of Pakistan, 1955), 2–6.

4 On the conflicting relations between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal during the colonial rule, and on the partition of Bengal realised by the British in 1905 see for example: Torri, *Storia dell'India*, 493–497.

where different religious groups could live together in peace. Religious differences in Independent Pakistan remained alive and emerged again in 1971. The Pakistani Army, during its violent repression of East Pakistan's political instances, indulged indeed in communitarian violence, which resulted in the majority of the Hindu community searching a shelter in India to escape<sup>5</sup>.

The rivalry between Hindus and Muslims is not the sole exacerbating factor of the Pakistani civil war. Also sociological and cultural differences triggered the formation of regional identities competing to the national one among the same Pakistani Muslims. Bengali Muslims identity was deeply rooted in the linguistic and cultural traditions of Bengal, which were significantly different from those of West Pakistan, for instance. In some cases the colonial rule had indirectly enhanced the differences. For example, the East Pakistan socio-economic context was different from the Western one, and not only for its different climatic characteristics. After the colonial period the Eastern wing resulted indeed dominated by a much smaller size of land-holding than the West Pakistan, and by a more heterogeneous class of landlords<sup>6</sup>. Another case was that the new Pakistani administrative centre “became increasingly identified with Punjab because of the region's dominance of the two main institutional structures of the state – the Army and the civil bureaucracy”<sup>7</sup>. This aspect directly came from the colonial period when Punjab and the North-West

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5 The percentage of Hindus on the entire number of refugees was consistent, around 80%. Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 296. Even if the word genocide seems not appropriate, what seems plausible is that the Pakistan Army, during their work of violent repression of the political dissent in East Pakistan, worked to up-root the Hindu population with the aim of weakening the resistance of the Bengali movement. On this topic see: Hasan Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan: The Rise and Realization of Bengali Muslim Nationalism* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 261; Sarmila Bose, “Anatomy of Violence: Analysis of Civil War in East Pakistan in 1971,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 8, 2005): 4465; and “Telegram sent by American Embassy in Islamabad to Department of State sent on 2 August 1971”, in Roedad Khan, *The American Papers: Secret And Confidential India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Documents, 1965-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 624–631, where there is direct indication that “persecution of Hindus appear to have ceased” due to the “drastic decrease in number of Hindus available to persecute”, and that “the main instance of de-Hinduization was expulsion of Hindus”.

6 It had been the process of land reforms promoted by the British to produce a society in Bengal where the size of land-holding was much smaller, and the power of landowners more fragmented than in West Pakistan. On this see for example: Torri, *Storia dell'India*, 368–495.

7 Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, Second ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 126.

Frontier Province were the areas from which the major part of the colonial Indian army had been recruited. This had led their social order to be shaped by the British politics of racial classification into martial groups, and by the privileged treatment conceded to these classes in the allocation of land and public jobs<sup>8</sup>. As a result after Independence Punjabi were 80% of the new Pakistani military forces, while Bengali only 5% of the officer corps of the Pakistani Army, and 7% of the other ranks, doing slightly better in the air force representation<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, Punjabi covered 55% of the entire civil service, while East Pakistani working in this field were only 16%<sup>10</sup>.

As a last colonial inheritance, the vice-regal pattern of government directly favoured the centralisation of state power in the hands of the Governor General who led the country until 1956, thus encouraging Pakistani political system to become authoritarian<sup>11</sup>. The lack of well-established political institutions at the time of Independence also did not favour the democratization process of the newly formed state. The Muslim League (ML), the larger Muslim party that during the colonial period represented all the Muslims in the dialogue with the Indian National Congress and the colonial power, did not have a mass participation until 1940-7, and not even a strong local and territorial organization in the territories that became Pakistan<sup>12</sup>. Deprived by Partition of “the platform of religion as a political mobiliser”, the ML lost the element of cohesion that was central in its previous political struggle to assure Muslims a protected position, and faced the emergence of other parties based on regional and provincial identities, like for example the Awami League (AL) in East Pakistan<sup>13</sup>. The latter demanded indeed a more fair representation in the civil and military jobs, a more equitable distribution of the economic resources, and a proportional political representation of the provinces in the National Assembly.

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8 David Taylor, “Pakistan: The Military as a Political Fixture,” in *Politics in the Developing World*, by Peter Burnell and Vicky Randall (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 420.

9 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 10.

10 Christophe Jaffrelot, *A History of Pakistan and Its Origins* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 18.

11 Khalid B. Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase, 1857-1948* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998), 300.

12 Hasan Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (New York: Macmillan Basingstoke, 2000).

13 Mazhar Aziz, *Military Control in Pakistan: The Parallel State* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 15.

Moreover, the only nationally recognised leaders of the whole Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, dying prematurely soon after Independence, created a political vacuum in the ML that was not so easily filled by the other emerging political leaders that had only regional support<sup>14</sup>.

The responsibilities of the failure of the Pakistani national state have not, however, to be just linked to the legacies of the colonial period. In fact, political developments in Pakistan after 1947 directly favoured the explosion of conflicting identities. In fact, “successive bouts of authoritarian rule have reinforced centrifugal ethnic, linguistic and regional forces”, enhancing economic and political imbalances between the West and the East Pakistan<sup>15</sup>. For example, the attempt made by the Governor General in 1948 to impose Urdu as the only national language in order to suppress the regional different identities of Pakistan had the opposite effect. The strong resistance to replace Bengali with Urdu became indeed the ground on which the Bengali regional political movement of the AL was built.

As yet another cracking factor, the regionally divided and weak political parties of Pakistan did not reach any agreement in the Constitution Assembly upon the rules for the formation of the National Assembly until 1954<sup>16</sup>. This gave an important advantage to the bureaucratic and military institutions of the state controlled just by the Punjabis, who threatened by the request of a more equitable distribution of military and civil jobs raised by regional parties<sup>17</sup>, gradually assumed the control of the state politics. Even though expectations of a democratic evolution brought three prominent politicians from the Eastern wing to become Prime Ministers in the Fifties, political power was indeed taken over by a triumvirate, based on the military-bureaucratic nexus, and composed by Ghulam Muhammad (Governor General from 1951 to 1955), General Ayub Khan (Commander in Chief of the Army), and Iskander

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14 Taylor, “Pakistan: The Military as a Political Fixture,” 420.

15 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 1.

16 The issue was if adopting the proportional method for the formation of the National Assembly, which would have favoured the major populated East Pakistan, or instead the concept of parity among the two wings of Pakistan to avoid the East to become dominant. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 10.

17 Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 298.

Mizra (an Army officer who was Defence Secretary, and later President). The reign of this power block was imposed in 1954, when the Governor dissolved the Constitutional Assembly and the provincial governments elected previously, directly naming a new government<sup>18</sup>. The promised elections of the National Assembly did not take place, and were definitively cancelled by President Mizra's imposition of martial law in 1958. Justified by the Army with the necessity to save the nation from political disintegration<sup>19</sup>, the subsequent coup of Ayub Khan imposed a new Constitution that exacerbated the East-West tensions. This indeed recognised both the concept of equity between the two wings, which damaged the representation of the Eastern wing, and only few powers to the provinces, thus subjugating them to the presidential executive located in West Pakistan. Furthermore, during the Ayub government, the military-bureaucratic nexus was further reinforced by introducing military officers into bureaucracy<sup>20</sup>.

Regional dissatisfaction and resentment were strengthened during the Fifties and the first half of the Sixties when East Pakistan saw a diverse economic and social development of West Pakistan. The two wings of Pakistan emerged in 1947 were indeed not characterised by critical differences in terms of development. After Independence, however, resources were mainly directed towards the industrial development of West Pakistan, though East Pakistan was the larger foreign exchange winner, exporter of jute and tea. Thus, the East received only 20% of the entire developmental expenditure during the 1950-1951/1954-1955 period, and 36% during 1965-1966/1969-1970 period, though it had the 60% of the total population<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, while East Pakistan's industrial production grew only marginally until

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18 Ibid., 196.

19 See for example Ayub Khan's speech made on 8 October 1958, quoted in Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (Bodmin: Yale University Press, 2009), 77.

20 Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan: Civil-military Relations in a Praetorian State," in *The Military and Democracy in Asia and the Pacific*, by Viberto Selochan and Ronald James May (Canberra: Australian National University, 2004), 194.

21 Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 12; Muhammad Anisur Rahman, *East and West Pakistan: a Problem in the Political Economy of Regional Planning* (Harvard: Harvard University, Center for International Affairs, 1968), 32–36.

1970, that of West Pakistan tripled compared to the East Pakistan's one<sup>22</sup>. As a result, in the Sixties the Bengali population increasingly felt they were being treated as a colony by the West. The feelings of dissent therefore revolved around Bengal identity and reinforced the linguistic and cultural traditions.

Divergences were further sharpened during the 1965 war when the central government decided to dismiss the supervision of defence and economic matters of East Pakistan; thus enhancing its geographical isolation and vulnerability<sup>23</sup>. In this context the demand for a more political and economic autonomy for the East was clearly formulated in the Six-Points Programme by the leader of the AL, Sheikh Mujib-ur Rahmana, in February 1966<sup>24</sup>. This programme not only asked once again for the recognition of a major autonomy to the province of East Pakistan, but also for its full fiscal independence, and for the creation of a separate militia or paramilitary force for the security of East Pakistan. The Pakistani government reacted by arresting the AL leader, and beginning a trial in 1968 against him and 35 other political personalities, civil servants and army officers accused to have taken part in the *Agartala conspiracy*, a plot to bring out the secession of East Pakistan with Indian help. Although there were some grounds for these accusations<sup>25</sup>, no solid evidence was presented. Thus social and political pressure erupted in the streets in the East, added to the political demonstrations in West Pakistan, leading the Pakistani government of Ayub Khan to release Mujib on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1969, and to pass

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22 As a consequence disparities in per capita income significantly grew (the disparity ratio passed from 21,0% in 1949-50 to 61% in 1969-1970), as well as the disparities in infrastructures such as power generation, transport facilities, health and educational services. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 12.

23 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 189.

24 For the text see Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1972), 23–33.

25 The name of the conspiracy came from the Indian city in the Tripura state where the accused were supposed to have met Indian army officers. The fact that Mujib had had meetings with representatives of the Indian government since 1962 in different secret locations in India is largely recognised. See: *The Bangladesh News*, 23 February 2011 (<http://www.bdnews24.com/details.php?id=188118&cid=2>), or *The Daily Star*, 12 June 2010 (<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=142345>, both retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012). What remains unclear is whether the two parts were really acting with the same goal of the division of Pakistan in the Sixties or if the Indians were just keeping alive their relations with the East Pakistan political exponents.



on its powers to another general of the same faction, Yahya Khan, who imposed the Martial Rule again.

The new President declared his intention to give proportional political representation to the two wings of Pakistan<sup>26</sup>. The first free elections of Pakistan were then fixed and held on December 1970. The AL won in East Pakistan running a political campaign on the base of the Six-Points Programme, while in the West the Pakistani People Party (PPP), a political party led by the previous member of the Ayub government, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, emerged as the major party. The AL won 160 of 162 seats available for the East Pakistan candidates, ensuring the control of the majority of seats in the National Assembly, while PPP assured 81 seats, becoming the second party<sup>27</sup>. However, these results left Pakistan politically divided: on one hand, the day after the elections Bhutto declared that the PPP and the AL had to share the authority of the national government and that the AL could not lead alone; on the other, Mujib claimed his right to lead a government in autonomy<sup>28</sup>.

The first free elections of Pakistan dramatically ended in a new political stalemate which left the space to the military to return on the political scene, precipitating the situation<sup>29</sup>. President Yahya Khan seized indeed the opportunity and intervened again, first postponing the National Assembly to 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1971, and later further complicating the political negotiations<sup>30</sup>. On 21<sup>st</sup> February the Pakistani president decided indeed to dismiss the civilian government he had named in 1969, to rule just with his personal military advisers, and to consider the option of making a

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26 On 30th March 1970 Yahya promulgated the Legal Framework Order (LFO), giving 120 days to the Constitutional Assembly to frame a new Constitution where 162 seats over 300 (the majority) had to be given to the elected representative of East Pakistan. Golam Wahed Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent* (New Delhi: Free Press, 1975), 92–93.

27 Craig Baxter, "Pakistan Votes -- 1970," *Asian Survey* 11, no. 3 (March 1971): 206.

28 Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 132–133 and 137–142.

29 Although Sisson and Rose claimed that the electoral results surprised all the actors, bringing president Yahya Kahn to be driven by just events, it is possible to argue that the army, as the principal actor controlling the political scene in Pakistan at that time, was aware of the probability and interested to assume direct political control. Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, 310–313.

30 Yahya meeting several times in private Bhutto, and modifying repeatedly its position over the Six-Points programme, gave the impression of preferring Bhutto and enhanced the political distrust that led to the stalemate.

display of power in East Pakistan<sup>31</sup>. As a result, even though the Governor of East Pakistan had informed him of the risks of a further postponement of the National Assembly, the president dismissed the Governor, and on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1971 announced both the postponement sine die of the National Assembly, and a sharper imposition of martial law.

The reaction in the East was harsh, seeing people marching in the streets seriously protesting. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March the AL launched a non-violent non-cooperative movement, blocking all the governmental and commercial activities, and recurring to violence in some occasions<sup>32</sup>. As a consequence, the central authority in East Pakistan collapsed, the Pakistani army found it difficult to control the situation, and a civil war erupted. Yahya reacted shifting to the political parties the responsibilities, and fixing the date for the inaugural session of the National Assembly on 25<sup>th</sup> March. He then flew to Dhaka on 15<sup>th</sup> March officially to try to find a last agreement with Mujib. Even if the negotiations came close to defining an interim government, they definitively failed when Bhutto, who had not been consulted since the beginning, joined the discussions<sup>33</sup>. As a result of the failure of the negotiations, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971, after having left Dhaka with the West Pakistan politicians, president Yahya seized the opportunity and ordered the Army to launch a violent and repressive operation, *Operations Searchlight*, with the aim to bring East Pakistan back under control as it had been successfully done in 1969<sup>34</sup>.

A 24 hours curfew was therefore called, and the Army forces got out from their barracks with the order to suppress the political demonstrations recurring to violence if necessary, to arrest Awami League members, students, and all those suspected

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31 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 206.

32 Bose, "Anatomy of Violence," 4464. Highlighting the complexity of a situation where no obviously right or wrong positions were present, Bose's recent work reinforces in part the official Pakistani position, sustained in the Government of Pakistan, *Hamoodur Rahman Commission of Inquiry Into the 1971 India-Pakistan War* (Karachi: Arc Manor LLC, 1974), <http://www.pppusa.org/Acrobat/Hamoodur%20Rahman%20Commission%20Report.pdf>, retrieved on 5th May 2012.

33 President Yahya indeed invited Bhutto only on 16th March, when negotiations already were begun. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 119.

34 Harry W. Blair, "Sheikh Mujib and Deja Vu in East Bengal: The Tragedies of March 25," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 52 (December 25, 1971): 2559.

supporting the AL claims of major autonomy for East Pakistan. Despite Mujib Rahman being captured, the majority of AL members escaped and found refuge in India. Violence was indiscriminately used, and women and Hindus became the primary target of the repression<sup>35</sup>. Differently from 1969, this time the military crackdown triggered the mutiny of the East Bengal regiment led by Major Ziaur-Rahman on 27<sup>th</sup> March, and a popular revolt against the Pakistani Army presence. In some cases killings of Urdu-speaking minorities occurred, like those of the West-Pakistani and Bihari people (the non-Bengali Muslims who had moved from India to East Pakistan after partition)<sup>36</sup>. Due to the opposition of the Bengali population, bringing back the urban centres of East Pakistan under control took the Pakistani Army almost six weeks. The surviving nucleus of the future Bangladesh army which had tried to militarily resist thus escaped in India, enlarging together with millions of Bengali people who fled violence and murders the lines of refugees of the AL members. These events directly involved New Delhi, which offered hospitality first to the rebels and then to the refugees, and affected the already tense Indo-Pakistan relations, thus leading to the third Indo-Pakistani war.

## ***2.2 Indo-Pakistani relations until 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971***

The relations between India and Pakistan, as already highlighted in the first chapter, had been characterised by profound distrust and rivalry since the foundation of the two states. Cultural, religious and communal divergences developed during the colonial rule, led Pakistan to emerge on a religious base and to proclaim itself as the state for the Indian Muslims. As already mentioned, after Independence several

35 For a selection of eyes-witness accounts and newspaper reports see Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 280–445. For a complete account from a Bengali point of view, see Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*; David Loshak, *Pakistan Crisis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971). For an account much closer to the Pakistan's official view, see Bose, "Anatomy of Violence"; Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (New Delhi: Hachette India, 2011).

36 Bose, "Anatomy of Violence," 4464–4465.

tensions also grew, further estranging the relations among the two countries: first, the question of Kashmir led to military confrontation in 1948 and in 1965; and second, the process of militarization of Pakistan resulted in Rawalpindi entering the American sponsored alliances of CENTO and SEATO at first, and then establishing a growing military collaboration with China. However, after the Tashkent Conference<sup>37</sup> of 1966, which followed the 1965 war and laid down the conditions for a restoration of normal relations between the two states, relations between Islamabad and New Delhi did not off. First the global developments that had been analysed in the first chapter, like the new friendly American attitude toward Pakistan and the improving Sino-Pakistani relations, caused New Delhi to be concerned about Pakistan's armament plans. Secondly, some specific regional issues, which will be now better analysed, like the alleged Indian support for the AL secession project in East Pakistan, and the Indian reaction to forbid the flyover right as a result of the hijacking episode of 30<sup>th</sup> January 1971, contributed to growing tension between Islamabad and New Delhi.

As already mentioned previously in this chapter, in 1966 Mujib Rahman was accused by the Pakistani judiciary to be part of the *Agartala conspiracy* in which India apparently collaborated with the leaders of the AL, supporting their secessionist movement. Even if it is certain that Indian functionaries since 1962 and onwards met Bengali political leaders (a fact in itself not surprising since it was part of the duties of the diplomatic corps stationed in Dhaka), it is still unclear if the Indian government played an active role in supporting the AL plan to secede, as the Pakistani government was suspecting. In the absence of official sources, it seems plausible that India was seriously interested in fostering relations with the AL to weaken the strength of the Pakistani state, and because it was a party based on secular values, thus considered more reliable to the Indian eyes than the military institutions of the Pakistani state, or the small Islamic parties diffused in the West, or

<sup>37</sup> The Tashkent Declaration was released at the end of the Conference, on the 10th of January 1966 after the second Indo-Pakistani war fought in 1965. The two agreed to return their territorial position to those of the pre-conflict, so as not to interfere with each other's internal affairs, and to restore economic and diplomatic relations. Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004: The Gradual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 287–288.

the political party led by Bhutto. Even if since 1966 Bhutto had developed a populist rhetoric similar to the one of Indira Gandhi, there was no room for sympathy between the two, and he was certainly a strong supporter of harshening the relations with India<sup>38</sup>. Although this fact was mainly dictated by the domestic politics goal to emerge as an alternative to Ayub at the political level, it did not help the relations between the PPP and the Indian government that became increasingly strained as a consequence of the growing aggressiveness shown in Bhutto's speeches after the 1970 Pakistani elections<sup>39</sup>. Yet another factor strengthening the Indian support for the AL was that the two were more interested than Islamabad to see the lifting of the trade-ban between India and Pakistan in force since the 1965 war, because of the embargo was affecting the interests of East Pakistan and of India more than the West Pakistani ones<sup>40</sup>. However, a significant involvement of India in the plot to subvert Pakistani internal equilibrium before the dramatic events of March 1971 does not seem so credible. Despite the sympathy towards Bengali nationalism, India's leadership until the spring of 1971 was primarily focused on domestic politics. Before hand Indira Gandhi was fighting against the Syndicate, and after 1969 trying to gain the political power for ruling the country autonomously from the support of opposition parties. Even if some economic and political support could have been provided to the AL, it seems probable that this was not significant enough to alter the internal relations of power existing in Pakistan<sup>41</sup>. In addition to the absence of evidence of the alleged open support of India to the secessionists of East Pakistan,

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38 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 197.

39 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 40.

40 "Note on Pakistan, dated 28th November 1970", in MEA, HI, HI/121/11/70, National Archives, New Delhi. On this see also: P. N. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49.

41 Talbot, *Pakistan*, 203–205. An evidence of the Indian presence in East Pakistan in support for AL is given by a note of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the section of the Indian intelligence service that deals with international intelligence, that informs on 13th April 1971 the Prime Minister Secretariat (PMS) of the fact that the they (together with the AL) were losing the control of almost all Bangladesh in favour of the Pakistan Army: "Note from RAW to PMS, dated 13th April 1971", in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi. However, the presence in East Pakistan's territory of the envoys of the Indian Intelligence services is not evidence of the direct involvement of the Indian government in a plot aimed to divide Pakistan before 1971.

the fact that the AL had an even more rigid position than the official Pakistani on the issue of the Ganga river (for obvious territorial interest reasons), cast also doubts on the fact that India was directly supporting the AL before the military crackdown launched by the military junta in March 1971<sup>42</sup>.

The second issue that directly complicated bilateral relations and also had an important impact on the events of 1971 in East Pakistan was the hijacking by two Kashmiri of an Indian Airline flight from Srinagar to Jammu on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1971. The two hijackers landed the plane in Lahore, and after evacuating crew and passengers, they blew it up. While Pakistan's government granted the hijackers political asylum and allowed them to address public meetings where they strongly criticised India's policies in Kashmir<sup>43</sup>, on 4<sup>th</sup> February, India reacted by revoking all flyover rights from Pakistan over Indian Territory, both civilian and military. This action had a significant impact since the resumption of the over flight rights across each other's territory was the only significant agreement reached since Tashkent. This veto further complicated the Pakistani process of strengthening its military presence in East Pakistan that had begun in the second half of February as a reaction to the political stalemate reached with the 1970 elections, with the aim of launching a political repression to the AL movement in East Pakistan. Pakistan military equipment and soldiers therefore had to make longer trips around India either flying, or sailing through Ceylon<sup>44</sup>. Several explanations had been formulated to explain the hijacking: Indian intelligence and politicians believed it was an accident planned by

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42 The main issue on diverging interests of East Pakistan and India was the Farakka Barrage Project: a barrage located in West Bengal, only 16 km from the border with East Pakistan, right before the beginning of the Ganga delta, allowing India to control during the whole year the flux of water towards East Pakistan. This was a 1951 project of the Indian Government that consisted in the construction of a damn diverging waters from the Ganga to the Hoogly river in order to improve the navigation conditions along the latter and to preserve and maintain the Kolkata port where it debouched. These were the official reasons justifying the project built by the Government of India (see: <http://mowr.gov.in/index3.asp?sslid=296&subsublinkid=714&langid=1>, retrieved on the 8th August 2012). On the Ganga division see: Salman M. a Salman and Kishor Uprety, *Conflict and Cooperation on South Asia's International Rivers: Legal Perspective* (London: World Bank Publications, 2002), 125–194; B. G. Verghese, *Waters of Hope: Integrated Water Resource Development and Regional Cooperation Within the Himalayan-Ganga-Brahmaputra-Barak Basin* (Oxford: Oxford & IBH Pub. Co., 1990).

43 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 136.

44 Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 495.

some sections of the Pakistani military in order to erode relations with India, and to divert attention and complicate the political negotiation process on going between the political forces of Pakistan to restore democracy<sup>45</sup>; on the contrary, a Pakistani commission inquiry produced a report in April 1971 accusing the two hijackers of being Indian spies working in favour of the secession of East Pakistan<sup>46</sup>. Despite these contrasting versions, it appears credible that New Delhi's decision to revoke the over flight rights came as a retaliation answer to the fact that Pakistan 4 years after Tashkent was still linking the lifting of the trade ban, the softening of the visa procedures, and the opening of the cultural exchange with India to the resolution of the question of Kashmir and Farakka<sup>47</sup>. In addition, Indian reaction could have been motivated by several other factors: the renewal of the weapons flown from the United States to Pakistan in September 1970 through the American *one time exception* policy; the opening of the road connecting Pakistani Kashmir to China in 1969<sup>48</sup>; the alleged support since 1969 provided by Pakistan to the rebels of North-East India, such as the Naga and the Mizo<sup>49</sup>; and the attempt of Pakistan to internationalize the issue of the Ganga water through the intervention of international organization like the World Bank in 1970<sup>50</sup>.

Therefore, Indo-Pakistan relations in March 1971 had already been really tense. However, it was the crisis that exploded after 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971 that definitively affected them, triggering a broader re-formulation of India's foreign and domestic

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45 Sisson and Rose got the impression this vision was generally diffused from several interviews they made in India. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 136. About the Pakistani domestic policy, it is relevant to note that Bhutto supported openly the hijackers, criticising India's policy in Kashmir, while Mujib downplayed the event as a simple terrorist attack without linking it to India. *Ibid.*, 76.

46 This version it is not so credible since the hijackers after 1971 war were released and in 1982 were still living without any restrictions in Pakistan. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 137. It is rather more credible to think that this would have been impossible, had they actually been "Indian agents."

47 "Note on the state of Indo-Pakistani relations, dated 1<sup>st</sup> August and 28<sup>th</sup> November 1970", in MEA, HI, HI/121/11/70, National Archives, New Delhi. Evidence of this irritation was India deciding not to celebrate the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tashkent agreement signature, and explaining its decision to its High Commissioning Offices in Pakistan declaring that the improvements from 1966 in the bilateral relations had been too slow.

48 Indeed even if the road was declared opened only in February 1971, truck passage was already possible since 1969. John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001), 207.

policies, and a re-organization of the entire South Asian political equilibrium.

### ***3. India's foreign policy formulation from March to July 1971***

India officially reacted to the launch of *Operation Searchlight* assuming a neutral position, and indeed it depicted it as a domestic affair of Pakistan; but this did not prevent New Delhi to immediately grant hospitality to the Bengali political leadership and to the refugees, and to support their cause through sympathetic statements. The situation changed significantly from mid-April, when the flux of refugees became consistent. At that point, New Delhi declared that their settlement would only have been on a temporary base, in special camps along the borders, limited until the solution of the East Pakistani crisis. India carried on keeping its formal neutral position, but increased its military support of Bengali guerrilla forces,

49 The control over the North Eastern area of India had already been a problem for the British during the colonial era since the Eastern regions were not densely populated and they were instead largely controlled by tribes that maintained a sort of autonomy from the British rule. When New Delhi with Independence extended its political control over these remote and distant areas of the North East some Naga groups, after an initial period of consultations, in mid-1950s resorted to arms to raise their cause for larger autonomy and independence. Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011), 271. New Delhi at the time sharply reacted sending the Army to brutally repress the rebels, and at the same time try to find a political solution. It granted them in 1953 the creation of their own state (Nagaland), without however ending the quest for independence raised by the rebels. Rebels after 1966 established some contacts with Beijing that began indirectly to support them. During that period another violent movement also emerged in the Mizo hills calling for independence, which is generally know as the Mizos. This has led New Delhi since 1969 to accuse Islamabad of allowing the establishment of Chinese training camps into its territories along the borders with North-East India for the Indian rebels. After several years of military repression and negotiations a state, the Mizoram, was then granted in 1986 to this population ending their rebellion. However, in reality the rebels problem is much more complex for India and Pakistan: indeed Pakistan actively supported dissident elements in Jammu and Kashmir, while India continued to provide economic and political support to the Pakhtoon dissidents in the North-West Frontier province of Pakistan. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 43.

50 “Telegram of the Indian Embassy in Washington to High Commissioner of India in Pakistan on 10<sup>th</sup> February”, and “Telegram of the latter to Foreign Secretary in New Delhi on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1970”, in MEA, AMS, WII/104/14/70, National Archives, New Delhi.



and its urge over the international community to ask Pakistan to achieve a fast crisis solution that could bring back the refugees. According to India, this was the only solution that could assure the restoration of democratic policies in Pakistan and return the AL to government in East Pakistan. Before analysing the evolution of India's foreign policy during spring and the first half of summer 1971, it is important to consider briefly who those Indian institutions and people were that handled the foreign policy decision-making process. Since it was highly centralised, few people directly influenced the formulation of India's foreign policy. Therefore, it becomes interesting to spend time in presenting them.

### ***3.1 The foreign policy decision-making process in India in 1971***

The foreign policy decision-making process in India in 1971 was highly centralised to a small circle of the Prime Minister's personal advisers that held positions in the Prime Minister Secretariat (PMS) and in the Cabinet Secretary. This group of people made decisions informally calling on the Army and Intelligence when considered necessary. This was partially a historical consequence of the fact that since Independence Jawaharlal Nehru had not only been the Prime Minister until his death in 1964, but also the Minister of External Affairs for the whole period<sup>51</sup>, and that he was used to making decisions upon foreign-policy matters mainly consulting his circle of personal advisers<sup>52</sup>; and occasionally the Parliament, the Cabinet or the

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51 On this question see: Warren F. Ilchman, "Political Development and Foreign Policy: The Case of India," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 4, no. 3 (1966): 216–230; Sumit Ganguly, "The Prime Minister and Foreign and Defence Policies," in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*, by James Manor and B. D. Dua (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 142–143; Steven A. Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 46–47.

52 This group was really restricted to the personal friend of the Prime Minister, Krishna Menon, who in 1957 became Minister of Defence, to the Home Minister Govind Ballabh Pant for the period preceding 1962, to B. N. Mullik, the head of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and to Subimal Dutt, the Foreign Secretary.

Army officers. Although after the 1962 defeat<sup>53</sup> of India in the war with China the foreign policy decision-making institutionalisation process was consolidated, in 1971 it had reached only partial results. However, several explanations have been given to explain why it was characterised by such a high concentration of power: some argued that the personal character of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, insecure and power-hungry, contributed to the centralisation<sup>54</sup>. Others argue that personal influences alone cannot explain the whole scenario: social, economic and political aspects, which have already been briefly analysed in the first chapter, would have also contributed to the centralisation process that involved the Indian government<sup>55</sup>. The fact that both Pakistan and Bangladesh in the same period, and in similar condition of deep crisis and large weakness of their dominant political parties, experienced a similar regime of authoritarian democracies further reinforces this thesis<sup>56</sup>. However, the long standing disinterest of the Indian politicians in foreign policy, as argued by Tharoor<sup>57</sup>, certainly contributed to the process in relation to the foreign policy area.

53 During the initial phases of the 1962 war the opinions of the Army were generally not seriously considered. Even worse, the Prime Minister on several occasions bypassed their criticism deciding to promote to the apex of the Army those who were condescending towards the government's will, like Lt. Gen. B. M. Kaul during the last phases that preceded the Sino-Indian war of 1962. On this see for example: Neville Maxwell, "China and India: The Un-Negotiated Dispute," *The China Quarterly* no. 43 (July 1, 1970): 179–199 and 202.

54 See for example: Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966-1982* (London: Sage Publications, 1984), 19–29; B. D. Dua and James Manor, *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 8; Paul R. Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*; Harish Kapur, *Foreign Policies Of India's Prime Ministers* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2009), 124–130.

55 It has been argued that the growing Congress party crisis that began in the first half of the Sixties indeed could have contributed to the centralisation of power into the Prime Minister hands and of her advisers. On this see: Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). At the same time some sustain that the Indian growing socio-economic conflicts that emerged in the second half of Sixties, and the masses entrance into politics could have created a situation of instability that indirectly favoured the emergence of a strong man at the political level. On this see for example: James Manor, "Party Decay and Political Crisis in India," *The Washington Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1981): 25–40; James Manor, "Anomie in Indian Politics: Origins and Potential Wider Impact," *Economic and Political Weekly* 18, no. 19/21 (May 1, 1983): 725–734; Sudipta Kaviraj, "Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, no. 38/39 (September 20, 1986): 1697–1708; Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*.

56 On this topic see: Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

57 Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India's Foreign Policy Under Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1982), 116.

What is important to note here is that the Indian Parliament was almost completely excluded from the decision making process. By 1971 all the Parliament committees concerned with foreign policy issues, organised during Shastri's government, had been abolished and replaced in 1970 with the Political Affairs Committee (PAC): a body that only occasionally functioned<sup>58</sup>, and that was chaired by the Prime Minister herself, and composed only of those Ministers that Indira Gandhi had maintained from her previous government, therefore clearly loyal to her, or at least considered as such. These were the Minister of External Affairs, Swaran Singh, the Minister of Defence, Jagjivan Ram, the Minister of Finance, Y. B. Chavan, the Minister of Agriculture and Food, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, and the Minister of State K. C. Pant, who was inter alia in charge of the situation in West Bengal. The rest of the Cabinet was generally just informed of the decision taken by the PAC and the Prime Minister, and its "formal approval, when requested, was automatic and usually given without serious discussion"<sup>59</sup>. The exclusion of the Parliament from the decision-making process related to foreign policy matters was also directly favoured by the fact that the government held a large majority after 1971.

As mentioned earlier, the military and the intelligence were involved in the foreign policy decision-making process only informally, though after 1962 new authority and weight had been recognised for both institutions. During the Pakistani invasion of Kashmir in 1965 Lal Bahadur Shastri, Nehru's successor, left almost all decisions about the formulation and implementation of the defence strategy to the military<sup>60</sup>. In addition after 1962 the military intelligence was strengthened, with a 50% increase of the assigned officers<sup>61</sup>. Moreover, after the 1965 war with Pakistan, in order to increase independence and efficiency in the intelligence work, the competences of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) were restricted to the internal field. A new body, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was created in 1968, assuming control over the international intelligence; furthermore a new committee, the Joint

58 Ganguly, "The Prime Minister and Foreign and Defence Policies," 152.

59 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 140.

60 Ganguly, "The Prime Minister and Foreign and Defence Policies," 30.

61 Steven A. Hoffmann, "Anticipation, Disaster and Victory: India 1962-71," *Asian Survey* 12, no. 11 (1972): 977.

Intelligence Committee (JIC), was formed to coordinate the different intelligence services, like the IB, the RAW and those of the military, and passed under the direct and personal control of the Prime Minister<sup>62</sup>. However, the military and the intelligence roles in 1971 were not formally institutionalised. In fact, for example, Indira Gandhi during her first government had abolished the Defence Committee (set up during Shastri's government): an organ through which the three Indian military forces' chiefs (Army, Navy and Air) had to become involved in decision-making<sup>63</sup>. Therefore, the army and the intelligence heads were consulted only when the Prime Minister and her advisers considered it strictly necessary.

As a consequence, the dominant component of the foreign policy decision-making process was the bureaucracy. The institutional places where the process was effectively carried out were indeed those inter-ministerial committees that included all the key Indian administrative officials, such as the PMS and the Cabinet Secretariat. In the Cabinet Secretariat these were V. W. Swaminathan (cabinet secretary), P. N. Haksar (Prime Minister's secretary), K. B. Lal (defence secretary), I. G. Patel (economy secretary), T. N. Kaul (foreign secretary)<sup>64</sup>. Moreover, Indira Gandhi dealing with the Pakistan crisis in 1971 relied largely on a number of other secretaries of the Prime Minister Secretariat (PMS): like G. Ramachandra, M. Malhotra, Sharada Prasad, and B. N. Tandon, who later achieved important posts in the Indian administrative service. Other key figures of the administration at that time: P. N. Dhar, who later replaced Haksar in 1973 as principal secretary of the Prime Minister, in 1971 was the external adviser of the PMS; and G. Parthasarthy, the close confidant of Indira Gandhi<sup>65</sup>. The other functionary that played a crucial role was D. P. Dhar: a socialist member of the Congress For Socialist Actions that had formerly been ambassador to the Soviet Union, who after the eruption of the Pakistani crisis was designated head of the Policy Planning Committee in the Ministry of External

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62 Asoka Raina, *Inside RAW: The Story of India's Secret Service* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981), 12–14.

63 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 139.

64 Ibid.

65 Bishan Narain Tandon, *PMO Diary: The Emergency* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2006), viii–ix.

Affairs<sup>66</sup>. From that position D. P. Dhar strategically controlled the setting of the long-term targets for India's foreign policy, and the entire institution of the Ministry of External Affairs that, as a matter of fact, played a secondary role in the decision-making process<sup>67</sup>. The Ministry of External Affairs was thus consulted by the political leadership only when considered useful.

What has been said until now underlines the statement that only a few people directly influenced the decision making process in 1971: the most important role was obviously that of Indira Gandhi, who ultimately retained the last word and the power to decide<sup>68</sup>; followed by P. N. Haksar, her principal secretary, who during those years had been described as the “main centre of power and authority” in the Indian government<sup>69</sup>. Further down the chain of command were D. P. Dhar, P. N. Dhar, and T. N. Kaul, who together with Haksar were known as the *Kashmiri Mafia*, for their ethnic provenance, and for the influence they had upon the Prime Minister. To understand why Indira Gandhi preferred circling with bureaucrats instead of politicians, let us reassert at this point her personality, insecure and incapable of tolerating criticism, which directly influenced the way the decision-making process was carried out, impeding her in trusting her political colleagues<sup>70</sup>. In fact, in the absence of a specific ideological inclination or a clear personal vision of the world, Mrs. Gandhi had to rely on her advisers to formulate long term strategies<sup>71</sup>. Others analysts when talking of Indira Gandhi rather prefer to describe her as a person just interested in detaining political power, and sitting on top of the “decision making

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66 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 463.

67 Under the level of secretary indeed the bureaucracy of the Ministry of External Affairs was subservient: because those high-ranking officials, such as Jagat Mehta, that had tried to criticise PMS' decisions in appointing new officials, had been sent in 1971 outside New Delhi for other duties. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 141; The fact that the same Foreign Minister Swaran Singh (1970-1974) was a man of Indira, loyal and submissive, and that Y. B. Chavan became then Foreign Minister (1974-1977) did not help making the independence of the Ministry. Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 151–156.

68 P. N. Dhar sustains in his book that she generally consulted and carefully took into consideration the opinions of her advisers, but on several occasions she decided not to follow their indications. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 144.

69 V. A. Pai Panandiker and Ajay K. Mehra, *The Indian Cabinet: a Study in Governance* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), 227.

pyramid<sup>72</sup> who had no problems manipulating people for her personal interests<sup>73</sup>. Insecure and power-hungry Indira Gandhi developed an authoritarian style of ruling that explains the growing role of bureaucracy under her mandate: in fact bureaucrats, lacking a political base of power in the Congress or among the people, were indeed not able to challenge the Prime Minister's political influence, while they were however able to support her in the decision-making process.

This explains why P. N. Haksar, her private secretary from 1967, became the most influential man of Indira Gandhi's group of personal advisers<sup>74</sup>. Haksar had a career as a civil servant, holding important posts at the diplomatic level in several states in Europe. Serving as secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, he had the

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70 She had a lonely and difficult childhood: with her mother having a long-term sickness before dying prematurely; and her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, often absorbed by his political engagements as the leader of the Indian nationalist movement that fought against the colonial rule at first (he spent several years in prison), and later as the Prime Minister of Independent India. Her personality remained for a long time highly insecure even when she became an adult, she often experienced long periods of depression and witnessed several failures in her academic and private life. Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 251–271; Kapur, *Foreign Policies Of India's Prime Ministers*, 124–126. Although her father insisted on having her educated in one of the best universities of that time, such as Oxford, Indira Gandhi repeatedly failed exams and finally abandoned academia without concluding it. Moreover, during her youth she suffered for a long period with serious health problems that obliged her to remain in a sanatorium in Switzerland. Lastly, even her marriage with Feroze Gandhi, thoroughly desired by Indira Gandhi, soon failed. She then moved into her father's house becoming his primary help in both practical and political issues. When following her father and Shastri's death she became Prime Minister, her persona also began to influence her way of dealing with political power. At the beginning of her political career she was much too shy, insecure and did not shine for her oratory capabilities. For these reasons it has been reported that she was called "dumb doll". Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Hodder, 2010), 43. However, after a few years in power she quickly transformed herself, gaining self-esteem, and generally becoming perceived as the "only man in the government" in 1971. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy*, 123. For more information over the life of Indira Gandhi consult biographies like for example: Frank, *Indira*; Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*; Benny Aguiar, *Indira Gandhi, a Political Biography 1966-1984* (Vitasta Pub., 2007); Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy*; Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi: An Intimate Biography* (New Delhi: Pantheon Books, 1992); Zareer Masani, *Indira Gandhi: a Biography* (New Delhi: T. Y. Crowell, 1976); Uma Vasudev, *Two Faces of Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1977); Uma Vasudev, *Indira Gandhi: Revolution in Restraint* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1974).

71 Mansingh, *India's Search for Power*, 27; Kapur, *Foreign Policies Of India's Prime Ministers*, 123. P. R. Chari, in the interview done on 29th November 201, argued she was not really able to conceptualise and that she relied on others for that within the PMS, such as P. N. Haksar, D. P. Dhar and P. N. Dhar. She did not write books or spend her time in long philosophical discussions, as opposed for example to Haksar who wrote *Premonitions* (1979), *Reflections in our time* (1982), *One more life* (1989) and *India's Foreign Policy and its Problems* (1989) and edited several others books. Thus she was a pragmatist and a tactical person, rather than a thinker or a strategist.

Prime Minister's confidence also thanks to the fact that he had been a close friend of Indira Gandhi's husband, Feroze Gandhi, since their youth. Known as a staunch socialist, he was one of the most influential persons within the Congress Forum for Socialist Action on which Indira Gandhi had begun to rely since 1967 when she tilted toward leftist policies to win her battle for power within the Congress<sup>75</sup>. His desire to see leftist forces assuming the position of power in India led him first to believe and support Indira Gandhi, and then to work with her to reinforce the Prime Minister's powers through a bureaucratization of the political decision making process, with the clear aim to weaken the moderate and more conservative forces present in the Congress party. Having the power to control all the civil servant appointments in Indira Gandhi's government<sup>76</sup>, Haksar facilitated the ascent of those bureaucrats loyal to Indira Gandhi, and contributed to the Indian bureaucracy "politicization" process<sup>77</sup>. This fact seriously undermined the bureaucratic independence, especially of the PMS, and of the Cabinet Secretariat, that were actually the key institutions

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72 Stanley A. Kochanek, "Mrs. Gandhi's Pyramid: The New Congress," in *Indira Gandhi's India: a Political System Reappraised*, by Henry Cowles Hart (Boulder: Westview Press, 1976), 95–102. This aspect of her personality was also expressed by her obsession, already developed in 1969 according to her biographer, in identifying herself with the nation, and in considering her permanence to power as necessary for the future of the nation. Frank, *Indira*, 320. By 1971 she had indeed centralised the power within the Congress party in her hands, intervening, as already shown in the first chapter, with the selection of candidates for the 1971 elections, and by-passing the structure of the party through a direct and populist call to the masses. Kaviraj, "Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics". Moreover, after the electoral victory Indira Gandhi assumed not only the position of Prime Minister, but also the portfolio of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, of the Home Affairs Ministry, of the Planning Ministry and of the Atomic Energy.

73 Interview with P. R. Chari, dated 29<sup>th</sup> November 2011 at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), Salfadurang Enclave, New Delhi. Prof. P. R. Chari was a civil servant at the Ministry of Defence from 1971 to 1975. He had not direct access to the Prime Minister at that time, but he based his affirmations upon his memories of that time and on the accounts of other more important bureaucrats, such as B. N. Tandon.

74 From a letter sent by D. P. Dhar to Haksar on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1972 one can easily understand that Haksar was the man after the Prime Minister that had major power in the Indian government: in this letter D. P. Dhar, a close adviser of Indira Gandhi, gives his apologies to Haksar for having criticised a decision made by the latter. See: "Letter from D. P. Dhar, to Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1972", in P. N. Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 235, NMML Archives, New Delhi. The relation of power that emerges clearly confirms the impression that Haksar was the most powerful man even inside the small circle of close advisers of the Prime Minister.

75 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 401.

76 Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 116.

77 David Potter, "The Prime Minister and the Bureaucracy," in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India* (New Delhi: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 86–87.

where foreign policies were formulated<sup>78</sup>. Having Indira Gandhi's direct support and confidence, Haksar during 1971 was therefore the first bureaucrat to influence India's decision making process in such a considerable way, especially at the foreign policy level<sup>79</sup>. The Prime Minister indeed trusted him so much that it has been argued that “his guidance was behind most of the initiatives that Indira took to prevail over the Syndicate”<sup>80</sup>. As a consequence of all these aspects, within the PMS and the Cabinet Secretariat decisions were taken in a highly informal way. According to P. N. Dhar's account, the decision making process was indeed completely dominated by “a personality cult”, and by the fact that “a court came into existence” where the Prime Minister and P. N. Haksar held positions of major authority and respect<sup>81</sup>. Also B. N. Tandon recognises the fact that the people who worked close to Indira Gandhi generally lacked the courage and vision to obstruct her authoritarian style<sup>82</sup>. This was related to the fact that political and bureaucratic careers during the government of Indira Gandhi were completely dependent on the loyalty people demonstrated to her or her advisers, rather than on their political base or capabilities<sup>83</sup>.

Therefore, the decision-making process related to the handling of the East Pakistani crisis that exploded in March 1971 was significantly influenced by the Prime Minister and her small group of advisers, excluding other sources playing their part, such as the Parliament and the Cabinet. As it will be shown later in this chapter, this aspect left ground to polemics about the decisions New Delhi took about some issues<sup>84</sup>.

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78 Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 144–145.

79 See for example: “Letter from P. N. Haksar to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, dated 8<sup>th</sup> October 1970”, in P. N. Haksar, III inst., f. n.160, NMML Archives, New Delhi. Here Haksar criticises and tries to influence the choice made by the Director about who to promote in the top ranks of the military.

80 Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 635.

81 Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 135.

82 Tandon, *PMO Diary*, xxiii–xli.

83 Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 118.

84 This is particularly true for the Simla agreement, as it will be shown later.



### 3.2 *The first reaction of New Delhi to the launch of Operation Searchlight*

New Delhi in the days that followed the launch of the *Operation Searchlight* elaborated an ambiguous position: India officially assumed formal neutrality with respect to the crisis in East Pakistan, but granted its concrete support to Bengali nationalism. Indira Gandhi in her statements in the Lok Sabha on 27<sup>th</sup> March indeed declared the intention of her government to “act within proper international norms”<sup>85</sup>, while two days later Samar Sen, India's representative at the United Nations, defined the development in East Pakistan as being a “domestic affair” of Pakistan<sup>86</sup>. By doing so, India expressed its anguish over the human rights violation perpetrated by Pakistan, also trying to focus international attention on the matter. Therefore, on 30<sup>th</sup> March Samar Sen submitted a note concerning the “question of the situation in East Pakistan” highlighting the dramatic on going situation<sup>87</sup>. The same Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 4<sup>th</sup> April declared that it was “neither proper nor possible” for India not to comment on the East Pakistan situation<sup>88</sup>.

In spite of these mild neutral declarations, the official Indian reaction revealed immediately the support toward the Bengali, through different channels, some more subtle than others. Firstly, Indira Gandhi and the Foreign Minister in their official Indian Parliament public speeches on 27<sup>th</sup> March declared the general support of the government to the people of East Pakistan, and its availability to help them as it did during the numerous natural disasters that had hit East Pakistan in the past<sup>89</sup>. Second, Indira Gandhi also openly manifested India's sympathy towards the Bengali inserting an element that clearly revealed India's inclinations: in her speeches she purposely

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85 Indira Nehru Gandhi, *India and Bangla Desh; Selected Speeches and Statements, March to December, 1971* [By] Indira Gandhi (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972), 11.

86 The Times of India, 31 March 1971.

87 Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 275.

88 Robert Victor Jackson, *South Asian Crisis: India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 44.

89 Gandhi, *India and Bangla Desh; Selected Speeches and Statements, March to December, 1971* [By] Indira Gandhi, 9–12.

used the term “East Bengal” or “Bangladesh”, and not “East Pakistan”<sup>90</sup>. It should also be considered that even in the private conversations between Haksar and Gandhi the term “East Bengal people” was always used<sup>91</sup>.

Moreover, the sympathy towards Bengali nationalism was diffused in both Indian society and political elite: this also immediately emerged through the reactions of political parties, the press, and some other influential figures. These supportive reactions in some cases became critical with respect to the government’s neutral and cautious reaction. Some elements inside the Congress party for example urged a tough response of the Indian government, while some opposition parties directly called for a military intervention in order to support the repressed Bengali forces<sup>92</sup>. However, the fact that the Congress was leading a majority government, installed just a few days before the crisis, enabled it to largely ignore the opposition’s interventions and critics. This facilitated the duty of the Prime Minister, and of her advisers who could take their time to evaluate the situation and carefully choose how to proceed. Only a few sections of the press, namely the conservative comprising *Motherland* and the *Organizer*, and the communist pro-Soviet newspaper *Patriot*, criticised the official government reaction, demanding direct military intervention. All the other newspapers, especially the English-language ones, took a more moderate position, supporting the government<sup>93</sup>. The only interventions that publicly embarrassed New Delhi were the ones made by Jayaprakash Narayan<sup>94</sup>, who asked to sustain more Bengali forces, and by K. Subrahmanyam, the director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi. In a seminar held by the

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90 Similarly the resolution of the Working Committee of the All India Congress of the 29th of March, and the resolution of the Lok Sabha on the 31th of March. Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 669–672.

91 “Letter from Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, dated 26<sup>th</sup> March 1971” and “Letter from Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, dated 27<sup>th</sup> March 1971”, in P. N. Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 164, in NMML Archives, New Delhi.

92 *The Time of India*, 8 April 1971; and Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 149.

93 “Old Wine,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 13 (March 27, 1971): 690.

94 *The Hindustan Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1971. Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as J. P., was an Indian independence activist and a respected Gandhian leader. After his retirement from political life following the Indian Independence, he returned on the political scene during the Seventies, playing later a national role in leading the opposition to Indira Gandhi's government in 1975 against its corruption and authoritarianism.

Council of World Affairs on 31<sup>st</sup> March, Subrahmanyam expressed the need for a direct Indian military intervention<sup>95</sup>, and on 5<sup>th</sup> April he published an article in the *National Herald* where he wrote that: “the breakup of Pakistan is in our interest and we have an opportunity the like of which will never come again”<sup>96</sup>. Although Subrahmanyam declared this without consulting any Indian government officers before expressing his personal opinion, it is clear that his decision to take that position probably had some impact on the political leadership in New Delhi. He was an influential political analyst leading the national strategic thinking, funded by the Indian Ministry of Defence<sup>97</sup>. However, at least at a first, India decided to act differently from what he advised, keeping a cautious approach towards the crisis. Likewise, several others public figures intervened in the debate over the crisis in East Pakistan supporting the government, for example: C. Rajagopalachari, former governor general of India and former chief minister of Tamil Nadu, General Cariappa, former commanding general of the Indian army, and M. Karunanidhi, chief minister of Tamil Nadu. They sustained the softer approach proposed by New Delhi, underlining the risks that hasty action could have created<sup>98</sup>.

Despite of the public discussions and the reaction of the press, the Indian foreign policy decision-making process remained highly centralised within the small circle of advisers that surrounded the Prime Minister. Discussions were kept secret and limited to the PMS and PAC circle, with the executive consulting neither the Cabinet nor the Parliament. However, according to P. N. Dhar, the criticism raised by the civil society against the weak reaction of the Indian government instilled some doubts in the Prime Minister who decided to consult the Army; at least for evaluating the possibilities of a direct military intervention of India in the Pakistani crisis for solving the issue in favour of the AL<sup>99</sup>. According to J. N. Dixit, who at that time was Deputy Secretary in the UN division of the Ministry of External Affairs<sup>100</sup>, this decision was also supported by D. P. Dhar. Instead, although Swaran Singh and

95 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 151.

96 Pakistan Horizon, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1971, 64.

97 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 150.

98 The Hindu, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1971.

99 Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 157.

Haksar accepted to listen to the army's advice, they clearly declared themselves contrary to a conflict underlining the necessity to respect international norms to avoid the world community condemnation, and the possibility that a similar position could later be taken by other countries in relation to the question of Kashmir<sup>101</sup>. Based on these different opinions the Army and the Ministry of Defence, Jagjivan Ram, were therefore asked for advice.

It has been reported that the Chief of the Army Staff, Gen. S. F. H. J. Manekshaw, informed the government that, in the best case scenario, the completion of a successful military intervention would have required several months<sup>102</sup>. Indeed, it would have required time to prepare the army for a direct military intervention: although the expansion and re-organisation of the Indian armed forces that began after the 1962 war with China, and continued after the 1965 war with Pakistan, with the aim of being able to fight a two-front war were proceeding fast, in the spring of 1971 they were still not concluded<sup>103</sup>. In addition, it would also have been necessary to wait for the dry season to allow military movements in the area of East Pakistan, since it was expecting monsoons in the April-May period, and even better to wait for winter time when the Himalayan passes would have been naturally blocked by the snow, preventing a direct Chinese military reaction<sup>104</sup>. At last, Gen. Manekshaw also warned the government that it was strategically fundamental to wait in order to allow the Bengali armed forces re-organization, and to support formation and training of Bengali guerrilla groups – activities that would have required three to four months at least<sup>105</sup>. Exploiting Bengali support in both forms would have facilitated the Indian intervention since these local groups knew the territory better, and had the support of

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100Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 50. J. N. Dixit based his descriptions over the secondary briefings he received on the discussions the Prime Minister had with a closer group of senior by D. P. Dhar, at that time chairman of the Policy Planning Committee, and T. N. Kaul, Foreign Secretary, who actively took part in those meetings.

101“Letter from Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, dated 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 1971”, in P. N. Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 174, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

102Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 209.

103D. K. Palit, *Lightning Campaign: Indo-Pakistan War, 1971* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1972), 41–43.

104Ibid., 44.

105Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 209.

the population.

Therefore, the military recommendations, reinforcing the authoritative position taken by Haksar concerning the impropriety of attacking Pakistan at that time<sup>106</sup>, led the Indian political leadership to exclude the possibility of starting a war to immediately solve the crisis. Nevertheless, during the first days of April, the demonstrations of general support expressed by the Indian government became more explicit. New Delhi, reacting to the fact that the Pakistani Army was re-gaining the control over the larger cities of East Pakistan<sup>107</sup>, allowed the Awami League to establish its headquarters in Calcutta, and to proclaim on 17<sup>th</sup> that month the formation of the Sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh, without however officially recognizing it. Furthermore, India took several other actions: giving hospitality on its territory along the border to the people escaping from Bangladesh; allowing *Radio Free Bangla* to set up near Calcutta; transforming the old Pakistan High Commission office to function as a Bangladeshi mission; and forming training camps for the Bangladeshi liberation, called *Mukti Bahini*<sup>108</sup>, on its own territory directly controlling their organizations through the provision of military and economic support. The control of the camps was indeed assigned by New Delhi before the Border Security Forces (BSF), and after 30<sup>th</sup> April to the Indian Army<sup>109</sup>. Moreover, India “began a gradual but substantial build-up of its military forces” in the North-East states<sup>110</sup>. The aim was to control the political order of the area<sup>111</sup>, and to answer the threatening presence of the Pakistan Army. By the end of April, following the regain of control over the territory, the Pakistani armed forces indeed began to concentrate their troops along the borders with India. This was a significant sign since even during the 1965 conflict East Pakistan was barely armed enough to

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106“Letter from Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, to Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, dated 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 1971, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 174, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

107The Pakistani victories had been reported in Indian press since mid-April. Sumanta Banerjee, “Next Phase of the War,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 16 (April 17, 1971): 818–819.

108Literally meaning “Freedom Fighters”. This name generally described the forces that were trained in unconventional ways by either the Indian or the Bangladesh Army officers, and that later directly contributed to the liberation of Bangladesh.

109Interview with Gen. Jacob held in New Delhi on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2011.

110Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 145.

111Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 275.

guarantee its internal security. Finally, the dispatch of Indian military forces in West Bengal turned out to be doubly useful to New Delhi, since it provided major freedom to the government of West Bengal for dealing with the Naxalite movement, which was, by that time, becoming a serious challenge to the state power supremacy in the North-East Indian region<sup>112</sup>. Not surprisingly the increasing presence of armed forces in West Bengal was carried accompanied by the introduction of a presidential ordinance allowing preventive detention<sup>113</sup>.

From the analysis developed so far, there is no element to argue that India's reaction was passive and only driven by events, as expressed by some<sup>114</sup>. Instead, it seems clear that from March New Delhi followed a clear strategy of supporting the

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112The Naxalites movement originated in 1967 in Naxalbari, in the Darjeeling district where India touches Nepal and East Pakistan; in the strategic corridor that provides access to the states of the North-East. In the same year other groups of Naxalites became active in Andhra Pradesh and in Orissa, claiming better wages for labourers, redistribution of land and access right to forest products. Since 1967 the term "Naxalite" became however the word used to address all the radical revolutionaries active in India. In that area the rural poor were mobilised by some political exponents of the CPM on the basis of the deeply inequitable agrarian structure of that area. Following those events the CPM and the Bangla Congress, a breakaway of the Congress party, took power in West Bengal in 1967, leaving the activists the freedom to recur to violence. After the fall of the government and the President Rule imposition in 1968, a new set of elections in 1969 restored power to the CPM-Bangla Congress coalition; which then tried to open a dialogue with the Naxalites, and to pursue an effective redistribution of land. The situation, however, became chaotic, problems emerged on how land should be distributed, and violence spread in the countryside. Tensions grew between the two parties in power, between the West Bengal government and the Naxalites that formed a new party, the CPI (Marxist-Leninist), to distinguish them from the CPM, and between the state and New Delhi. Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 422-424; An intensive anti-terrorist campaign was therefore launched by New Delhi after the reintroduction in March 1970 of the President Rule. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 381; On the 2nd of April in 1971 a new coalition government led by Indian National Congress took power, exploiting the division which had emerged among the Marxist parties (*The Statesman*, 16 March 1971). In spite of the superior position assumed by the Congress, CPM being out of the government was interpreted by New Delhi as a new threat, since it was free to re-establish closer ties with the Naxalite movement. This was a challenge for New Delhi that wanted to bring back the state under the Congress control. For a better analysis of the Naxalite movement see, for example: Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising* (Michigan: Zed Books, 1984); Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1996).

113The presidential ordinance was later introduced into Lok Sabha and voted in 1974 as the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). This law empowered the governments at the centre and in the states to detain people without process for up to one year in order to prevent actions against the security of India, of the states and of the maintenance of the public order. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 457.

114Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 141; Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 37; Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy*, 50.

Bengali forces<sup>115</sup>. Moreover, some documents prove that even before 25<sup>th</sup> March India's political leadership already had quite a clear view concerning what was going on in Pakistan. In fact, on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1971 the RAW had already sent the Cabinet Secretary a note about the Pakistani situation, considering it highly probable that the democratic forces in Pakistan could be repressed again, and judging the situation as a potential threat for India's security<sup>116</sup>. Moreover, Yayha Khan's decision to dismiss the Pakistani civilian government on 21<sup>st</sup> February and to authorise the press censorship did not pass unnoticed, since it followed his previous Army mobilization in reaction to the Indian imposition of an over flights veto on 4<sup>th</sup> February. Furthermore, during the first days of March, a RAW operator from Dhaka had resent a letter to Calcutta informing his uppers and New Delhi of a probable imminent military crackdown of the Pakistan Army against the Awami League<sup>117</sup>, who was in turn informed by the Indian government<sup>118</sup>.

Therefore, it appears unconvincing to assume that the Indian political leadership was completely surprised by the military crackdown in East Pakistan. The decisions taken by New Delhi in late March and early April, which offered its informal (but concrete) support to Bengali nationalism, showed the intentions of a state willing to sustain the Bengali movement. Indeed, after 25<sup>th</sup> March it was quite clear that supporting the claims for Bengali nationalism, or the return of the AL to the East Pakistan government, could have assured the establishment of a much more friendly government in the north-eastern neighbourhood of India. However, the cautiousness of the Indian government, that did not officially recognize the government of Bangladesh as being in exile, has to be considered as an obvious reaction from an entity trying to better understand how the East Pakistani situation could have developed before creating greater hostility with Pakistan and declaring a war

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115See for example: "A Relevant Pakistan Policy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 3/5 (January 1971): 171–172; K. P. Karunakaran, "East Pakistan's Non-Violent Struggle," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 12 (March 20, 1971): 659–660.

116"Note from RAW on Pakistan, dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 1971", in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 220, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

117Raina, *Inside RAW*, 53–54.

118Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 495.

unsupported at the international level. This last dissent will be shown to be the main position the world's great powers.

### ***3.3 The development of India's position towards the influx of millions of Bengali refugees in May***

New Delhi's position with respect to the East Pakistan issue, undertook a significant reformulation during May-June 1971, following the consistent growth of the influx of East refugee from mid-April onwards. In reality, the first groups of refugees that found protection across the Indian border in late March were not so significant in dimension. They were mainly Awami League leaders that had escaped the Pakistani army repression, or Bengali officers of the Pakistani police, or Bengali soldiers. In addition, there were also some Bihari-Muslims and a few West-Pakistani civil and military officers that had escaped from the area controlled by the Bengali, feared by the retaliation measures they adopted. India allowed them to enter its territory on a temporary base. However, from mid-April onwards the flood of refugees became significantly more consistent. According to the Indian Minister of Labour and Rehabilitation there were 119,566 refugees on April 17<sup>th</sup>; but they suddenly became 3,37 million by May 22<sup>nd</sup>, and 6.33 million by late-June<sup>119</sup>. The influx of such a massive population, with proportions unseen in earlier world history, created several problems for India, and the territories that hosted them, as will be seen later. However, in order to understand the real nature of the influx it is first crucial to highlight the fact that the percentage of Hindus within the entire number of refugees was close to 80%<sup>120</sup>. The religious composition of the refugees indeed helps understand why such a population migration occurred, and to reflect over the different interpretations, some not plausible, that have been provided to explain such

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119Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 446.

120Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 296.



a human tragedy.

The only convincing explanation is that by mid-April the Pakistan Army had regained control over the largest cities in East Pakistan. This aroused fear in peoples' minds of retaliation to the support given to the AL party, and among Hindus for the communitarian violence carried out by the Pakistani army. As a consequence, a significant portion of the population began to leave their houses and properties to find shelter in India. Even if many had used the word *genocide* in reference to the East Pakistan violence<sup>121</sup>, it seems incorrect to argue that the Pakistani Army was aiming at physical elimination of the Hindu Bengali population. A historical perspective analysis indeed shows the absence of plans for selective killings of Hindus, and that no official orders were given by the Pakistani Army high command to kill Hindus only. However, it is clear that a large part of the Pakistani Army officers indulged in various forms of violence purposely intended to harm the Hindu minority, which they superficially considered to be the first supporters of the AL party<sup>122</sup>. What seems plausible is that the Pakistan Army during their work of violent repression of political dissent also actively worked to up-root the Hindu population with the aim of weakening the resistance of the Bengali movement<sup>123</sup>. In addition, it has been reported that many civil and military West Pakistan officers welcomed the Hindu exodus as “good riddance”<sup>124</sup>, and that the Pakistani army spread several false rumours of massacres perpetrated by Hindus against Muslims to incite Muslims and

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121See for example: J. Sengupta, *History of the Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, 1943-1973* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1974), 281–312; Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 345; Several contemporary newspaper articles (like Mascarenhas in Sunday Times, 13 June 1971; Editorial in The New Nation (Singapore), 6 April 1971; and The Saturday Review (New York), 22 May 1971), made reference to the violence in East Pakistan, as well as All-India radio, improperly using that term. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 147.

122It seems that Major General Gul Assam, Major General Farman Ali, and the martial law administration, General A. A. K. Niazi, incited their troops to kill Hindus. The fact that the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report, fruit of a Pakistani judiciary enquiry made in 1972-4, reported some accusations against these three Generals, without however recognising them as guilty for the abuse, can be considered as evidence of the fact that these Army officers probably abused of their power. Government of Pakistan, *Hamoodur Rahman Commission of Inquiry Into the 1971 India-Pakistan War*, 27–30.

123Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 177.

124Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 261.

to justify their resorting to violence, and to convince Hindus to migrate<sup>125</sup>. Eye-witness accounts indeed reported that communal violence was initially caused by the behaviour of some paramilitary forces and of the Pakistani Army units, even if later tensions significantly became diffused in East Pakistan, dividing villages and communities along religious affiliations, and creating a situation of growing chaos and misery that echoed the massive migration of people at the time of partition<sup>126</sup>. Significant in this respect is also the account provided by the US Consul-General in Dhaka, Archer Blood, that reported how the violence and atrocities committed by the Pakistani Army in turn triggered the violent answer of the Bengali forces<sup>127</sup>. He also argued that often the Pakistani Army could not concretely distinguish between Hindus and Muslims, and that specific division was based upon local people hinting to the military. Therefore, even if the word *genocide* appears improper for describing the massacres committed by the Pakistani Army, the crucial outcome of their action was the success in uprooting several million people, largely Hindus, who looked for shelter in India.

Other two motivations had been used to explain the significant influx of people to India, but are not credible. The first is the famine that hit East Pakistan after the beginning of the civil war. From the analysis of birth and death rates made by Curlin, Chen and Hussain in their study, it has been indeed demonstrated that the food

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125Partha N. Mukherji, "The Great Migration of 1971: I: Exodus," *Economic and Political Weekly* 9, no. 9 (March 2, 1974): 369.

126Bose, "Anatomy of Violence," 4465; A direct indication that the "persecution of Hindus appears to have ceased" due to the "drastic decrease in the number of Hindus available to persecute", and that "the main instance of de-Hinduisation was expulsion of Hindus" is present in: "Telegram from the American Embassy in Islamabad to the Department of State, dated 2nd August 1971", in Khan, *The American Papers*, 624–631. Evidence of the interests for the de-Hinduisation of the East Pakistan society are present also over several different newspapers that documented the operations of replacement of Bengali script by Urdu ones (Times of India, 9 July 1971). Similar evidence also reported on different Pakistani newspapers cited in: Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 76.

127Archer K. Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat* (Dhaka: University Press, 2002), 216–217. From the American declassified documents it became evident that the alarming accounts sent by Blood to Washington were not considered with the right attention, and largely ignored by the Nixon administration that at that time preferred to believe the American Embassy in West Pakistan that was reporting that the situation was under control. On this see for example: Gary R Hess, "Grand Strategy and Regional Conflict: Nixon, Kissinger, and Crisis in South Asia," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 5 (2007): 961. He reports the fact that Blood's messages was commented as "miserable [... and] inexcusable."

scarcity doubled the number of the malnourished children in 1971 in East Pakistan, and caused the consumption of food grains to dramatically fall<sup>128</sup>. Food scarcity was not only due to the crop waste generated by the political instability and violence, but also to the collapse of the Pakistani authorities' control of river communication over which food and imports were generally distributed inside the Pakistan Eastern wing<sup>129</sup>. However, the famine cannot explain why the major component of the refugee flux from mid-April onwards was Hindu. It is important to note that the majority of Hindus who escaped to India were not coming from the lower Pakistani classes (which could have explained their escape); but were rather small/middle class landowners, traders, or members of the middle urban class<sup>130</sup>. The third thesis to explain the refugee influx in India was the one formulated by the same Pakistani military regime in 1971: trying to hide its responsibilities, it accused India of deliberately encouraging the Hindu outflow in order to destabilise the Pakistani internal situation<sup>131</sup>. However, this hypothesis completely lacks credibility for at least two reasons. First, All-India radio and newspapers not only described the Pakistani violence, but also reported, often exaggerating, the victories of the pro-Awami League forces<sup>132</sup>. Second, although India gave support to the Bengali forces, it was for sure contrary to the influx of such a consistent number of Hindu refugees, which was a potential destabiliser for its already unstable territories of the North-East, as this will be shown later.

The official position of the Indian government concerning the refugee issue remained unclear until 4<sup>th</sup> May when Indira Gandhi, without previously consulting any political apparatus of her government finally declared in an interview to *India News* that the Indian government had no intention to rehabilitate refugees on a permanent basis. The official government position was then translated into laws for

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128George T. Curlin, Lincoln C. Chen, and Sayed Babur Hussain, "Demographic Crisis: The Impact of the Bangladesh Civil War (1971) on Births and Deaths in a Rural Area of Bangladesh," *Population Studies* 30, no. 1 (March 1976): 88.

129Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 237–272.

130Mukherji, "The Great Migration of 1971," 366.

131Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 198.

132"Beyond Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6, no. 15 (April 10, 1971): 762.

regulating the organization of the refugee camps constructed along the border with East Pakistan. According to the text of the laws, refugees had to register to the Indian authorities as foreigners in order to receive a card. Such card entailed them to the right to receive food rations; obligation not to leave the camp where they would be assigned, with the risk of being otherwise arrested; and the prohibition to work in order to avoid their integration inside the Indian social context and the emergence of tensions with the local Indian people<sup>133</sup>. This was innovative since until that moment refugees had always been considered by the host country as non-returning population that needed to be rehabilitated and resettled, as for example during the partition in 1947 in the Indian subcontinent. On 24<sup>th</sup> May in a speech to the Indian Parliament the Indian Prime Minister further clarified the government position arguing that: “They are not refugees in the sense we have understood this word since the partition. They are victims of war who have sought refuge from the military terrors across our frontier”<sup>134</sup>. By the end of May therefore 330 temporary camps were established to care for nearly 4 million refugees<sup>135</sup>. With the only exception of some small programs of re-settling people from the crowded refugee camps along the border to some more internal areas in mid-June<sup>136</sup>, these refugees were kept in camps close to the borders, theoretically ready to go back to their homes as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, the influx of the refugees soon became a serious concern for New Delhi at different levels: at the economic level because of maintenance costs; at the humanitarian level since several illnesses began to spread; and at the social and political level since the concentration of so many people in specific areas created problems with the local population. The growing number of refugees during the spring resulted in a significant financial burden for New Delhi since the official statistics of the Indian Government were of 18,5 million Rupees as the daily

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133Government of India, “Administrative Regulations for Transit Relief Camps for Refugees from East Bengal” (Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, Branch Secreteriat, Calcutta, 1971).

134Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 673.

135Ibid.

136These small programs were started and carried out with the support of the US and Soviet forces, but after a short period were ended by the Indian government due to operational costs, and not to complicate the process of a future return of the refugees to East Pakistan. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 178.

maintenance costs<sup>137</sup>: a sum of money significant for a country like India that had just reached precarious food self-reliance<sup>138</sup>. The first allocation of resources made in April-May in the national budget was of 600 million Rupees, but this was later increased to 2.000 million in August, when the refugees were about 8,2 million<sup>139</sup>, and of other 1.430 Rupees in December 1971 with supplementary budgets, reaching 5,5% of the total (including planned and not plan expenditures) outlay of the Union budget<sup>140</sup>. In addition, health problems emerged in the camps: the Indian government indicated that by 4<sup>th</sup> June there had been approximately 9.500 cases of cholera, with 1.250 deaths<sup>141</sup>. This estimate then increased during the summer resulting in 46.000 reported cases by the end of September, and the number of casualties to 6.000<sup>142</sup>. Moreover, social tensions emerged soon after the settling of the camps since the resources given by the centre to maintain the refugees depressed the prices of the local food grain. In spite of the legislations banning refugees to work, it was also difficult for them to remain inactive for a long time. Therefore, paid less than the usual minimum wage of an agricultural labour, they altered the economic and social context of those areas where the camps were located, creating an explosive situation<sup>143</sup>. Moreover, the hosting Indian states, such as West Bengal, Tripura<sup>144</sup>, Assam, and Meghalaya, also faced specific problems due to communal tensions that the introduction of such great number of Hindus caused. In fact, during partition the areas involved had been earlier interested by the migration of Hindus from those

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137Mukherji, "The Great Migration of 1971"; Frankel refers to almost US\$3-4 million per day: Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 461.

138Government of India, "Economic Survey 1971/1972" (Ministry of Finance, 1972), Review and Assessment, 87, <http://indiabudget.nic.in/es1971-72/esmain.htm>.

139Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 262.

140The import of food grain had been reduced largely by 1971: in 1970-1971 the total amount of food imports was only 2.2% of the net availability of food grains in India. Government of India, "Economic Survey 1971/1972," Major Economic Indicators, 9; Review and Assessment, 100.

141Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 153.

142New York Times, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1971.

143Partha N. Mukherji, "The Great Migration of 1971: II: Reception," *Economic and Political Weekly* 9, no. 10 (March 9, 1974): 407.

144By the end of May in the state of Tripura 900.000 people had found refuge in the camps, over an indigenous population of only 1,5 million. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 153.

territories that had become part of Pakistan<sup>145</sup>, which had already created political and communal problems for these states, especially in West Bengal and Assam<sup>146</sup>. In addition, local specific problems emerged: in Tripura the rapid influx of two million refugees threatened the fragile internal stability of the state since it reversed the tribal/non-tribal population ratio<sup>147</sup>; while in West Bengal, the radical communists of the CPM and of the Naxalites movement began to establish direct links with the extremist groups of the East Pakistani forces, such as the communists, and those of the National Awami Party (NAP), rivals of the AL and considered pro-Beijing by India<sup>148</sup>.

As a consequence, in the second part of May the Indian government felt the necessity to assume a firm position and to answer to the critics raised by the press. The latter had indeed begun expect a more aggressive approach from the government, and the official recognition of the Bangladesh government in exile in Calcutta<sup>149</sup>. Therefore, following a two day visit of the Prime Minister to the refugee camps in mid-May, which contributed to the growing awareness of the political leadership about the delicate situation, the Prime Minister informed the Parliament, until that moment kept uninformed, as well as the Cabinet<sup>150</sup>, of the situation and of the measures chosen by the executive. Indira Gandhi depicted the refugee influx from Pakistan as a “threat to India's security”, and as a form of “indirect aggression”

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145It has been reported that 344.000 Hindus came to India during 1947, and that 180.000 continued to flow annually from 1948 to 1955 creating several problems in the Indian state along the borders with East Pakistan. Public political discussion emerged over the question of the rehabilitation of East Pakistan refugees and several states decided to declare the issue of federal power competence in order to receive the necessary aid to face the burden. However, the larger part of the state-sponsored initiative failed and the rehabilitation process was almost left to self-initiative of the single groups of refugees. Gyanesh Kudaisya, “Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and Their Rehabilitation in India, 1947–79,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 17, no. 1 (1997): 28–39.

146Economic and Political Weekly, 12th June 1971; and *ibid.*, 31.

147Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 181.

148Economic and Political Weekly, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1971.

149See for example the incitements raised by Romesh Tapar (Economic and Political Weekly, 16<sup>th</sup> April, 813, and Economic and Political Weekly, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1971, 946), and Ashok Sanjay Guha (Economic and Political Weekly, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1971, 983-85) asking the intervention of India in favour of the Bengali movement.

150Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 117.

against India that had to be solved as soon as possible<sup>151</sup>. At the Lok Sabha she argued about the necessity of taking action to solve the crisis and allow the return of refugees, reiterating their “temporary” status. Interestingly, the question of the religious affiliation of the refugees was downplayed, since Mrs. Gandhi affirmed that “They belong to every religious persuasion – Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian”, therefore without underlining that the largest percentage of them was Hindu<sup>152</sup>. This is explained by the fact that New Delhi was not interested in transforming the political crisis of East Pakistan into a communal problem between India and Pakistan, for at least two reasons: first, it would have probably raised political and social turmoil in the North-East Indian states already sensitive to these issues; second, it would have transformed the conflict in the eyes of the international community that could have assimilated it to the events of Partition, and therefore diminishing the political responsibilities of Pakistan's government. It should also be noted that in her discourse at the Lok Sabha the Indian Prime Minister did not make any references to India’s intention to respect those international norms that protected the state from external interference in its internal affairs, as she on the contrary did in late March<sup>153</sup>. Even more clearly at the Rajya Sabha Mrs. Gandhi affirmed that: “what was claimed to be an internal problem of Pakistan has also become an internal problem of India” regarding the refugee problem<sup>154</sup>.

Despite this more aggressive position and the pressure exercised by the Parliamentary members, New Delhi did not officially recognise the exile of the government of Bangladesh. The official explanation provided was that since the situation was still fluid, there was no need to alter the official Indian position of neutrality that could have just complicated matters at the international level<sup>155</sup>. However, New Delhi reinforced its previous political strategy in order to try influencing the development of the crisis. Therefore, at first larger support was given to the Bengali forces in order to increase their political cohesion and organization,

151The Washington Street Journal, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1971.

152Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 673.

153Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 258.

154Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 673–674.

155Ibid., 679–681.

and their military capabilities; and second, an increased effort was made to sensitise world opinion and great powers over the growing challenge the refugees was posing to India's security, and for increasing the pressure over Pakistan to solve the East Pakistani crisis politically.

The Indian government increased its efforts in sustaining the Bengali forces both at the political level, reinforcing its control over the government of Bangladesh in exile in Calcutta, and over the *Mukti Bahini* in order to control their factionalism and support the AL, and at the military level, training the guerrilla forces. Even if the first initiative gave partial results, the second was entirely successful, as now detailed. Political Bengali forces were indeed quite heterogeneous at the political level: internal divisions had emerged since the AL had tried to stand as the political force able to represent all the Bengali government members in the exile of Bangladesh<sup>156</sup>. The AL justified its pretensions making reference to the electoral results obtained in the elections of 1970. However, several others forces, like the NAP and the communists, contested its position from the beginning<sup>157</sup>. Moreover, divisions emerged even within the same AL party, as for example over the role of Tajuddin Ahmed, who had assumed the office of Prime Minister in the government of Bangladesh in exile, as the leader of the Awami League<sup>158</sup>. Personal rivalries and ideological differences also became shaded into disagreement over the strategies the liberation movement should follow, like for example over the issue of what to do in case of Mujib's death<sup>159</sup>. In order to face this problem the Indian authorities established a separate secretariat branch of the Ministry of External Affairs in Calcutta with the aim of reinforcing relations and contacts with the government of

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156A. Mukhopadhyay, "Mukti Foj's Two Fronts," *Economic and Political Weekly* (1971): 855–856.

157Economic and Political Weekly, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1971, p. 761.

158Lawrence Lifschultz and Kai Bird, *Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Zed Press, 1979), 21–30; It is interesting to note that the American Consulate in Dacca on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1971 underlined, in a letter to the Department of State, the fact that the AL was "a vast umbrella sheltering many disparate elements" and that "one theme only, binds them together - [...] anti-West Pakistan feeling", reflecting on the scarce possibilities for that party to remain "a cohesive political force". See "Letter from American Consulate in Dacca to Department of State, dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 1971", in Khan, *The American Papers*, 457.

159Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 57.



Bangladesh in exile<sup>160</sup>. Moreover, India proposed to the government of Bangladesh in exile to create a committee, called *War Council*, which also included the other political forces of the East Pakistan political scene, like the NAP, and the communists. The effort however was not positive since the other groups were reticent to come under the umbrella of the Bangladesh government in exile that was (in their eyes) too linked to the Indian government, and for the same fear of the AL to lose its position of dominance inside the Bengali forces<sup>161</sup>.

A similar attempt was also carried out in reference to the *Mukti Bahini* forces, where political divisions also emerged<sup>162</sup>, complicating other specific internal problems of those groups. These were caused by several factors: first, the recruited Bengali came from different political and social backgrounds since some were just students, political activists, and peasants lacking any military preparation, while others were soldiers coming from the East Bengal Regiment, the Pakistani Army, or the police corps; second, the direct assumption of responsibility by the Indian military forces over the training camps raised a lot of resentment among the trainees, who were upset about getting their salary and arms from the Indian Army officers (since this gave them the feeling of being on the pay roll of India), and among some Bengali ex-Pakistani army officers, who were irritated by the control over their behaviour by the government of Bangladesh in Calcutta through the Indian Army<sup>163</sup>; and third, in West Bengal the presence of external groups of guerrillas to those organised in the *Mukti Bahini*, which were those guerrilla groups officially recognised by the government of Bangladesh and controlled by the Indian Army, further complicated the already precarious political situation, since those close to communist positions allegedly started to organize themselves together with the

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160Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 59.

161“RAW note on the situation of the Bangladesh Army dated 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1971”, and “Letter from Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, dated 5<sup>th</sup> May 1971”, in Haksar papers, III inst, f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

162“RAW report over the situation in Bangladesh dated 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst. f. n. 227, in NMML Archives, New Delhi.

163“RAW record dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

Indian revolutionaries<sup>164</sup>. Therefore, specific draconian measures were thus adopted by New Delhi in West Bengal to face and trying to exploit the situation to definitively solve the problem of the Naxalites<sup>165</sup>. In addition, to control this generally explosive situation, in May New Delhi decided to sustain the enlargement of the recruitment of the *Mukti Bahini* to people affiliated to the NAP and to the less radical communists. Again, the aim was to include them in a coordinated action, avoiding the radicalisation of those groups. However, these operations largely failed for reasons similar to those mentioned for the *War Council* creation initiative<sup>166</sup>.

Despite all these problems, and thanks to the decision made by New Delhi to also support the *Mukthi Bahini* militarily and assisting them with the Indian Army and with the RAW, by the end of May a command structure was formed under the guidance of Col. A. G. Osmani, a retired Pakistani army officer loyal to Mujib. Bengali forces were therefore organised in units, which were incorporated into three brigades, and the East Pakistan territory was divided into several sectors, each one

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<sup>164</sup>Economic and Political Weekly, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1971, 1218-9; and Economic and Political Weekly, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1971, 1319.

<sup>165</sup>New Delhi on 19<sup>th</sup> June decided to impose once again the President's Rule to West Bengal. Therefore, using the excuse to avoid a destabilization of the area, the centre assumed free hands again to squeeze the Naxalites and the CPM activities once and for all (Economic and Political Weekly, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1971, p. 2045). The control of the political situation of West Bengal therefore passed to Sidhartha Shankar Ray, Secretary of State for West Bengal, and to Governor A. L. Dias, who directly re-called the Army to assist the civilian authorities. A. M., "Calcutta Diary," *Economic and Political Weekly* 8, no. 20 (May 19, 1973): 889. The state then entered a phase of terrible and violent political repression, and again large-scale arrests were carried out as it happened during the period of the President's Rule that preceded the elections of March 1971, when 3.000 people were arrested because suspected of being Naxalites (The Statesman, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1971). The lower estimates of the number of people killed and arrested for political crimes, provided by a senior civil servant, is that 15.000-17.000 were detained in 1971, of whom around 2.000 were killed. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 458. The repression led to a large-scale use of terror by the state (Economic and Political Weekly, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1971, 2267-2268) that resulted by the end of the year in an official spokesman reporting that West Bengal had become "one of the most peaceful states in India" (The Statesman, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1971).

<sup>166</sup>"RAW report dated 5<sup>th</sup> July", in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi. However, these attempts brought some results in September when the hopes for a peaceful resolution had almost completely evaporated. Thus external groups were finally integrated inside the Mukti Bahini forces, and a "Five Party Consultative Committee", including the AL, the NAP, the Communists, and other smaller forces, was finally set up to coordinate actions of the Mukti Bahini on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1971. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 78. This will be better explained later in this chapter.

under the control of a Bengali officer<sup>167</sup>. Moreover, it has been calculated that by the end of June, 30.000 *Mukti Bahini* recruits had been trained, and that by September 59 camps had been organised by the Indian Army along the borders<sup>168</sup>. The guerilla activities during June-August exploited the monsoon period, and therefore the scarce mobility of the conventional Pakistani forces. Through small-scale raids over the border and actions of sabotage against Pakistani strategic facilities such as bridges, communication systems, power stations, and ships<sup>169</sup>, the *Mukti Bahini* created serious disruptions<sup>170</sup>. They caused the collapse of the communication system and the East Pakistani economy to almost come to a halt<sup>171</sup>. Therefore, in spite of the persistence of those organizational problems cited before, by the end of June the *Mukti Bahini* were instead organised, and since that moment onwards they had begun to operate with coordination under the Indian Army supervision.

The second strategy followed by the Indian government from mid-May was to increase its efforts to lead the international community in putting pressure on Islamabad to solve the East Pakistan's political situation. In the speech of 24<sup>th</sup> May Indira Gandhi argued that “there cannot be any military solution to the problem of Bangladesh. A political solution must be brought about by those who have the power to do so. World opinion is a great force. [...] The great powers have a special responsibility”<sup>172</sup>. World opinion until that moment had indeed been sympathetic towards the Indian position<sup>173</sup>, though global players like Great Britain and the

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167“Note for the Chief in Command about the Bangladesh forces”, in P. N. Haksar files, III inst., f. n. 227, in NMML Archives, New Delhi.

168Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 184–185.

169Attacks against Pakistani ships were launched during August. See: Indian Express, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1971; and Times of India, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1971.

170Later these destructions were major obstacles for the same Indian forces that invaded East Pakistan. This strategic error can be explained with the scarce strategic ability of New Delhi to plan its actions. See: Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 304. Otherwise it soul be evidence of the fact that until the second half of July there was no specific plan to invade East Pakistan in New Delhi.

171Banerjee, “Next Phase of the War,” 818–819.

172Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 674.

173British and American newspapers criticise the behaviours of their governments that did not condemn Pakistan for the repression. See for example: The Guardian, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1971; and The New York Times, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1971, and 18<sup>th</sup> April.

United States had remained neutral, or had continued to support Pakistan<sup>174</sup>. Therefore, the New Delhi man began to call for international aid assistance to face the refugee burden<sup>175</sup>. These efforts were reinforced by the tour in the West capitals made by the Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh, together with Japrakash Narayan. This brought positive results, bringing the total international aid assistance to \$160 million by 30<sup>th</sup> June<sup>176</sup>. Moreover, several international voluntary humanitarian organizations, together with numerous national ones, gave their direct collaboration to the Indian Army in the management of the refugee camps. Relief assistance was also provided by several UN agencies head quartered in New Delhi, such as the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Food Programme (WFP). In addition, the increasing pressure of great powers on Pakistan to solve the East Pakistan crisis, India had some initial success in influencing the position of the global powers to support the intervention of the UN in East Pakistan. In May both London and Washington answered the pressure exercised by India, by the press, and by the opposition, beginning to distinguish between the relief help, and the *developmental aid* they were providing to Pakistan. They linked the second to the Pakistani acceptance allowing the UN to intervene upon its territory<sup>177</sup>. This was an important fact since Pakistan was facing a difficult situation at the economic level, urgently needing significant international assistance. In fact, during July 1970 till February 1971 its foreign

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174Britain on the 27th and the 29th of March had assumed, with the statement of its Prime Minister and its foreign minister, a neutral position on the East Pakistan's crisis; and had further resisted a growing internal public and parliamentary pressure to assume a more active role to mediate the crisis within, for example, the Commonwealth. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 38. In the United Kingdom opposition members of the Parliament criticised the "soft" British stance towards the issue and intervened in the debate about the necessity to stop all developmental aid to Pakistan. On this issue see, for example, the intervention made by Mr. Russel on the 31st of March, by Lord Fenner Brockwaz on the 4th of April and the articles published by Mr. Reginald Prentice and, members of the British Parliamentary delegation which visited Pakistan and India (Sunday Times, 11th July 1971). Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 520, 522, 564–565. The case of the United States will be better analysed in the next paragraph.

175Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 675.

176Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 263.

177Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 49 Ambassador Keating confirmed this in a conversation with Foreign Minister Swaran Singh on 26th May 1971. See: "Record of the conversation made by Rukmini Menon, Joint Secretary at American Division of MAE, in MAE, AMS, WII/104/17/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

exchange reserves critically diminished due to the increased imports of military material and food, and the diminished export earnings. Moreover, in 1971 Islamabad was unable to repay its foreign debt to the World Bank Consortium, due by the end of June, and needed a rescheduling of the deadline for the re-payment even more<sup>178</sup>. This financial weakness led Pakistan to be extremely careful not to alienate the support of the international community. Although the question of the UN intervention developed later, as it will be detailed in the next paragraph, in a potentially dangerous affair for India, it is interesting just to note that in June the Indian diplomacy obtained another important result. Peter Gargill, a team leader for the World Bank, in his report on the East Pakistan's situation suggested a suspension of the *developmental aid*<sup>179</sup>. This directly influenced the activities of the Pakistan Aid Consortium that did not find an agreement over the future of its multilateral developmental aid, and in turn the same bilateral assistance programmes of all the Western countries. On 23<sup>th</sup> June Great Britain announced that its *developmental* programme in Pakistan was suspended until the resolution of the crisis in East Pakistan<sup>180</sup>; during the first days of July the same position was taken by the Swedish, Dutch and West German governments and on 15<sup>th</sup> July also by the American Congress.

In spite of these accomplishments, three factors during the summer of 1971 further complicated the Indian position and the solution of the East Pakistan crisis: first, the continuation of the flux of refugees; second, the possibility of the UN intervention in East Pakistan; and third, the evolution of the Sino-American normalisation process.

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178Ibid., 48.

179Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 518.

180Ibid., 509.

#### ***4. International dynamics and the development of India's position towards the East Pakistan crisis during June and July***

As a consequence of the continuing influx of refugees, from the end of June India began to consider a war with Pakistan as the only option to bring the AL party back to power in East Pakistan, and to repatriate the refugees. Therefore, India faced the increasingly worrying possibility of the UN intervention in East Pakistan. As a result, India felt the need to assure the support of the Soviet Union, and to therefore consider the beginning of the negotiation of the treaty Moscow had been proposing since 1969. In mid-July the discovery of a Sino-American-Pakistani axe confirmed the accuracy of such a decision. This paragraph will first consider India's new approach towards the East Pakistan's crisis and to the UN intervention issue, and then the discovery of a potentially hostile alignment between Washington, Beijing and Islamabad.

##### ***4.1 India's new approach and its isolation over the UN intervention issue***

After mid-May Pakistan formulated a new conciliatory domestic strategy for East Pakistan. Islamabad tried to regain international credibility, showing the formal intentions of the Pakistani military junta to repatriate the Bengali refugees. In this context, on 24<sup>th</sup> May Yhaya Khan ordered the construction of camps for resettling returning refugees, and announced the first restoration plan for a civilian government in East Pakistan<sup>181</sup>. To sustain his declaration, on 28<sup>th</sup> June the Pakistan president announced the appointment of a Bengali as his special assistant, in the form of Dr. A. M. Malik; he further promised the establishment of a new government based on the

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<sup>181</sup>Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 51.

November 1970 election results, to which only elected politicians who were considered anti-state would not be allowed to participate. Yahya Khan left this statement vague until August, though it seemed clear that the Pakistani president was probably referring to Mujib Rahman and the main AL leaders forming the government of Bangladesh in exile in Calcutta. These conciliatory gestures of Islamabad came along with the change of position over the UN involvement, passing from a contrary to a favourable one. As a matter of fact, since by mid May Pakistan had regained major control over East Pakistan, the UN presence could have just improved its international credibility, and legitimise its programme of creating a new civilian government in East Pakistan. Moreover, the necessity to keep the Western economic support alive led it to answer the pressure of London and Washington positively. Therefore, already in May the Pakistani government officially announced its availability to host the UN mission, through the words pronounced by Yahya Khan's economic advisers, M. M. Ahmed, during his visit in the United States<sup>182</sup>. This official and conciliatory new approach of Islamabad, however, did not convince the Bengali refugees who did not go back to East Pakistan. On the contrary, the refugee influx to India continued consistently during both June and July, even if it fortunately began to decrease in size<sup>183</sup>, as a consequence of the repeated violence in East Pakistan daily life. In this regard, it has been reported that since mid-July a paramilitary force, called the *Razikars*<sup>184</sup>, began to control rural areas of East Pakistan, arresting suspected people, and recurring to violence<sup>185</sup>.

These events convinced New Delhi that probably only through a war would it have been possible to bring the AL back to government in East Pakistan, and therefore to allow the repatriation of the Bengali refugees. From this point of view, therefore, the UN intervention would have just been an obstacle. Up until mid-May

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182Ibid., 50; and “Telegram from American Embassy in Pakistan to American Consulates in Pakistan”, in: Khan, *The American Papers*, 587–589.

183Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 446.

184These forces were largely composed of non-Bengali that continued the de-Hinduisation campaign begun by the Pakistani Armed forces in March, such as the Bihari or those coming from other Indian states. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 62.

185“Memorandum for the Secretary by the Agency for International Development, dated 5th November 1971”, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 703–705.

the UN intervention could have been useful to impede the Pakistani Army to repress the Bengali population, and to up-root Hindus, from June onwards the UN presence in East Pakistan only would have been an impediment for India. It would have obstructed Indian Army's training of the *Mukhti Bahini*, and New Delhi to declare a war with Pakistan<sup>186</sup>. Moreover, India did not want the UN to pry into West Bengal, where repressive operations were carried by the Indian Army and police against the Naxalites and the CPM.

As a consequence, from mid-June New Delhi therefore reformulated its position: as an example, on 17<sup>th</sup> June Foreign Minister Swaran Singh who was visiting the United States asked for a *political settlement* of the East Pakistan crisis; criticising the international community appearing at that time as *only* being interested in an economic and social solution of the emergency<sup>187</sup>. The situation got even worse when during the last days of June both the Indian Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, and the Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, released aggressive statements, as they had never done before, that openly considered resorting to an open war as the only solution to the crisis<sup>188</sup>. These statements came together with the reportedly regular movement of Indian Army units along the border<sup>189</sup>, and with the decision to comply with the Soviet pressures to reconsider the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation*, as will be further analysed in the following chapter. Moreover, the Indian press published several articles presenting the option of a war as the “cheapest” solution for solving the refugee issue, thus urging a direct military intervention from India<sup>190</sup>. The perception of the American president advisor, Henry Kissinger, who visited India at the beginning of July, confirmed the fact that India by that time had started considering war as the only favourable solution to the East Pakistan crisis<sup>191</sup>.

India's position concerning the UN involvement was restated again at the

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186Evidence that reinforces this thesis is the fact that India also required a withdrawal of all the foreigners working inside the refugees camps by the end of June: Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 190.

187Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 687–690.

188Ibid., 688.

189National Herald, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1971; and The Hindu, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

190Economic and Political Weekly, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> July 1971; and 14<sup>th</sup> August 1971.

191Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 860.



Economic and Social (ECOSOC) meeting held in July, where New Delhi officially voted against the Pakistani proposal favourable to the UN intervention. However, foreign countries supported it, leaving India alone. As a confirmation to that: on 17<sup>th</sup> July the UN special representative, I. T. Kittani, submitted a report about East Pakistan relief needs where he recommended that the UN immediately provide a sum of \$28 million for humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance<sup>192</sup>. Furthermore, on 19<sup>th</sup> July the Secretary of the UN, U. Thant, sent a memorandum to both Indian and Pakistani governments asking that the representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) be stationed along the common border<sup>193</sup>. Such action, not formally being a UN “humanitarian peace-keeping” action, did not require the Security Council support and could have been launched if the two states agreed. Internationally it was immediately welcomed not only by Pakistan, but also by Great Britain and the United States, which then supported this cause until the late fall of 1971. In addition, the proposal was pushed even further on 20<sup>th</sup> July by U. Thant who unusually wrote a memorandum to the President and members of the Security Council, describing that: “border clashes, clandestine raids, and acts of sabotage appear to be becoming more frequent, and this is all the more serious since the refugees must cross this disturbed border if repatriation is to become a reality”. With these words he stood for the stationing along the border of the UNHCR representatives.

India's reaction to these international developments came indirectly on 27<sup>th</sup> July through the speech released by Mr. Hossain Ali, the head of the Bangladesh mission in Calcutta. On that occasion he announced that, although the UN were “honoured people”, the *Mukti Bahini* would have not welcomed them and that their safety would not have been guaranteed<sup>194</sup>. A few days later India's official reaction came through the declaration of the Foreign Minister Swaran Singh who on 2<sup>nd</sup> August affirmed that: “the mere posting of observers will only create a façade of action as a cover for the continuation of the present policies of the military rulers of Pakistan”,

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192 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 66.

193 Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 657–658.

194 *The Statesman*, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1971.

and restated the “total opposition” of India to the presence of UN in East Pakistan<sup>195</sup>. Moreover, similar instructions were sent by the Foreign Minister on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1971 and by P. N. Haksar on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1971 to the Indian Embassy in Washington<sup>196</sup>.

The eventuality of having to fight a war, together with the prospect of the great power pressure over India’s acceptance of international observers, transformed the situation into an extremely risky one for India. On the one hand, New Delhi had the option of accepting the representatives, give up its support to the Bengali movements, and hope for the UN and the world opinion to be able to press Yahya Khan’s regime to assure a real transfer of power to the East Pakistani civilians. This could have caused, however, a problem at the domestic level where public opinion was instead becoming largely favourable to supporting Bengali forces, and was agitated by the right parties like the Jan Sangh<sup>197</sup>. On the other hand, New Delhi could have decided to keep the position since the beginning of the East Pakistan crisis: thus, continuing to sustain the refugees, and the Bengali liberation movement, and considering the possibility to solve the situation with a military conflict. However, in order to be carried out, this second option would have required India finding support of its point of view at the international level, and in the Security Council to avoid a UN intervention. Pressed also by the news of the secret trip made by Kissinger to Beijing through Pakistani mediation, as the next paragraph will underline, India definitively carried out the second option.

#### ***4.2 The American and Chinese stances on the East Pakistan crisis and the effects of the normalisation of their relations with India***

India was persistently dissatisfied with the international response to the crisis of East

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195Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 662.

196See: MEA, AMS, WII/104/17/71, National Archives, New Delhi; and P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 170, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

197David H. Bayley, “India: War and Political Assertion,” *Asian Survey* 12, no. 2 (February 1972): 92.

Pakistan, not only with regards to the UN, but also to the United States. In fact, from March 1971 Washington had assumed a neutral (and quite silent) position. Although on 14<sup>th</sup> April the Congress officially suspended all of the military sales that had been granted by the *one time exception* in 1970, New Delhi was irritated by the fact that Washington released its concerns just over the humanitarian issue, without raising any specific criticism to Islamabad<sup>198</sup>. Therefore, on 13<sup>th</sup> May Indira Gandhi sent a letter to President Richard Nixon urging Washington to press Pakistan to condemn the actions of Islamabad in East Pakistan, and to use its influence over Yahya Khan to assure the personal security of Mujib<sup>199</sup>. The American answer came on 27<sup>th</sup> May when Washington urged “restraint” to India and Pakistan, profoundly irritating New Delhi. Foreign Minister Swaran Singh affirmed that the equation of responsibilities, implicit in the American declaration, had to be considered as another form of assistance to Yahya Khan's regime<sup>200</sup>. Criticism did not only come from New Delhi, but also, as already mentioned, from the same American public opinion, and the world press. Also opposition members in the American Senate and House of Representatives during the whole spring of 1971 raised their voice against the government position<sup>201</sup>. The consequent American pressure on Pakistan for the acceptance of the UN relief activities should not be considered as a withdrawal of American support of the military regime of Pakistan. Indeed, not only was Pakistan ready by that time to accept the UN presence in its territory, but the White House in parallel had sent some warm messages to the government of Pakistan: on 28<sup>th</sup> May even President Richard Nixon wrote to Yahya encouraging him in his attempt to establish *political accommodation* in East Pakistan, and at the beginning of June he recalled the United State Consul-general in Dacca, Archibald Blood, who had been

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198Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 42.

199Nixon Presidential Material Staff, NSC files, Indo-Pak war, Pakistan chronology, Dr. Kissinger to India chronology 1971, 1 of 2, Box 578, Kalyani Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond* (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2010), 216.

200The Patriot, 29 June 1971.

201See, for example, the statements pronounced by Senator E. M. Kennedy, Senator Harris, Senator W. F. Mondale, Senator C. E. Gallagher, and Senator Church had made in the American Senate since April to June 1971, in Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 520–525, 535–536, 538–545, and 547–556.

highly critical with respect to the neutral position assumed by its country and to the behaviour of the Pakistani authorities<sup>202</sup>.

The estranged relations between Washington and New Delhi were further eroded on 22<sup>th</sup> June by the news published in the *New York Times* that some shipments of American military supplies had been dispatched from the United States<sup>203</sup>. This triggered strong reactions: in Washington, members of the opposition parties raised their vibrant criticism in the Senate, calling for the imposition of a total embargo to Pakistan. Some parts of the American press reacted similarly<sup>204</sup>; while in India on 24<sup>th</sup> June the Political Affairs Committee met to evaluate the situation, and on the same day the Indian Foreign Minister stated in the Parliament that "...any accretion of military strength of Pakistan [...] would not only amount to a condonation of these atrocities, but could be constructed as an encouragement to their continuation. [...] The United States Government have promised to give urgent consideration to this matter and we are awaiting their response"<sup>205</sup>. The official reaction of Washington was that military shipments to Pakistan would only be constituted with "non-lethal arms", and were related to sales already concluded before March 1971<sup>206</sup>. Studies

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202Times of India, 7 June 1971; and Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 55.

203Intelligence reports and documents of the Ministry of the External Affairs of India, now declassified, calculated that during the spring 1971 three ships left the United States to carry arms to Pakistan: the steamships Padma (left the United States on 22<sup>nd</sup> June), Sunderbans (left on 8<sup>th</sup> May), and Kaukahla (left in the second week of April and reached Karachi on 16<sup>th</sup> June). All of them reportedly were carrying parts and electronic accessories for tanks, artillery, and aircraft. On this, see: "Letter sent by the American Embassy in India to the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, dated 15<sup>th</sup> July", "Letter sent by S. K. Lambah, AMS sections of MEA, to Parliament sections, dated 31<sup>st</sup> July", and "Letter sent by G. C. Saxena, Department Director of RAW, to the Cabinet Secretariat, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1971", in MEA, AMS, WII/109/13/71-VII, and WII/109/1/73-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

204See for example the speeches made by Senator E. M. Kennedy and Senator W. Saxbe on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, and those made by Senator C. E. Gallagher, Senator F. Church and by the same Saxbe on the first days of July. Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 556–559, 562–564, and 567–568; About the press reaction see the critics moved by the Washington Daily News (30<sup>th</sup> June 1971), the ABC Evening (13<sup>th</sup> July 1971), and the Evening Star (19<sup>th</sup> July 1971). See also the article of the former American ambassador to India where he contested the American approach to India: Chester Bowles, "America and Russia in India," *Foreign Affairs* 49, no. 4 (1971): 636.

205Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 696.

206Later Kissinger, in his official visit to India on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, tried to excuse the United States behaviour talking of a "bureaucratic muddle" that led Washington to release contrasting statements over the issue. Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), 293–295.

published in 1972 calculated that the value of the military equipment provided by the United States to Pakistan from March 1971 to September 1971 was worth \$3,8 million, under licenses conceded before 25<sup>th</sup> March<sup>207</sup>. However, the Indian government in the following days was not impressed by the statements made by some American members of the opposition, such as Senators Edward Kennedy and Frank Church, who reported that United States sales of military equipment to Pakistan in the previous five years came to \$30 million<sup>208</sup>. The fact that this sum was much higher than the one (\$10-15 million) previously declared by the State Department to the Indian Foreign Minister during his visit to the United States in June, triggered further anger in New Delhi that felt humiliated<sup>209</sup>.

In order to clarify the misunderstandings and to discuss America's position over the East Pakistan issue, during the first weeks of July a few meetings were arranged between Foreign Minister Swaran Singh, and American Secretary of State, William Rogers. On these occasions, Rogers announced that Washington had no intention of imposing a complete economic embargo on Pakistan, justifying such decision by commenting that it would have only brought as a result the rapprochement of Islamabad to Beijing, diminishing the possibility of a political settlement of the crisis along the lines traced by president Yahya Khan, which were fully supported by the United States<sup>210</sup>. Moreover, during the visit made by Nixon's advisor in India on 6<sup>th</sup> July, the message conveyed to New Delhi was that India should not expect any help from the United States in the event of a Chinese intervention in an Indo-Pakistani conflict over East Pakistan<sup>211</sup>. Lastly, the American support of the Yahya plans for East Pakistan was again confirmed on 14<sup>th</sup> July, when Nixon's administration

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207Michael Walter, "The U. S. Naval Demonstration in the Bay of Bengal During the India-Pakistan War," *World Affairs* 141, no. 4 (1979): 298.

208India followed with great attention all the movements made by the American Senators, as the letters sent by the Indian Embassy in Washington to New Delhi along 1971 demonstrate. See: "Letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July 1971 and 5<sup>th</sup> August 1971", in MAE, AMS, WII/109/13/71-VII, National Archives, New Delhi.

209See for example the two speeches released by the Foreign Minister Swaran Singh in Lok Sabha on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, and those made on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1971. Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 699–710.

210Indian Express, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1971.

211Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, 77. That stance was then re-asserted on 17<sup>th</sup> July during a conversation between Kissinger and the Indian Ambassador L. K. Jha. Kux, *India and the United States*, 295.

declared its intention to finance a fresh list of developmental projects in East Pakistan, and to increase humanitarian relief help, which also included the restoration of the principal communications lines<sup>212</sup>.

To fully comprehend the Nixon administration's favourable attitude towards Islamabad, it is important to appreciate the crucial role Pakistan played in facilitating the normalisation of relations between the United States and China. As already explained in the first chapter, when the East Pakistan crisis exploded in March 1971 the relations between Washington and Beijing had reached a deadlock, although both sides had intentions to elevate the bilateral discussions from the bureaucratic to a higher political level. The first big issue was to decide which topics to cover on the dialogue agenda. As it emerged during the initial contact in Warsaw in 1970 the two governments were still in profound disagreement on several issues, among which the Taiwan question. On this issue for example, Beijing judged the American military intervention in Taiwan as an intrusion in its internal affairs, whereas Washington wanted Beijing to recognise the control of the island belonging to the government of Taiwan<sup>213</sup>. It was in order to close these gaps that both sides had agreed at the end of 1970 to hold bilateral meetings at a higher level. The first months of 1971 were used by both parts to assess their diplomatic options, and to formulate the negotiation-strategies<sup>214</sup>, and to wait for the opportunity to carry on. According to Chen this was especially true for China since its leader Mao needed a triggering event to mobilize the support of his people for establishing the dialogue with the United States. That opportunity suddenly emerged in April 1971 in Japan where the Chinese delegation was participating to the *Thirty-first World Table Tennis Championship* in Nagoya<sup>215</sup>.

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212Times of India, 15th July 1971. Due to the Congress opposition, the Nixon administration could only on that occasion introduce a new food aid program of \$54 million together with \$36 million cash. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 257.

213Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 258.

214Kissinger, *White House Years*, 704–705.

215It was the first time that the Chinese delegation had participated in an international competition after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. In the early Seventies ping pong was a sport extremely popular in China and therefore the decision to send a team to play abroad was regarded in China as a political issue. The Nagoya championship proved to be a great national event in China.

During the championship the Chinese and the American players had several opportunities to meet; during one of those meetings the manager of the American delegation asked the Chinese if it was possible, in light of the ending of all travel restrictions to the United States imposed to China, for American players to go to China to learn from their Chinese counterpart<sup>216</sup>. This was the kind of event that the Chinese political leadership was waiting for. After some hesitation, on 6<sup>th</sup> April Mao decided to seize the opportunity and officially invite the American ping-pong team to visit China. The United States immediately approved the visit that turned out to be a big diplomatic success. At the end of the period of visit, in a ceremony at the Great Hall of the People, the Chinese Prime Minister announced that the visit had: “opened a new chapter in the history of the relations between Chinese and American peoples”<sup>217</sup>. Moreover, a few hours after Chou Enlai pronounced those words, the American administration announced new measures concerning China, including the ending of the trade embargo imposed twenty-two years earlier. After these positive developments, Mao decided to grant permission to Edgar Snow, the American journalist invited to visit China in the previous autumn, to publish the interview the Chinese chairman had left him – in which Mao declared to be willing to meet Nixon in Beijing – and ordered the diffusion of the interview also in China<sup>218</sup>.

In the wave of the ping-pong diplomacy both chancelleries continued to work through the Pakistani channel to organise the agenda and the details of the high level meeting. On 21<sup>st</sup> April Beijing sent Washington another message reiterating the necessity to solve the Taiwan issue, and its availability to receive the American president or someone from his representatives. Nixon received the message on 27<sup>th</sup> April and decided that for domestic reasons the visit should be kept “totally secret until the final arrangement for the presidential visit had been agreed upon”, and that Kissinger was the best person to go to Beijing for the meeting<sup>219</sup>. On 10<sup>th</sup> May Kissinger handed the message to the Pakistani ambassador in the United States with

216The Chinese team were the best of the world: they won four medals out of seven events in Nagoya.

217Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 261.

218Ibid., 262.

219Richard Nixon, *Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 549–550.

the order to deliver to Beijing. The text stated Nixon's availability to make a visit to China and proposed his advisor Kissinger to go on a secret preparatory trip after the 15<sup>th</sup> of June; the goal being to begin working on the official presidential visit agenda. The message was received by Mao on 17<sup>th</sup> May who replied on 29<sup>th</sup> the same month, again through Islamabad's mediation, announcing that the Chinese Prime Minister was ready to receive Kissinger in China<sup>220</sup>. The American president got the message four days later, commenting: "This is the most important communication that has come to an American president since the end of World War II"<sup>221</sup>.

The statement made by Nixon clearly demonstrates the fact that the American political leadership during spring 1971 was fully concentrated on the Sino-American rapprochement. This also helps in understanding that the events related to the East Pakistan conflict were received and considered by Washington as troublesome news: in fact South Asia "was definitively not on its radar"<sup>222</sup>. According to Robert Dallek the highest priority of the Nixon administration was to avert a war between Pakistan as long as "Pakistan served as gateway to China"<sup>223</sup>. This *tilt* towards Pakistan led the Nixon administration to grant its support to the Pakistani president in his attempts to restore peace in East Pakistan, and to identify India and its support to the Bengali liberation movement as the threat for the maintenance of stability in the area<sup>224</sup>. From the analysis that had been carried out on the American Government declassified files<sup>225</sup>, it had emerged that the Nixon administration was aware since the beginning of the humanitarian dimensions of the crisis, since the American Consul General in

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220Kissinger, *White House Years*, 725–727.

221Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 265.

222Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 2.

223Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 337–338; In reality another channel was available for the White House to communicate with China: the Romanian one, as already mentioned in the first chapter. However, already in 1970 that of Pakistan revealed to be the fastest and the Nixon administration opted to continue to use it even after the crisis explosion in March 1971. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 704; this was probably due to both personal inclinations, as already explained in the first chapter, since Nixon had established friendly relations with president Yayha Khan, and to the fact that the Pakistani channel had long term success. Moreover it was probably complex to re-frame the communication through the other channel, and it is possible that the White House did not want to appear to China as an opportunistic country that abandoned its allies (such as Pakistan) in adversities. On this topic see the interview with Winston Lord, a member of the NSC staff who accompanied Kissinger in his trip to Beijing reported in: Lifschultz and Bird, *Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution*, 156.



Dacca, A. K. Blood, sent several cables informing Washington<sup>226</sup>. Moreover, for years the United States was well aware about the political fragility of Pakistan due to the economic and political disparities between the two wings<sup>227</sup>. However, Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, decided that the humanitarian considerations had to be submitted to the American global strategy<sup>228</sup>, and that the United States had to continue to support the Pakistani position vis-à-vis with India concerning the East Pakistan question<sup>229</sup>. It is interesting to note that since 1969 the State Department was approaching the American South Asian policy in a completely different manner, with respect to the White House<sup>230</sup>. On the issue regarding how to react to the East Pakistan crisis the two institutions differed even more in their evaluations; this was because the State Department was largely kept uninformed about the evolutions of the Sino-American rapprochement, and of Nixon's plans for the secret visit of Kissinger to China<sup>231</sup>.

India was aware of the relaxation process on-going between the United States and China, but it did not see it as a direct potential danger that could have some

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224On the 28th of April Kissinger and Nixon agreed on the necessity to “squeeze not Yahya at this time”, but to support politically the military junta in Pakistan to find a solution for East Pakistan. See “Note from Kissinger to Nixon about Washington’s options, in FRUS, Vol XI, No. 36, cited by Geoffrey Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971,” *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005): 1105; As reported by Kissinger, Nixon administration had been indeed informed during the spring of 1971 of the fact that Indira Gandhi had consulted the Army already in late March to evaluate the possibility of a war. See: “Note dated 25th May”, in FRUS, Vol XI, No. 57, in Kissinger, *White House Years*, 857; When the refugee influx became substantial during May also the State Department began considering a war between India and Pakistan possible. See “Memorandum to the President, dated 26th May 1971”, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 592–595.

225The most relevant declassified documents that shed new light on the American policy towards South Asia in 1971 are the following: the file “South Asian Crisis, 1971” in the American State Department; the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969-1976, Volume IX. Among the edited texts there are: about the White House’s documents F. S. Aijazuddin, *The White House & Pakistan: Secret Declassified Documents, 1969-1974/selected and Edited by FS Aijazuddin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Khan, *The American Papers* about the State Department’s documents. These documents confirm the revelations appeared on the American press in December 1971 and the first months of 1972, called “The Anderson Papers”, due to the journalist name, that embarrassed Nixon administration about their unethical choices. Marta R. Nicholas and Philip Oldenburg, *Bangladesh: The Birth of a Nation; a Handbook of Background Information and Documentary Sources* (Madras: M. Seshachalam, 1972); Christopher Van Hollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia,” *Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (April 1980): 339–361.

226Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971,” 1103–1104; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 325–362; Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 212–350.

specific impacts on the East Pakistan crisis. Indeed, New Delhi, as well as many other chancelleries, did not know that Pakistan had played a direct role in the evolution of that process in the past, and that was continuing to do so during 1971. Moreover, the Chinese behaviour since the beginning of the crisis did not provide any evidence that could alarm New Delhi in any way. Indeed, Beijing's formal definition of its position over the East Pakistan question came late, on 13<sup>th</sup> April, and it was cautious, and far less aggressive than during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war.

The Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-Lai, in a letter he wrote to President Yahya Khan declared its support of the Pakistani effort to “uphold the unification of

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227Professor Morgenthau already in an article published in mid-1950s expresses his scepticism about the political future of Pakistan Hans J. Morgenthau, “Military Illusions,” *The New Republic* (March 19, 1956): 15–16. Moreover, the same Nixon administration was aware of the difficulty Pakistan was facing already in 1969: first, a telegram sent by the American Consulate in Dacca on the 9th of June 1969 to the Secretary of State, Washington informed Nixon administration of the pessimism of the UK deputy High Commissioner in Dacca, Roy Fox, about the future of Pakistan which was going to breakup due to the next likely victory of Mujib at the elections, and the successive repression of the authorities, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 274–275; second, political and economic imbalances were well summarized by Kissinger in the secret memorandum he wrote to the president on the 16th of July 1969, before Nixon’s visit to Islamabad, in Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 48. Several other documents of the State of Department of the United States carefully describe the political evolution and expressed their pessimistic opinion about the future of Pakistan (e.g. Khan, *The American Papers*, 293–310, 327–346, and 358–416). Furthermore, Indian declassified documents demonstrate that the United States were informed of the critical situation in Pakistan during April 1970. See for example: “Telegram sent by the Indian Embassy in Washington to C. B. Multhamma, Joint secretary in New Delhi”, with attached the report made by J. N. Ganju, Public Relations International, on the political situation in Pakistan, in MAE, AMS, WII/104/9/70, National Archives, New Delhi. Communications from the Consulate in Dacca were absolutely pessimistic on the topic of Pakistan unity: reportedly Blood already on 2nd March 1971 defines them “to be near zero”. See: “Information memorandum sent to Kissinger from the Executive Secretary of the State Department on the 3rd of March 1971”, in *ibid.*, 497.

228Kissinger, *White House Years*, 854.

229This fact, documented by the declassified American documents, had led many to blame the Nixon administration for moral failure in dealing with the crisis. See for example: Itty Abraham, “South Asian Events of 1971: New Revelations,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 28 (July 9, 2005): 2994–2995; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*; Hess, “Grand Strategy and Regional Conflict”; Robert J. MacMahon, “The Danger of Geopolitical Fantasies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the South Asia Crisis of 1971,” in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, by Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 249–268; Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*.

230On this see, for example: “Memorandum for the President, dated 10th February 1970” commenting that India is “relatively more important to our interest than Pakistan”, or “Memorandum sent by W. P. Rogers to Nixon, dated 18th December 1969”, that does not suggest providing arms to Pakistan through third countries. Documents cited are in: Khan, *The American Papers*, 320–325.

Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards a split”, and reiterated its condemnation of India's “flagrant interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan”<sup>232</sup>. India had already been attacked by Beijing in a *People's Daily*<sup>233</sup> commentary for its “open interference” linked to the hospitality given to the AL politicians and to the government in exile in Calcutta<sup>234</sup>. However, the key passage in the letter from Chou En-lai was a specific phrase that shows the cautious approach of Beijing: “should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese government and people will as always support the Pakistan government and people in their just struggle to safeguard State Sovereignty and national independence”<sup>235</sup>. Although the tone was of warm support towards Pakistan, the exact phrasing of the letter caused growing concern for Pakistan. The formula that Pakistan would have preferred was the one accepted by the Conference of Muslim Foreign Ministers in June at the Jiddah meeting where the twenty two ministers expressed their support for “Pakistan's national unity and territorial integrity”<sup>236</sup>. Differently from the latter, Zhou's phrase indeed seemed to assure support for Pakistan only in the case of a threat of war West Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's pressure, Beijing did not modify that statement. Instead that approach was reiterated by Chou Enlai during his conversation with Kissinger in July: on that occasion indeed the necessity to work for a peaceful resolution of the crisis was affirmed by both parts, whereas the Chinese Prime Minister reiterated his (general) intention to support Pakistan in case of an

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231Kux, *India and the United States*, 293–295; Van Hollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited,” 343–346; and the much more recent analysis made by Dallek the Nixon administration acted independently from the State Department especially regarding foreign policy, concentrating all the powers in the hands of the President, of his aide, Kissinger, and of the National Security Council (NSC): he describes the Nixon administration as an “Imperial Presidency”. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 51. The State Department during the first months of 1971 expressed its suggestions to urge Yhaya to desist from military actions in March 1971. See for example: “Letter sent by the assistant secretary, Sisco, to Kissinger, dated 2nd March 1971”, in: Khan, *The American Papers*, 504–517; and later to recognise the existence of an international problem in East Pakistan, no longer an internal affair of Pakistan. See: “Telegram sent by Keating to Secretary of State in Washington, Rogers, dated 13th of April 1970”, in: *ibid.*, 527–529.

232Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 41.

233The paper is an organ of the Central Committee of Communist Party of China.

234Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 210.

235Pakistan Horizon, 24: 2, 153-154; a copy was transmitted to the Secretary of State by the American Embassy in Pakistan, in: Khan, *The American Papers*, 530–531.

236Times of India, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

Indian aggression threatening its sovereignty<sup>237</sup>.

This cautious attitude came from the fact that China “concluded early on that it had nothing to gain and much to lose by developments in East Pakistan”<sup>238</sup>. Several reasons explained that evaluation. At first, like the United States, for its global interests China did not want to be involved in a dangerous crisis that could evolve at the international level damaging the rapprochement between Beijing and Washington. Secondly, China was disturbed at the ideological level by the Pakistani repression since it was, at least in theory, the supporter of world revolutionary movements, and by the fact that the Bengali secessionist movement was well rooted, and by the presence of pro-Beijing groups in it. At last, Beijing was irritated by the fact that at the regional level the Pakistani repression could have provided justifications to India for intervening and strengthening its friendly ties with the eventual future Bangladeshi government at the detriment of China. Therefore, Beijing's policy was balanced between the necessity not to alienate its relations with Pakistan, strategic for the rapprochement with the United States and for its interests in South Asia in balancing India, and the will to avoid the explosion of a war, which would have advantaged New Delhi's image and credibility.

These factors led the Chinese Prime Minister, in a private communication with a high delegation of the Pakistani military junta, to criticise the brutal methods used in East Pakistan and to urge Islamabad to find a quick political solution to the crisis<sup>239</sup>. During the same month China's ambassador in Pakistan also pronounced his distress for the raising disaster in East Pakistan and the beginning of the refugee flux to India<sup>240</sup>. However, this did not prevent China to openly support Pakistan with: military supplies, delivered through the Karakorum highway officially opened in February 1971, economic assistance, cooperation (such as at the Taxila heavy engineering complex) and training from March onwards<sup>241</sup>. When Western nations began to compel Pakistan for its repression, Beijing inversely promised \$100 million

237“Memorandum of conversation between Chou En-Lai and Henry Kissinger, dated 11 July”, in: Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 148.

238Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 209.

239Ibid., 210.

240Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers*, 211.

in economic assistance – in addition to the \$200 million given in November 1970<sup>242</sup>.

India carefully monitored the signs Beijing gave during 1971 at the governmental<sup>243</sup>, academic, and political levels<sup>244</sup>. From the available sources it is possible to argue that by the beginning of July 1971 India was led to conclude that China would definitely have continued providing diplomatic and physical support to Pakistan until the end of the crisis; but that it would have intervened militarily only if the very existence of Pakistan (the West wing) was threatened<sup>245</sup>. Nevertheless, the decision announced by the United States not to intervene in favour of India in case of a Chinese military reaction caused distress.

The news of Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July came as a big surprise, making India feel even more insecure. When Henry Kissinger came to India on 6<sup>th</sup> July during his trip to Pakistan, New Delhi was certain the reason was for looking for a solution for the East Pakistan crisis. When the news that Kissinger had prolonged his permanence in Pakistan for health problems reached India, it did not alarm New Delhi too much. On the contrary what shook New Delhi was the announcement made

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241 There are references about the Chinese economic and military assistance to Pakistan in 1971 in the *Financial Times*, April 29; *Dawn*, 21st May, 12th August and 25th September 1971; *Hindustan Standard*, 17th June 1971; *The Times of India*, 16th May, 28th June, 9th July, and 22nd September 1971; and *International Herald Tribune*, 14th-15th August 1971. Chou Enlai recognised that China also gave military training aid to Pakistan during the conversation he had with president Nixon and Kissinger on 23rd February 1972. See "Memorandum of conversation in Beijing" in: Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 164.

242 Garver, *Protracted Contest*, 210.

243 Even if no document declassified by the MAE proves that India tried to establish direct contacts with China in 1971, to understand China's intentions it is possible to consult: "Letter from D. P. Dhar to T. N. Kaul, dated 29<sup>th</sup> Apr 1971", and "Record of conversation between Gromkyo and Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, dated 7<sup>th</sup> June 1971" in P. N. Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 207, NMML Archives, New Delhi. They show that India was carefully monitoring China's actions, and that postponed all decisions about the possibility to sign a treaty with the Soviet Union with hope to improve relations with China.

244 The Indian Council of World Affairs conducted several analysis of the situation and presented its results during different seminars in July 1971. See for example Sinha and Gosh essays in: K. Subrahmanyam, *Bangla Desh and India's Security* (Dedra Dun: Palit and Dutt, 1972), 113–134. Serious analysis of the Indian options were published also in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (17th July 1971, 1413 and 1424-5). See also the article of Balraj Puri in the Special Number of that month (1517-20), and the article of Giridhar Jain in *The Times of India* (3rd June 1971).

245 "Letter from D. P. Dhar to T. N. Kaul, dated 29<sup>th</sup> April 1971", in P. N. Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 207, NMML Archives, New Delhi. Even the Indian journals shared this view: *Economic and Political Weekly*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

by the American president, Richard Nixon, on 15<sup>th</sup> July about the secret successful<sup>246</sup> meeting held between his advisor, Henry Kissinger, and the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou Enlai, thanks to the mediation of the Pakistanis. Reactions in India were vibrant not so much because of the discovery of the Sino-American détente, considered a natural development, but for the secrecy around Kissinger's trip: newspapers criticised the government for not having fully understood the situation, and seize the opportunity to also call for a stronger approach to the East Pakistan issue<sup>247</sup>. The official reaction of the Indian government was fearful: Foreign Minister Swaran Singh indeed argued that the Sino-American rapprochement became a threat to India due to its enlargement to Pakistan<sup>248</sup>. The secret Indian documents now declassified by MAE confirm that Singh considered that “this rapprochement with Peking would be at the expense of India”<sup>249</sup>.

On the contrary, the development of the Sino-American rapprochement was regarded in Islamabad as a “major diplomatic success for Pakistan”<sup>250</sup>. Indeed, Yahya Khan knew due to his contribution in bridging the secret meeting with China, Washington had a debt of gratitude towards Islamabad. Considered as a significant

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246Kissinger's visit to Beijing turned out to be a success because of some concessions he made on Taiwan that led a Chinese agreement on a common agenda for Nixon's future visit. In fact Kissinger informed that the United States were ready to withdraw two-thirds of their troops from Taiwan after the end of the Vietnam war, and to continue later in parallel with the improvement of Sino-American relations. Nixon's advisor assured the Chinese Prime Minister that Washington was also ready to recognise Taiwan as a part of China and that it would not support its independence. Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 266. Beijing considered these concessions as the first step America had to take in order to reach a decision for the complete removal of all the American troops from Taiwan and the abolishment of the American-Taiwanese Treaty. Therefore, on the issue of Nixon's visit to China an agreement was reached, spring 1972 was chosen as the best period for it, and a new channel for bilateral communications was established, namely Paris. See: “Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Chou of the 11th of July”, in: Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 134. On the 15th of July both Beijing and Washington announced simultaneously the coming visit of Nixon to China. This was for the Nixon administration a significant foreign policy accomplishment that brought positive effects on its domestic popularity, and that, according to Dallek contributed in the following year to Nixon's second victory at the presidential elections: Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*.

247Inder Malhotra, in *The Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1971; *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 1971: 1414 and 1424-1425; and *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number July 1971: 1517-1520.

248See the speech made by Swaran Singh on the 20th of July in the Lok Sabha in: Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 707–708.

249“Note of MEA, dated 30<sup>th</sup> July”, in MEA, AMS, WII/104/34/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

250Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 65.

deterrent to India's intervention in East Pakistan, this led president Yahya Khan to declare that in case of any attack conducted by Bengali rebels in East Pakistan, he was ready to declare total war to India<sup>251</sup>. Such a statement triggered the Indian reaction: the Indian Foreign Minister answered that India had “no desire to seize any part of Pakistan”, but that it was “ready to defend” itself<sup>252</sup>. As a consequence, reports indicated that the Pakistan Army began to deploy troops along the West Pakistan border with India<sup>253</sup>. Despite the growing tension, the international criticism<sup>254</sup>, and the reduction of the strategic position followed by the opening of direct China-American relations in Paris, Nixon did not delude his ally. On 4<sup>th</sup> August he publicly reaffirmed that they were: “not going to engage in public pressure over the government of Pakistan”<sup>255</sup>. This can be explained by the fact that the Nixon administration did not want to forget Yahya Khan, and on the contrary wanted to demonstrate its loyalty to its key ally<sup>256</sup>; though most of the Department of State raised doubts about the possibility to solve the crisis without pressing Pakistan to include the AL leaders into the new government<sup>257</sup>. In the meantime, also the Chinese and the Soviets continued to contribute their direct economic and military assistance to Pakistan<sup>258</sup>.

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251 Times of India, 18<sup>th</sup> July 1971.

252 Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 711.

253 Times of India, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1971.

254 The Beatles, Bob Dylan and the Indian sitar Ravi Shankar performed together on the 2nd of August for raising funding for Bengali and sensitising world opinion. MacMahon, “The Danger of Geopolitical Fantasies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the South Asia Crisis of 1971,” 250.

255 Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 218–220.

256 This is confirmed by the now available record of the meeting between Kissinger and the Chinese ambassador held in France on 16th August 1971, in *ibid.*, 107–108.

257 Van Hollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited,” 430.

258 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 48.

## ***5. The Indian diplomatic reactions and the preparation for the worst***

In July India came to the conclusion that a political solution with Pakistan was improbable, and that it had to act to escape the diplomatic stalemate it had found itself in. Therefore, during the summer New Delhi decided to answer the Soviet pressure and in August to sign the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation*<sup>259</sup> with Moscow. Later when the last hopes to find a political solution acceptable to the Bengali forces with the Pakistani president went through the board, New Delhi decided to prepare its military forces for the conflict, and to embark on a diplomatic effort to defend India's cause in front of the world community.

### ***5.1 India's decision to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Moscow, July-August 1971***

As already analysed in the first chapter, although still publicly neutral towards South Asia from Tashkent, since 1969 the Soviets had indeed been trying to approach their relations with India. Moscow's goals were to assure its influence over the region in the wake of the *Nixon doctrine*, and to contrast the growing influence China was assuming over Pakistan. Not surprisingly, Moscow had been the first country to welcome Indira Gandhi's victory, considered as a positive and significant step for

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<sup>259</sup>The Treaty was signed on 9th August 1971 by the foreign ministers of India and the Soviet Union. It proclaimed that the two countries would have to work together for the preservation of peaceful relations in Asia, and for the refusal of colonialism and racialism. One of its aims was to strengthen the economic, technological, and cultural cooperation between the two parts in respect of India's policy of Non-Alignment. However, as it will be shown later the treaty included also a specific article (article nine) that gave, especially to India, the security and military assurance of Soviet support that New Delhi needed in relations to the situation of East Pakistan. To see the entire text of the Treaty: Ibid., 188–191.



Indo-Soviet relations due to her socialist credentials. The Soviet Union, willing to finalize the Treaty it had proposed to India since 1969, indeed interpreted the victory of the party led by Indira Gandhi as a guaranteed signature. This stance led the Soviet Union to be the first great power to state its position over the East Pakistan crisis. Although an initial intervention in favour of India, the Soviet position later became less critical towards Pakistan.

In fact, afterwards, on 28<sup>th</sup> March the Soviet consul in Karachi investigated the Pakistani government's intentions and, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April the president Podgorny urged Yahya Khan to “put an end to bloodshed and repressions against the population of East Pakistan” in order to reach “a peaceful political settlement”, thus demonstrating a critical position over Pakistan's behaviour<sup>260</sup>. This generated profound satisfaction in New Delhi among those people who had closely followed Indo-Soviet relations in the previous years, like D. P. Dhar, T. N. Kaul and P. N. Haksar<sup>261</sup>. By the end of the month the Soviet Union also encouraged India to help with the refugees and to press Pakistan to find a political solution to the crisis<sup>262</sup>. However, during April the Soviet approach towards the question became less critical towards Pakistan, and a much more complaisant letter was sent to Islamabad<sup>263</sup>. Later in May and June some other signs of openings towards Pakistan followed, with the probable aim not to completely alienate the Pakistani military junta. For example, an agreement was signed that doubled the Pakistani export to the Soviet Union for footwear manufacturing, and the Soviet Union approved the project for a steel mill to be set up near Karachi with Soviet help<sup>264</sup>. Although on 8<sup>th</sup> June, during the visit of Swaran Singh to Moscow, the Soviets pressed India for the discussion of a Treaty proposal<sup>265</sup>, and expressed in a joint statement their desire to see the “creation of the conditions

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260Ibid., 172.

261“Letter of D. P. Dhar to Foreign Secretary T. N. Kaul and Foreign Minister, dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

262“Letter of D. P. Dhar to Principal Secretary, P. N. Haksar, dated on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

263Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 40.

264Ibid., 48.

265“Record of conversation between Foreign Minister Swaran Singh and Andrei Gromyko, dated 7<sup>th</sup> June 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 203, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

for the return of refugees<sup>266</sup>, Moscow still decided to continue their economic aid to Pakistan for July<sup>267</sup>.

Although the Soviet ambivalence was interpreted by Jackson<sup>268</sup> as a sign of the desire to maintain a balanced position in South Asia, it appears more convincing that Moscow was trying to press Indians to seriously evaluate the Soviet proposal of treaty. According to the declassified documents of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the private papers of Haksar, India during the first six months of 1971 did not demonstrate any particular interest in resuming the discussion over the draft circulated since 1969, on the contrary to the Soviet Union that returned the issue twice. New Delhi was rather interested in receiving and finalizing arms sales with Moscow, as expressed several times<sup>269</sup>. The first time New Delhi reacted postponing any decisions, declaring the need for more time to understand the Chinese position toward the recent developments in East Pakistan, and expressing the will to try improving relations with Beijing<sup>270</sup>. When the Soviets in late June pressed again about the issue, finally India demonstrated its availability to negotiate. It was a probable consequence for the failure of the attempts to improve its relations with Beijing<sup>271</sup>, and for the same developments of the situation in East Pakistan. In fact, realising that the possibilities to reach a significant political solution with Pakistan were minimal<sup>272</sup>, in June New Delhi took the decision to continue sustaining the Bengali forces. In fact, since the Bengali forces alone were not able to win against the Pakistani Armed Forces in a reasonable amount of time<sup>273</sup>, by the end of July the Indian Army, the Navy and Air Forces discussed plans and tactics, and adopted some

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266Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 511–512.

267Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 70.

268Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*.

269“Note of Haksar to D. P. Dhar dated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1971”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 167; “Note of Haksar to Prime Minister dated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1971”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 164, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

270“Letter of D. P. Dhar to Foreign Secretary, T. N. Kaul, dated on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 227, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

271“Letter of Haksar to Prime Minister and T. N. Kaul dated June 1971”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 258; “Record of conversation between Foreign Minister Swaran Singh and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1971”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 203, in NMML Archives, New Delhi.

measures to prepare for the war<sup>274</sup>. Although by June East Pakistan had become a burden for West Pakistan, the division of Pakistan was considered as being of strategic interest for India: West Pakistan would have been more inclined to identify itself with Central Asian and Middle Eastern states rather than with South Asia; and profiting from this territory and population reduction due to the split, India would have emerged as the major power of the region.

Therefore, during the summer, in order to contrast its international isolationism, the Indian political leadership, consulting neither the Parliament nor the Cabinet<sup>275</sup>, began the negotiation process with the Soviet to sign a Treaty. Although some overrate the impact that the secret visit made by Kissinger could have had over the foreign policy decision-making in New Delhi<sup>276</sup>, it is erroneous to think it had no significant role in it since it constrained India's position favouring the acceleration, and finalisation of the treaty discussions<sup>277</sup>. Moreover, the assurance given by the Nixon administration to Yhaya Khan, that the American declaration of intention was not to intervene in case of a Chinese attack to India, and the evolution of the situation at the UN level, contributed to raising concerns in New Delhi. Those events

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272In order to assess that no other negotiation options were really possible with Pakistan, at the end of July the government in exile of Bangladesh and India tried together to reach a last compromise with president Yayha Khan, applying to the United States for mediating between the two parts. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 173–174. American officials considered it highly likely that the positions assumed by the representative of the Bangladesh government in exile had the approval of New Delhi. Ibid., 193–194. It is reported that the United States communicated to the Pakistani the new availability of the Bengali forces to withdraw their request of secession if the Pakistani president was ready to include AL members in the list of candidates for the mid-elections that he was planning to hold in September. Mid-elections were the solution found by the government of Pakistan for substituting those members considered anti-state. But Islamabad did not answer.

273Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 207.

274F. R. J. Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1997), 59–77; Nilkanta Krishnan, *No Way but Surrender: An Account of the Indo-Pakistan War in the Bay of Bengal, 1971* (Sahibabad: Vikas, 1980), 17–25.

275According to P. N. Dhar the Cabinet was informed of the initiative just a few days before the signature of the Treaty, while the Parliament was informed only later. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy*, 52.

276See for example: Mariele Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan: gli anni della presidenza Carter* (Roma: Carocci, 2009), 54; "A Relevant Pakistan Policy."

277"Record of conversation between Foreign Minister Swaran Singh and Andrei Gromyko on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1971", in Haksar papers, III inst. f. n. 170; "Letter of T. N. Kaul to Prime Minister on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1971" and "Record of Conversation between Kosygin and D. P. Dhar on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1971", in Haksar papers, I&II inst., f. n. 49, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

convinced New Delhi of the necessity to balance the new alignment of the United States with Pakistan, and most probably with China, reaching for the support of another great power. At the domestic level, the same pressure raised by the opposition parties for a direct military intervention in East Pakistan could not have been completely ignored for the negative impact it could have had on the next state assemblies scheduled for early 1972<sup>278</sup>. Moreover, criticism emerged during the summer of 1971 on the scarce performance of the new Indian government, due to the fact that “Mrs. Gandhi's government had done nothing to implement the 'Garibi Hatao' slogan”<sup>279</sup>, required something to be done to distract attention. Lastly, the number of refugees, which had reached seven millions by July<sup>280</sup>, increased the burden over the budget<sup>281</sup>, and worsened the situation in the North East of India<sup>282</sup>.

Therefore, D. P. Dhar, who had previously been ambassador in the Soviet Union and had followed the conception Soviet phases of the treaty in close collaboration with P. N. Haksar, went to Moscow on 2<sup>nd</sup> August to discuss the issue. During the discussion a specific article (article nine) was added to the drafts of the Treaty circulated earlier in 1969 and 1970, due to India's pressure. That article was the crucial part of the agreement since it disciplined the behaviour of the two states in case of war. The article first stated that both signatory countries would “abstain from providing any assistance to any third party that engages in armed conflict with the other party”; assuring New Delhi therefore of the fact Moscow would not provide military aid to Pakistan in case of war. Moreover, “mutual consultations” should have been held between the signatories in case of an attack (or threat of an attack) from a third country to either parts in order “to remove such threats and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and security”<sup>283</sup>. It is clear that this article was included in the treaty with the specific aim to reassure India of the Soviet help in

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278Hindustan Times, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July 1971

279Bayley, “India,” 91.

280Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 446.

281Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 159.

282Economic and Political Weekly, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1972, 1159.

283“*The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation, 9th of August 1971*” in Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 188–191.

case of a war with Pakistan, considered then probable by New Delhi<sup>284</sup>. Nevertheless, after the signature of the twenty-year *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation*, New Delhi and Moscow agreed to issue a milder declaration to diminish the impact it could have had on foreign chancelleries. The Foreign Ministers indeed stated that both sides “reiterated their firm conviction that can be no military solution and considered it necessary that urgent steps be taken in East Pakistan for the achievement of the political solution”<sup>285</sup>.

Although in India the signature of the Treaty was celebrated also by the opposition parties<sup>286</sup>, for New Delhi it was indeed important not to be read internationally as the aggressive state of South Asia, or as a client of the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, there was the risk that the Treaty signature was perceived by the non-alignment states as a departure from the policy of Non-alignment that India was still firmly declaring to support in 1971. Therefore, New Delhi reassured both publicly and privately that the Treaty was not a formal alliance with the Soviet Union, and that it did not constitute a departure from its historical policy of non-alignment<sup>287</sup>. As a sign of openness, New Delhi even declared its availability to sign similar treaties with other states as well, and included the United States<sup>288</sup>. From the Soviets’ perspective the treaty was an important result since it enlarged its influence in South Asia; and moreover was a concrete action for deterring other great powers, such as China and the United States, to intervene in an Indo-Pakistani war, which at that time seemed probable, even if not desired by Moscow. The news of the Treaty surprised the United States: Kissinger defined it as a “bombshell” that was “throwing a lighted match into a powder keg”<sup>289</sup>. According to Van Hollen, who was an official of the State Department, from that moment, Nixon began to fear that India had

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284D. R. Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size: The Authentic Story of the 14-day Indo-Pak War* (New Delhi: Indian Book Co., 1972), 32.

285Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 201.

286Economic and Political Weekly, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1971.

287“Record of the discourse made by Foreign Minister Swaran Singh in the Lok Sabha, dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 1971”, in MEA, AMS, WII/504/4/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

288“Letter from Joint Secretary in New Delhi to Rasgotra, Indian Embassy in Washington, dated on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1971”, in MEA, AMS, WII/504/3/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

289Kissinger, *White House Years*, 867–868.

become a Soviet client, and considered the evolution of a Indo-Pakistani conflict to a global scale probable<sup>290</sup>. As a result Nixon's administration began to threaten India of cutting all the economic assistance in case of a conflict<sup>291</sup>. On 7<sup>th</sup> August 1971 Indira Gandhi sent a letter to president Nixon refusing to accept the presence of the UN forces in its territories, and accepting the American invitation to visit Washington to discuss the issue directly talking to president Nixon. Later, Kissinger positively acknowledged that India was "by no means prepared to write off the US", despite his concern about the situation in South Asia<sup>292</sup>.

### ***5.2 The military and diplomatic preparation for the conflict, September-November 1971***

For India and the Bangladeshi government in exile the participation of the Awami League in the political negotiation was a prerequisite for solving the crisis. In mid-August, some days before the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty, the Pakistani president took the decision not to allow AL participation in the political process for setting up a civilian authority in East Pakistan<sup>293</sup>, and to begin a trial on a charge of treason against Mujib Rahman, for which he could be sentenced to death. This was unacceptable for both the government of Bangladesh, where the AL leaders were the majority, and for India that commented on the Pakistani decision declaring its "deep anxiety" and warning of the "grave and perilous consequences" that the trial to Mujib

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290Van Hollen, "The Tilt Policy Revisited," 432.

291"Memorandum for the record of the President's meeting with the Senior Review Group on Pakistan, dated 11th August 1971", in Khan, *The American Papers*, 659.

292"Memorandum sent to Nixon by Kissinger, dated 19th August 1971", in Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 255.

293The government of Pakistan on 5th August published a white paper giving its fullest account to date of the origins of the crisis and accusing AL members and Mujib of being responsible for the violence. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 80. In addition, a few days later the Pakistan president stated that 79 of the 160 Awami League members elected to the National Assembly had been disqualified by the new government, as well as 159 of the 228 AL members of the provincial Assembly. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 194.

would have worsened the situation in Bangladesh<sup>294</sup>. These decisions taken by Yahya excluded any possibilities to find a peaceful solution for the East Pakistani crisis. Again in September the Nixon administration, fully aware of the erosion of the situation in South Asia, tried to explore the possibility of finding an Indian compromise; but the Indian ambassador reconfirmed their position over the issue, and therefore that Mujib should have been included in all negotiations<sup>295</sup>.

As a consequence of the Pakistani decisions, since mid-August the priorities of the Indian government had become two: first, having the Armed and the *Mukti Bahini* forces ready for a war by winter time<sup>296</sup>; and second, to work at the international level to definitively avoid the UN involvement in East Pakistan, and for presenting East Pakistan's crisis under humanitarian dimensions capable of justifying the military intervention of New Delhi.

Therefore, New Delhi by late August ordered the Commander in Chief of the Indian Army, Gen. S. F. H. J. Manekshaw, to prepare for military action. Gen. J. Singh Aurora was in charge of the operations, and by the end of September along the East border seven Indian divisions were ready, together with one infantry brigade and two *Mukti Bahini* brigades<sup>297</sup>. By November reserves of the Indian Army were called, while the training of the new conscripts was undercut to have more operative divisions<sup>298</sup>. Moreover, the same tactics of the *Mukti Bahini* were significantly modified: first, as already underlined, a *Five Party Consultative Committee* was set up on 8<sup>th</sup> September to broaden the political base of the Government of Bangladesh in exile in Calcutta, and to coordinate the actions of the Bengali forces<sup>299</sup>; and second, the Indian military forces provided a higher support for the *Mukti Bahini*'s

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294Government of India, *Bangladesh Documents*, 711–713.

295Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 221.

296The best time to launch a military campaign was indeed winter time, as already highlighted by the chief of the Army forces in the discussion he had with Mrs. Gandhi in late March. The monsoon season would be over, the terrain dry enough to allow military manoeuvres in East Pakistan, and the passes in the Himalayas, through which a Chinese attack could have been eventually launched, closed by the snow. Moreover, the *Mukti Bahini* would finally have been ready to support the military operations.

297Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 225.

298Interview with Gen. K. M. Shergill, held in New Delhi on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011.

299Hindustan Times, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1971.

operations, resulting in a general collapse of the local authority outside large urban areas in East Pakistan by the end of September<sup>300</sup>. Furthermore, India restated its position again at the General Assembly of the United Nations held in the fall, refusing to recognise the crisis as an Indo-Pakistan problem. On that occasion Pakistan accused India of interference again, and called for the dispatch of UN forces. Although the situation was similar to the one in July at the ECOSOC meeting, by this time all decisions at the UN had been prevented by the Soviets, who since the end of August had declared their opposition to holding a Security Council meeting over the East Pakistan issue<sup>301</sup>.

Nevertheless, Moscow's attitude remained cautious in its support for India until the beginning of October, in order not to precipitate the transformation of the situation into a war, but to continue to search for a political solution. Therefore, Moscow limited its actions taking an uncritical position over the Indian behaviour both at the conference of the *Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)* on 10<sup>th</sup> September, and on the occasion provided by the joint communication signed at the end of the visit of the King of Afghanistan to the Soviet Union. Moreover, both Prime Minister Kosygin, during Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Moscow in late September, and president Podgorny, in his surprise stop in New Delhi on 1<sup>st</sup> October, restated the view that the problem had to be solved through peaceful means, continuing to refer to "East Pakistan", and not as "East Bengal" as the Indians had done since March<sup>302</sup>. Again on 9<sup>th</sup> October the Soviets renewed their preference towards a peaceful resolution of the South Asian crisis in occasion of the Soviet-Algerian joint communication released after the visit of Kosygin to Algeria, where they called for the respect the of "national unity and territorial integrity of Pakistan and India" and urged a peaceful resolution of the issue<sup>303</sup>. The Soviet approach was also similar to the American one, interesting as well to enhance the process of détente with the Soviet Union and to press India and Pakistan to reduce the risk of a war. American secretary of state Rogers and the

300Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 226.

301The Statesman, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1971.

302Vijay Sen Budhraj, "Moscow and the Birth of Bangladesh," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 5 (May 1973): 487.

303Times of India, 10<sup>th</sup> October 1971.



Soviet foreign ministry Gromkyo during a meeting in New York on 30<sup>th</sup> September indeed agreed that war was “not a solution”<sup>304</sup>.

On 8<sup>th</sup> October 1971 India, willing to impress the world opinion, made its last concessions to Pakistan: the Foreign Minister Swaran Singh clarified that India did not consider the independence of Bangladesh as the only solution, and stated that “the Indian stand had always been based on the need for a political solution acceptable to the already elected representative of Bangladesh”<sup>305</sup>. As noted by Jackson, this opening was probably made under Soviet pressure, and was intended as the last option to reverse the course of events. Evidence of this was that exiled political leaders of Bangladesh expressed different opinions from New Delhi, restating their commitment to complete independence<sup>306</sup>. The Pakistani answer came soon after: on 12<sup>th</sup> October President Yahya released a declaration that did not take into consideration restarting negotiations with Mujib and the AL members in exile. On the contrary, the Pakistani president underlined the efforts he had made to work for a political solution<sup>307</sup>, and accused India of preparing its Army for a war, calling again for the intervention of the UN forces along the borders<sup>308</sup>. Even more serious than his speech, Yahya ordered to move the military forces along the borders both in the East and in the West of Pakistan. Therefore, New Delhi ordered its army to position not only along the East border, where it had been for some time, but also to the West. The *Mukti Bahini* reacted by launching a specific campaign against the

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304 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 83.

305 Times of India, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> October 1971.

306 The Statesman, 9th October 1971. In reality a faction of the government of Bangladesh in exile, led by its foreign minister K. M. Ahmed, supported the official position stated by the Ministry Swaran Singh and took contact with the US Consul General in Calcutta for exploring the possibilities of finding a political settlement with Pakistan. Although Yahya suggested the Americans continue contact with that faction, no results were reached. Moreover, according to Dixit the government of Bangladesh in Calcutta did not support Ahmed’s actions, considered pro-Americans, and dismissed its foreign minister with the support of New Delhi. On this see: Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 69–70; Lifschultz and Bird, *Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution*, 113–116.

307 Since September General Tikka Khan had been replaced as governor of East Pakistan by Dr. Malik (a civilian), censorship had been lifted, the constitutional-making function of the National Assembly had been restored, while new elections for the 79 vacant seats at the National Assembly had been called for early December. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 81.

308 *Ibid.*, 199–204.

East Pakistani by-elections scheduled for December, killing a series of political figures that had agreed to participate.

As events progressed, the support of the Soviet Union for India became more explicit: *Pravda* on 16<sup>th</sup> October commented saying “certain representatives of the Pakistani military administration” that “continued fomenting tension and preventing the normalization of the situation”. On 17<sup>th</sup> October Yahya Khan called for a withdrawal of troops. Few days later he was supported by the UN General Secretary who also declared UN forces at the disposal of the two countries with regards to the risk of war. Since it was not a real concession for India, Indians did not change its position, and refused to withdraw<sup>309</sup>. Instead, Pakistan warmly welcomed the proposal of the General Secretary of the UN, and invited U. Thant to make a visit to the subcontinent. However, New Delhi began to support the operations of the *Mukti Bahini* with the artillery, and the air forces use<sup>310</sup>. This triggered a tougher response by the Pakistani Army and several attacks took place along the border especially from the beginning of November. The Indian decision to raise military efforts was probably made with two aims in mind: on the one hand, to prove the effective capabilities of the *Mukti Bahini*<sup>311</sup>; and on the other to force Islamabad to take the initiative for officially opening the hostilities. As a consequence of the increased tensions, India and the Soviet Union agreed that mutual consultation was needed by that time. On 22<sup>nd</sup> October the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Nikolai Firyubin, arrived in Delhi to discuss the implications of article nine of the Treaty signed in August. On 27<sup>th</sup> the two parts declared to agree on their assessment of the South Asian situation<sup>312</sup>, and on 28<sup>th</sup> October Foreign Minister Swaran Singh informed the country (and the whole world) of the Soviet Union’s “total support” of India. In the following days Soviet Air Marshal P. S. Koutakhov went to New Delhi to discuss the

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309Ibid., 91.

310Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 212.

311The *Mukti Bahini*, thanks to the new support of the Indian Army, were able to conquer some areas of East Pakistan, but they were never able to maintain it and therefore to make it the new base of the government in exile of Bangladesh. These facts should have resulted in New Delhi being even more certain of the fact that without a direct war the solution of the East Pakistan situation would have been long, if not impossible.

312Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 91–92.

shipments of weapons required by India that then began in early November<sup>313</sup>.

Moreover, in that period, Mrs. Gandhi left India to embark on a three week tour around the Western states with the aim of underlining the dramatic situation India was facing, and also the fact that India, despite the signature of the Treaty with the Soviet Union, was still interested in keeping cordial relations with the West, especially with Great Britain and France. In all the speeches she gave, Indira Gandhi underlined the fact that the refugees, who were by then 9,5 million<sup>314</sup>, was an unsustainable problem for India, and that the only acceptable solution to the crisis was a negotiation between Mujib and the Pakistani authorities. From Vienna the Indian Prime Minister indicated again New Delhi's opposition to the stationing of the UN observers along the borders<sup>315</sup>. On 31<sup>st</sup> October from London, Mrs. Gandhi restated her opinion that the proposal of U. Thant was not acceptable since it equalized the two countries and did not recognize the major responsibility of Pakistan; and restated the fact that India was still loyal to its long policy of Non-alignment<sup>316</sup>. In all the European capitals, and especially in London that was reluctant to see India fall under exclusive Soviet influence, Indira Gandhi made a considerable impression, and received warm welcome and expressions of comprehension<sup>317</sup>.

In November the tour brought Mrs. Gandhi to the United States for the meeting with president Nixon already planned during the summer. The meeting turned out to be unfriendly, tense and strained. According to Kux, all the parts later described it as a "dialogue of the deaf", where personal dislikes clearly came out and did not helping the actors to find an acceptable solution<sup>318</sup>. Nixon perceived the determination of Indira Gandhi to solve the situation at any cost, but since the United States had no intentions to significantly intervene and to press Pakistan to accept a

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313Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 86.

314Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U. S. Armed Forces As a Political Instrument* (Washington D. C.: Brookings Inst Press, 1978), 189.

315Gandhi, *India and Bangla Desh; Selected Speeches and Statements, March to December, 1971* [By] Indira Gandhi, 22–23.

316Ibid., 42–53.

317Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, 79.

318Kux, *India and the United States*, 198.

political solution including the government of Bangladesh<sup>319</sup>, the meeting did not produce tangible results<sup>320</sup>. Nevertheless, at the diplomatic level the tour in the West did not turn out to be a waste of time for India: it had a significant effect on the world's opinion that carefully followed it, especially in the United States<sup>321</sup>. Moreover, after that tour Indira Gandhi was able to state she had done everything in her power to solve the issue. On 13<sup>th</sup> November in a letter written to Nixon Indira Gandhi indeed restated India's position declaring the situation "untenable"<sup>322</sup>.

The Chinese factor was of course kept in high consideration during the fall of 1971 by both India<sup>323</sup> and Pakistan. Interested in reducing the possibilities of friction with China, during the fall India gave signs of distension that were carefully publicised by Beijing, such as the message pronounced by Indira Gandhi on 25<sup>th</sup> October when the People's Republic of China officially entered the United Nations, inheriting the seat that, until that moment, had been held by Taiwan. The small improvements in bilateral relations were then reinforced by Beijing's declaration of its willingness to receive an Indian ping-pong team<sup>324</sup>. These developments caused Pakistan to worry even more about the partial support China had declared to Islamabad earlier in April in the letter from Chou Enlai. In fact, from the declassified documents it is clear that China was not interested in getting involved in the Indo-Pakistani conflict and to risk a war with the Soviet Union: first, the Prime Minister Chou Enlai considered East Pakistan's situation as "already unable to be saved in the

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319See for example the Kissinger press briefing made on 7th November where he restated the position of the United States and their availability to promote further negotiations between Pakistan and the Government of Bangladesh in exile, without significant variations. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 207–211. According to Jackson, American ambassador Keating indirectly confirmed the fact that no specific moves were made by the United States to press Pakistan after that meeting with Indira Gandhi. *Ibid.*, 98. However, the Americans tried to push Yahya to collaborate through the creation of a channel reaching through which Mujib for the negotiation process; but their attempt failed since President Yahya Khan refused to collaborate. See: "Telegram sent by the Secretary of State to the American UN mission in New York, dated 26th November 1971", in Khan, *The American Papers*, 721–730. See also: Lifschultz and Bird, *Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution*, 113–116.

320Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 400.

321Kux, *India and the United States*, 199.

322Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 258.

323See for example: Subrahmanyam, *Bangla Desh and India's Security*, 113–127, 128–133, and 167–170 *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18th and 25th September, and 13th November 1971.

324Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 94.

fall of 1971<sup>325</sup>; second, during the meeting Chou Enlai had with Kissinger in late October, in which the agenda of Nixon's visit in 1972 was discussed again in all its details, Nixon's advisor indeed reported that the Chinese were standing behind Pakistan with “less passion” than in the previous July, and that he had the perception that in case of war China would be in an “awkward position”<sup>326</sup>.

Therefore, in order to understand the Chinese position, to boost the morale of Pakistani, and to press Beijing to make a public statement declaring their support for Islamabad, President Yahya Khan sent a delegation to personally test the situation<sup>327</sup>. Bhutto was the head of the official delegation composed by the Foreign Secretary, and by the Commanders in Chief of the Army, Air and Navy forces, though he did not hold at that time any specific political position. The mission was preceded by some statements made by President Yahya that, full of hope, declared to *Newsweek* on 31<sup>st</sup> October to have China's support in case of war. Despite the warm welcome given to the delegation, the meeting was disappointing for Pakistan, and no joint statement followed. Beijing did not move from its previous position, and on 7<sup>th</sup> November restated that “our Pakistani friend may rest assured that should Pakistan be subjected to foreign aggression the Chinese government and people will, as always, resolutely support the Pakistani government and people in their struggle to defend their state sovereignty and national independence”<sup>328</sup>. Again no reference to the *unity* or *integrity* of Pakistan was made. To react to this failure Bhutto tried to covert it, releasing a declaration that depicted the meeting as a “complete success”, without being controverted by the Chinese<sup>329</sup>. However, on 10<sup>th</sup> November the Indian government, which had carefully followed the Pakistani visit to China, finally declared that there was no indication that China would intervene on Pakistan's side. Even more significant, New Delhi decided to move several Indian divisions from the

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325“Memorandum of conversation between Henry Kissinger and Chou En-Lai, dated 20th June 1972”, in Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 203.

326“Memorandum South Asia”, in: *ibid.*, 149–150.

327“Telegram sent from the American Ambassador in Islamabad to the Secretary of State in Washington, dated 4th November 1971”, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 701–702.

328Cited in Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 95.

329Budhraj, “Moscow and the Birth of Bangladesh,” 488.

Himalayan front to the border with East Pakistan<sup>330</sup>.

In the meantime, the situation in East Pakistan had become characterised by several military engagements between Indian and Pakistani forces, in which Indian troops were alleged to have crossed the border<sup>331</sup>. This situation alarmed the UN General Secretary that on 15<sup>th</sup> November decided to launch the United Nations East Pakistan Relief Operation (UNEPRO), even if it did not have any formal supporting resolution released by a UN organ and “solely on the base of President Yahya Khan's acceptance of U. Thant's offer of humanitarian assistance”<sup>332</sup>. However, the UN mission did not last: after two days the head of the UNEPRO headquarters, Paul-Marc Henry, warned he was facing so many difficulties due to the opposition of the *Mukti Bahini* that the effectiveness and conduct of the operations was unsure<sup>333</sup>. Attacks on the UNEPRO personnel and facilities led Henry to suspend operations in a week for the scarce security conditions<sup>334</sup>. After 20<sup>th</sup> November the clashes became more significant between the Indian and Pakistani armed forces, and the Indian troops did not begin to withdraw after their operations beyond the border<sup>335</sup>. It is interesting to note that even on this occasion, as typical in the Indian decision-making process, decisions were taken by the Prime Minister and her advisers in autonomy, neither informing the Cabinet, nor reuniting the PAC to discuss<sup>336</sup>. Indira Gandhi only gave an account of the affair to the Parliament on 24<sup>th</sup> November, and soon after a spokesman from the Indian government made it public that instructions to cross the border for defending operations had been given to the military forces. On

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330“Telegram sent by the American Embassy in Islamabad to Washington, dated 23rd November 1971”, in Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 261–266.

331See: “Telegram sent by the American Embassy in Islamabad to Washington, dated 23rd November 1971”, in: *Ibid.*. It reports the letter sent by president Yahya Khan to Nixon delivered the same day. More in general on the military campaign in East Pakistan: Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*.

332Gidon Gottlieb, “The United Nations and Emergency Humanitarian Assistance in India-Pakistan,” *The American Journal of International Law* 66, no. 2 (April 1972): 363.

333UN press release on 19 Nov 1971, cited in *ibid.*

334New York Times, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1971.

335“Signal G-1104 dated the 21st of November from Commander to Chief of General Staff”, in Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report” (Government of Pakistan, 1974), 95, <http://www.pppusa.org/Acrobat/Hamoodur%20Rahman%20Commission%20Report.pdf>.

336Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 215.

30<sup>th</sup> November Indian Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, reassured the international community that Indian troops were not permitted to penetrate more than 13-16 kilometres<sup>337</sup>. Despite India justifying its operation as defensive, it was clear it was escalating tension in order to provoke Pakistan to begin the war. Since the last week of November New Delhi and the government of Bangladesh also worked on the creation of a joint military command to coordinate the actions of the Indian Army and of the Mukhti Bahini led by Gen. Osmani in preparation of the conflict. The agreement was signed on 3<sup>rd</sup> December by Mrs. Gandhi and the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Tajauddin. It was intended to be a political recognition of the role the government of Bangladesh had in the crisis<sup>338</sup>.

As a consequence of the new Indian military strategy, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November Pakistan had already proclaimed a state of emergency. Significantly, on the previous day the Chinese government, alarmed, sent a message to the White House through the Gen. Vernon Walters military attaché in Paris asking Washington to exercise more pressure over the Pakistani government to prevent further deterioration of the situation<sup>339</sup>. Sensing the risk of war, the Chinese were probably trying to transmit their concern to the United States, the only state that had sustained Pakistan until that time and could thus press it to accept negotiating with the AL and Mujib. However, the American reaction was not to put pressure on Pakistan. Instead, Washington contacted the Chinese envoy in New York, Huang Hua, for discussing China's intentions concerning how to act in the Security Council in case of war: Hua reassured Kissinger of the Chinese support to the Pakistani and American position<sup>340</sup>. Moreover, on 25<sup>th</sup> president Nixon wrote to all the principal actors, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, president Yahya Khan, and to Prime Minister Kosygin, proposing a limited withdrawal in order to de-escalate the situation<sup>341</sup>. The call did not affect India since the Indian Prime Minister stated that the country could not “hold” the

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337 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 102.

338 Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 87.

339 Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 223.

340 Kissinger, *White House Years*, 889.

341 Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 270.

situation any longer<sup>342</sup>. Therefore, on 1<sup>st</sup> December the White House clarified its unwillingness to press Pakistan again, announcing instead the suspension of all the licences for arms exports to India, which was then followed on 6<sup>th</sup> December (after the beginning of the third Indo-Pakistani war), by the decision to suspend all economic assistance to India for a value of \$87,6 million<sup>343</sup>. This fact led Mrs. Gandhi to polemically respond at a meeting of Congress workers in New Delhi stating that “The times had passed when any nation sitting 3.000 or 4.000 miles away could give orders to Indians on the basis of their colour superiority to do as they wish. India has changed and she is no more a country of slaves. Today we will do what is best for our national interest and not what these so-called big nations would like us to do”<sup>344</sup>.

## ***6. The third Indo-Pakistani war and the emergence of Bangladesh***

New Delhi succeeded in provoking a Pakistani attack on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, when Pakistan ordered its air forces in West Pakistan to launch several attacks on the north-western major Indian air bases<sup>345</sup>. This date is generally recognised as the beginning of the third Indo-Pakistani war, and because of the air strikes Pakistan is generally considered responsible for starting the conflict<sup>346</sup>. Demonstrating their support to

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342“Telegram sent by Keating to Nixon, dated 29th November”, in *ibid.*, 224.

343Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 105.

344Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*, 34.

345Dixit reported that D. P. Dhar commented on the news of the Pakistani attack saying: “The fool has done exactly what one had expected”. Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 89.

346Bayley, “India,” 93.



India, the Soviets came to the point of defining it as an “unprovoked aggression”<sup>347</sup>. However, analysing the events it would be much more accurate to consider 21<sup>st</sup> November as the starting date of the hostilities, since Indian troops on that day crossed the border and occupied without withdrawing from Pakistani territories. Apart from this, the war could be divided into two phases: the first one until 10<sup>th</sup> December, during which India clearly demonstrated its military superiority; and the second, that lasted until 17<sup>th</sup> December when, after the Eastern Command of the Pakistani Army surrendered, and the Indian declaration of a unilateral cease-fire for the West frontier, President Yahya Khan accepted the cease-fire, during which global powers interfered in the conflict.

### ***6.1 The military campaign until 10<sup>th</sup> December 1971***

On 4<sup>th</sup> December, when Indira Gandhi and Jagjivan Ram were back in Delhi after their stay in other Indian cities where they had been at the time of the Pakistani attack, the PAC was reunited and the military strategy to follow was discussed by the Indian leadership. According to Mankekar<sup>348</sup>, and Jacob<sup>349</sup> military plans had already been decided by July 1971 and they were just briefly reconsidered on that occasion. Although the Defence Minister expressed his opinion on launching a larger attack on the West front too, Indira Gandhi and the other advisers of the Prime Minister rebuffed it, choosing instead to fight an offensive war only at the Eastern front<sup>350</sup>. Here the strategy was to bypass the Pakistani forces concentrated in the principal East Pakistan centres, and trying to reach Dacca as soon as possible. In the West instead, only two special offensive operations were planned with the aim to deter a Pakistani advance: first, the occupation of some small but strategic sections of the

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347Robert H. Donaldson, “India: The Soviet Stake in Stability,” *Asian Survey* 12, no. 6 (June 1972): 484.

348Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*, 36.

349Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca*, 59–77.

350Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 215.

Pakistani side of Kashmir; and second, the occupation of a strategic area in Sind where all the major communication lines of Pakistan passed<sup>351</sup>. The political direction for military operation was restricted to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, P. N. Haksar, and D. P. Dhar. Operational guidance was given to Gen. Manekshaw, Chief of the Army Staff, and the Air and Navy Chiefs, P. C. Lal and Admiral Nanda<sup>352</sup>. Foreign Minister Swaran Singh and Foreign Secretary T. N. Kaul instead took care of the situation at the UN. Indian Army, Air, and Navy forces were more numerous, better equipped, and more mobile than the Pakistani forces<sup>353</sup>.

Therefore, on 5<sup>th</sup> December India launched its offensive in the East in order to conquer Dacca, where the Pakistani Eastern Command was located, while the small operations for the West were started<sup>354</sup>. In the following days India officially legitimised the government of Bangladesh in exile in Calcutta. The disposition of forces on the ground was in favour of India in the East, whereas in the West the two contending forces were equal<sup>355</sup>. The Pakistani forces in the East also had to face the hostility of the population<sup>356</sup>, and the fact they were already weakened both physically and morally by several months of occupation. Moreover, the defections of Bengali from military ranks resulted in a handicap for the Pakistani forces, especially in the Air Force where Bengali were largely represented. On the contrary, the East Indian troops were facilitated by the fact that the *Mukti Bahini* knew the territories well and supported them in the key operations, and that local the population of East Pakistan often welcomed them<sup>357</sup>. However, East Pakistan had a territory that facilitated defensive fighting, and the same strategic operations made by the *Mukti Bahini* forces during summer and in the previous months did not facilitate operations since the major communication facilities had been damaged by their terrorist attacks.

Pakistan instead fought the war with the idea that the “defence of the east is in

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351Ibid.

352Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 93.

353SIPRI data, 1971/1972, in Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 106.

354Ibid., 131.

355Interview with Gen. Shergill held in New Delhi on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011.

356“Signal G-1233 from Commander to the Chief of General Staff, dated 6th December 1971”, in Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 98.

357Interview with Gen. Ashok Mehta held in New Delhi on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

the west”: occupying Indian territories in the west was the goal, in order to trade them later for the eastern territories, considered almost impossible to protect<sup>358</sup>. In fact, since the fall of 1971 Islamabad had been conscious of the fact that defending East Pakistan would have been an almost impossible task<sup>359</sup>. The leading general of the Eastern Command, Gen. A. A. K. Niazi, had already drafted the first military plans for the resistance of the Pakistani Army in the East in May. These plans were reviewed at the commanders' conference in June in Rawalpindi, and the final version was issued by July. According to these plans the goal of the East was to keep the enemy troops involved to the maximum, in order not to allow them to shift to the West, and to “keep regular troops in certain designated towns, which had to be defended by them as fortresses or strong points”<sup>360</sup>. The plan however turned out to be impossible, since defending the designated fortresses directly implied leaving corridors open for the enemy to reach Dacca<sup>361</sup>.

The air attack of 3<sup>rd</sup> December had limited effects: few Indian air forces were hit<sup>362</sup>. In a few days India took complete control of the skies<sup>363</sup>, and the Pakistani troops resented both the East and West for the scarce air support for the whole duration of the conflict. Although on the western front the air attack of 3<sup>rd</sup> December was also supported by ground operations in Kashmir, Punjab and Rajasthan<sup>364</sup>, these advances were stopped during the first days of fighting by the Indian Army by 10<sup>th</sup> December. In fact, in Kashmir, Indian forces launched several small and successful

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358Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 359.

359“Telegram on Punjabi leadership opinion on war sent by the American Embassy in Islamabad, dated 9th October 1971”, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 690–691.

360Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 224.

361It is interesting to note, that the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report requested by the Chief of Martial Law Administration to investigate the responsibilities of the 1971 events, published in 1974 instead accused Gen. Niazi of being the only man to have conceived such a “wrong” plan. Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 67–69. This fact casts doubts on the impartiality of the report: the responsibility was only given to some Generals in order to save those who, after 1971 supported the new government of Bhutto and retained political power, such as Gen. Farman Ali and Gen. Tikka Khan.

362Bayley, “India,” 94.

363On the 4th of December Indian air forces attacked the principal Pakistani base in Peshawar and the oil-storage depots in Karachi, supported by the Navy, almost completely destroying the Pakistani forces. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 116. See also: Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*, 95–105.

364Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*, 83.

attacks that allowed them to assume the control of those strategic territories that they retained until the war end<sup>365</sup>. Furthermore, in Punjab and Rajasthan the Indian army stopped the advancement of Pakistan, and by 8<sup>th</sup> December was controlling the territories close to the crucial roads that connected North and South Pakistan, and occupying several areas in Sind<sup>366</sup>. At the naval level Indian forces completely dominated the scene from the beginning, especially supporting operations in the west against the Karachi harbour, and the oil installations that left the air force without refuelling<sup>367</sup>. Moreover, by 10<sup>th</sup> December the defence in the East was already close to collapse.

Surely the highly centralised Pakistani decision making process, which did not involve the civilian representatives, and that was just circumscribed to the Army, rather than to the Air Forces and the Navy, did not help either<sup>368</sup>. Moreover, during the war the communications between East and West became inefficient and difficult: this did not facilitate the decision-making process, as copies of the official documents of the contact between the military headquarters in West Pakistan and the Commanders in the East presented in the report of the Hamoodur Rahmana Commission clearly demonstrate<sup>369</sup>. President Yahya Khan and the military headquarters indeed communicated to the East only through two channels: the civilian Governor Malik and his military adviser, Gen. Rao Farman Ali Khan, or the Commanding General of the Eastern Command and martial law administration, Gen Niazi. However, even before the war contacts between Yahya and the Army in the East were not very good: in November Yahya was described as “isolated” from events in Pakistan by his advisers, and the Pakistan Army in the East had achieved almost “autonomous control of the province”<sup>370</sup>. The scarce efficiency and quality of the line of communication between the East and the West can explain at least two

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365 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 117–119.

366 Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 381.

367 Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*, 110–117; Krishnan, *No Way but Surrender*.

368 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 108. This aspect was also recognised by the report of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission. Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 90–92.

369 Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 95–126.

370 “Memorandum to Kissinger sent by the Agency of International Development, dated 5th November 1971”, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 703–705.

developments that did not favour Pakistan during the war: the late Pakistan's reaction to the Indian decision allowing its troop to invade East Pakistan; and the strange case of the declaration of a cease-fire by the Eastern commander on 9<sup>th</sup> December. In fact, when India decided to increase the level of fighting in the East after 21<sup>st</sup> November<sup>371</sup>, the headquarters in Islamabad downplayed the alarm report sent by the commanders in the East<sup>372</sup>, and opted for waiting without declaring war to India. It is probable that President Yahya Khan and his military advisers evaluated that it was not in Pakistan's interests to declare war, and that it was better to hope that the UN or the United States could dissuade India from attacking. However, this was an erroneous conclusion because nothing was done at the international level. Thus, Pakistan waited until 30<sup>th</sup> November before ordering the Army to prepare to attack India, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> December when it finally decided to attack it, paradoxically became the one perceived as the aggressor<sup>373</sup>.

Moreover, another example of the lack of communication between Yahya Khan and the political and military headquarters in Dacca was the cease-fire, which was presented and then withdrawn by the Eastern Command on 9<sup>th</sup> December to the UN. This event happened as a consequence of the answer Yayhya Khan provided in several messages sent on 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> December by Governor Malik and Gen. Niazi. In those messages Malik and Niazi were informed of the need to find a political settlement for East Pakistan due to the dramatic situation of the Pakistani troops in the East, which had been defined as “extremely critical” and hopeless<sup>374</sup>. President Yahya Khan, who, according to the American Ambassador Farland, seemed resigned about the future of the Pakistani troops in the East<sup>375</sup>, on the same day answered by

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371Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 321.

372“Signal G-1104 from the Commander to the Chief of General Staff, dated 21st November 1971”, in Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 95.

373Sisson and Rose reported that the decision was taken after a meeting on the 30th of November with Bhutto urging the president to take some measures to modify the unacceptable situation Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 230.

374“Signal A-6905 from the Governor to the President of Pakistan, dated 7th December 1971”, “Signal G-1255 from Commander to Chief of General Staff, date on 9th December 1971 ”, and “Signal A-1660 1971 from Governor to the President of Pakistan, dated 9th December 1971”, in Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 101–102, 104–105.

375“Memorandum for Nixon sent by Kissinger, dated 9th December”, in Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 289.

giving Malik's "good sense and judgement" the power to settle the situation<sup>376</sup>, and also ordering Gen. Niazi to accept the decisions Malik would have taken<sup>377</sup>. However, both the two signals launched by Yahya Khan were really vague, leaving room for misinterpretation. Governor Malik and Gen. Niazi interpreted them as permission to find a political solution to the entire question of East Pakistan, even if Yahya's signals were just referring to the specific military situation *in Dacca*, about which Governor Malik had telexed the President on 9<sup>th</sup> December. Whatever President Yahya wanted to say, Gen. Niazi and Governor Malik decided to write a proposal for a cease-fire and sent it to the UN representative Paul-Mark Henry in Dacca. Their proposal, signed by Gen. Farman Ali, however, not only recommended an immediate cease-fire, but also the return of the elected representatives of East Pakistan to rule the civilian government of Dacca<sup>378</sup>. It was then a profoundly irritated President who confirmed in his reply the fact that he did not devolve them the power to decide about the entire future of East Pakistan<sup>379</sup>. Thus the Pakistani president urged the Governor to modify the cease-fire proposal (that would probably have been accepted by New Delhi, since it did not ask for an immediate withdrawal of forces as a required point of the cease-fire), cancelling the reference to any political settlement of the situation, and to immediately inform the UN of the error.

As a result, it is clear that Pakistan after just a few days of hostilities, was in a dramatic position: in the East the Commander of the Army was almost convinced of the inevitability to surrender; while in the West no territories were captured as the strategy formulated at the beginning of the conflict would have required. However, on 10<sup>th</sup> December the American decision to send a nuclear aircraft-carrier to the Indian Ocean threatened India with the possibility that an international escalation of the hostilities could have taken place, internationalizing the conflict.

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376"Signal G-0001 from President to Governor, dated 9th December 1971", in Government of Pakistan, "Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report," 106.

377"Signal 1-10237 from Chief of the General Staff to Commander, dated 10th December 1971", in *ibid.*, 111.

378"Signal A-7107 from Governor to President of Pakistan, dated 10th December 1971", in *ibid.*, 107–108.

379"Signal G-0002 from President to Governor, dated 10th December 1971", in *ibid.*, 110–111.

## 6.2 The influence of the UN and global powers' during the 1971 war

On 10<sup>th</sup> December an event took place that risked escalating the explosive situation in South Asia into a global war. The Nixon administration ordered the naval task-force 74, led by the nuclear aircraft-carrier *Enterprise*, of the Seventh Fleet detached in the seas close to South Vietnam, to enter the Bay of Bengal with the official order of rescuing the Americans trapped in Dacca. This order appeared more of an excuse rather than an effective operation goal. In fact, not only were the Americans evacuated by the British Royal Air Force by 12<sup>th</sup> December, but the same documents with the memorandum of the discussion held in the White House<sup>380</sup> confirmed that the decision was taken for two reasons: first, to deter India to continue the war after the fall of Dacca in the western sector, and second, to urge the Soviet Union to press India as well. This decision was indeed the outcome of discussions held from 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> December in Washington, in which the Nixon administration analysed two specific CIA reports that considered an Indian attack on West Pakistan as highly probable<sup>381</sup>. According to Kissinger, this was the reflection of the long standing Nixon posture in favour of Pakistan over the South Asian crisis, and the result of the consideration that if Washington did nothing, then the Soviets, the Chinese and all the other countries would no longer have respected them<sup>382</sup>. As a confirmation of the symbolic nature of the gesture, the American task-force for logistic reasons arrived in

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380“WSAG Meeting – South Asia, dated 12th December 1971”, in Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 298–299.

381“Memorandum CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, dated 9th December 1971”, in *ibid.*, 286–288, and 307–318. Even if the State Department opinion was that the CIA reports had little credibility, Nixon judged them as credible (FRUS, Volume E7, Files 168) and pressed the State Department to take some initiatives in support of Pakistan and against India. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 341. On this see: Nicholas and Oldenburg, *Bangladesh*; Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971”; Van Hollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited”. The Nixon administration’s “tilt” towards Pakistan became the target of the critic since it was clear evidence of the high (for some even too high) concentration of power in the foreign policy decision-making process. The criticism was again taken up when documents of the White House and of the State Department were declassified due to the fact that they confirmed precedent thesis, and revealed further specific details, such as the vulgar language used by Nixon and Kissinger to refer to the Indians, defined often as “bastards”, and Indira Gandhi as, “the bitch”, or Bhutto as the “elitist son of a bitch”. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 340.

382Kissinger, *White House Years*, 898. “Memorandum of conversation between Kissinger and Nixon held on 7th December”, in FRUS, Vol. E7, No. 165.

the Bay of Bengal only after the end of the third Indo-Pakistan war<sup>383</sup>. However, in addition to the decision to send task 74, the Nixon administration contacted the Chinese in New York and the Soviet to propose an immediate cease-fire, and the withdrawal of troops<sup>384</sup>. The Nixon administration indeed feared that the Chinese would also have made some aggressive moves to reinforce the American gesture of sending the *Enterprise*<sup>385</sup>. In that case the risk of a Soviet retaliation would have been greater. But the Chinese on 11<sup>th</sup> took a conciliatory position: they affirmed that the emergence of Bangladesh at that time was a foregone conclusion, and agreed to sustain American actions at the UN calling for a cease-fire, and for a mutual withdrawal of troops<sup>386</sup>. The Chinese only raised their voices after the surrender of the East Commander on 16<sup>th</sup> to press India not to continue the war<sup>387</sup>.

Instead, as a reaction to the American decision to send task force 74, New Delhi, in accordance to the Indo-Soviet Treaty, called Moscow for consultation<sup>388</sup>. While D. P. Dhar was sent to Moscow on 11<sup>th</sup>, on 12<sup>th</sup> the Soviet deputy Foreign Ministers Firyubin and Kuznetsov went to New Delhi for consultations, where they remained until the end of the war<sup>389</sup>. In addition, the Soviet Ambassador in India, N. M. Pegov, on 13<sup>th</sup> December reassured India that they would “not allow the seventh fleet to intervene”<sup>390</sup>. Lastly, the Soviet Union also symbolically reinforced their small naval forces located in the Indian Ocean, already strengthened through the dispatch of a first naval task group from Vladivostok on 6<sup>th</sup> December, with a second task force

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383 Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971,” 301.

384 Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 232–233.

385 In reality a CIA report sent on 7<sup>th</sup> December over China’s options in the war had clearly summarised that China was not ready to intervene due to the fact that there were no troops ready along the Tibetan border, and that only small actions to divert attention were probable. See: “Intelligence Memorandum of CIA, Directorate of Intelligence, dated 7<sup>th</sup> December”, in *ibid.*, 282–285. However, the Nixon and Kissinger administration continued to consider a Chinese attack possible until the 11<sup>th</sup> of December. Moreover, in a following conversation with Kissinger Prime Minister Chou declared that China would have intervened only if the Soviet Union reacted to the sending of the American fleet. See: “Memorandum of conversation held in Beijing, dated 20<sup>th</sup> July 1972”, in *ibid.*, 199–211.

386 Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 235; Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971,” 1114.

387 Blechman and Kaplan, *Force Without War*, 195.

388 Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 218.

389 Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 107.

390 The Daily Tribune, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1972.



that entered the Indian Ocean only after the end of the hostilities<sup>391</sup>. However, in those days both the Soviets and the Indians also made conciliatory moves to downplay international tensions: to cancel all the American fears, India on 12<sup>th</sup> December replied through its Foreign Minister Swaran Singh that “India has no territorial ambitions in Bangladesh or West Pakistan”<sup>392</sup>. Furthermore, Moscow reassured the United States, sending on 14<sup>th</sup> a handwritten memorandum stating that Indians had no intentions to seize West Pakistan's territory<sup>393</sup>.

Although Kissinger expressed his opinion that the sending of the *Enterprise* had put pressure over the Soviets (and in turn India) to end the war in the West<sup>394</sup>, there is no clear indication of it<sup>395</sup>. As stated it seems that India, after the first discussions at the beginning of December, had never considered the option to continue the war in the West. The fact that Indian military forces were largely deployed in the East prevented New Delhi from seriously thinking about it, as well as the international opposition of China, the Soviet Union and the United States. The only goal India would have had to continue the war was to try solving the Kashmir question by force. However, it is probable that after having occupied some strategic position in that area, which could have helped New Delhi later at the peace conference to try to find a favourable compromise over the Kashmir issue, India did not feel the necessity to risk internationalising the war. What is certain is that the American decision contributed to further erode Indo-American relations, as it is possible to discern from the letters exchanged between the Indian Prime Minister and the President of the

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391 Warner, “Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971,” 301.

392 Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 129. The fact that there were no plans to continue the war in the West also became clear with the declassified Indian documents. See: “Letter of Haksar to the Prime Minister, dated 9th December 1971”, and “Draft letter from Prime Minister to president Kosygin, dated 10th December 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 173, NMML Archives, New Delhi. Moreover, even the Soviets warned India to end the hostility after the surrender in the East, demonstrating their intention to not tolerate the continuation of the war on the west front. See: “Note of Haksar to the PAC, dated 13th December 1971”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 174, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

393 Kissinger, *White House Years*, 912.

394 *Ibid.*, 913.

395 As already cited, several critics were raised to the Nixon administration for its approach to the South Asian crisis of 1971, and for its decision to send task-force 74. See for example: Nicholas and Oldenburg, *Bangladesh*; Van Hollen, “The Tilt Policy Revisited”; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*.

United States. In a letter sent on 15<sup>th</sup> December, in which Indira Gandhi reassured India's intention not to continue the war in the west, New Delhi accused the United States of having allowed during 1971 the East Pakistan crisis to rise and to end in war<sup>396</sup>. This letter triggered in turn a harsh reply of Nixon that refused all the accusations and instead considered India as the least interested in a political solution, but rather in war<sup>397</sup>. The only clear direct effect that the American decision had was to embolden the government in Pakistan to order the Eastern Commander on 9<sup>th</sup> December to continue resistance since something would have changed<sup>398</sup>.

Instead, the debate at the UN did not produce any insightful results during the 1971 war, although the possibility that the Soviet Union could not support India for the duration of the war was probably one of the major concerns of New Delhi, due to the superiority of the Indian troops in the East, and to the fact that China during the whole of the conflict did not demonstrate any intention to intervene<sup>399</sup>. Moscow did not want to affect its international position supporting India too much. The process of détente with the United States could have suffered from this decision, as well as the Soviet relations with the Islamic states, and also with other third world countries. This was the principle factor that had put pressure on India to accomplish its goals in the military operations as quickly as possible<sup>400</sup>. The debate at the Security Council and General Assembly was clearly vibrant: in the space of two weeks 24 resolutions were presented by singular states, or coalitions<sup>401</sup>. The two most debated were those

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396“Letter from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to President Richard Nixon dated 15th December 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 173, NMML Archives, New Delhi; see also: Khan, *The American Papers*, 743–745.

397Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 305–306.

398“Signal G-0011 from Chief of Staff to Commander, dated 11th December 1971”, in Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 113–114. It is interesting to note that in both the messages dated 5th and 11th December President Yahya Khan gave assurance of the Chinese intervention as if it had already been announced, and therefore already happening. See: “Signal G-0235 from Chief of General Staff to Commander”, and “Signal G-0011 from Chief of Staff to Commander”, in *ibid.*, 97–98, and 113–114. These of course were groundless and fraudulent messages sent with the aim to embolden his troops to resist.

399Beijing did not move its troops along the border, or next to those passes that were not completely blocked by the snow, such as the Sikkim-Tibet and the Ladakh-Tibet ones. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 216.

400“Letter from Haksar to the Prime Minister Gandhi ,dated 13<sup>th</sup> December 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 174, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

401Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 95–96.

proposed by the United States, and by the Soviet Union. The principal questions raised were three: the withdrawal of Indian troops from the Pakistani territories; the withdrawal of Pakistan from East Pakistan; and the issue related to the participation at the session of the government in exile of Bangladesh. China always voted with the majority against the Soviets. The Soviet Union supported India for the whole time, using its veto power for two resolutions on 5<sup>th</sup>, and on 6<sup>th</sup> December<sup>402</sup>. The only resolution that was approved by the General Assembly was the one proposed by Somalia on 6<sup>th</sup> December that requested a cease fire and a withdrawal of troops and that finally gave legal support to the UNEPRO activities which had already been launched in mid-November, and later suspended by U. Thant<sup>403</sup>. However, the Security Council did not approve it due to the Soviet veto, and it remained at the recommendatory level without therefore bringing any relief to the situation, but only renaming the suspended UNEPRO activities as UNROD (United Nations Relief Operations in Dacca) that began to take care of the coordination of the international relief operations in that city only<sup>404</sup>. The resolution that seriously worried India was the one presented by Poland that called for the direct transferral of power in East Pakistan to the representatives elected in 1970, and the withdrawal of all troops. However, Pakistan did not support the resolution, and it did not pass<sup>405</sup>. India was relieved by that outcome that would have required another Soviet veto. India would have indeed lost the opportunity (by that time certain) to win a war against Pakistan, and would have been prevented to assist in the moderate AL forces to establish their

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402 Britain and France supported the position of the United States, even if they opted to abstain when resolutions that did not ask for a political solution of the crisis, or were requiring only a mere withdrawal of forces were raised. Jackson, *South Asian Crisis*, 127–128. France already on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, with a letter sent by President Pompidou to President Yahya, had pressed Pakistan to accept discussions for a political solution with Mujib and the leaders of the AL. See: “Telegram from America Ambassador in Paris”, in Khan, *The American Papers*, 724–725.

403 Gottlieb, “The United Nations and Emergency Humanitarian Assistance in India-Pakistan,” 362–364.

404 See the UN archives available at <http://archives.un.org/ARMS/sites/ARMS/uploads/files/Finding%20Aids/Missions/ag-055%20UNEPRO.pdf> (retrieved on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2012).

405 Sisson and Rose’s account of the fact was that Bhutto, despite President Yahya decision, decided not to approve the resolution. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 307. It seems possible, however, that Bhutto acted in that way since he realised that a military defeat would have reduced the military junta’s authority. This could have helped him to assume political power in Pakistan.

control over the new state of Bangladesh. It was just after the end of the war, on 21<sup>st</sup> December that the Security Council finally passed a resolution demanding the continuation of the cease-fire until the withdrawal of troops had been completed, and called both sides to treat prisoners of war according to the Geneva Convention of 1949<sup>406</sup>.

The development of the international situation, where the United States and China did not put efforts into modifying the military results, and the UN did not reach the consensus on their proposal of a cease-fire, led President Yahya on 14<sup>th</sup> to send a message to Gen. Niazi that stated: “You have fought a heroic battle against overwhelming odds. The nation is proud of you and the world full of admiration. I have done all that is humanly possible to find an acceptable solution to the problem. You have now reached a stage where further resistance is no longer humanly possible nor will it serve any useful purpose. It will only lead to further loss of lives and destruction”<sup>407</sup>. Therefore, Gen. Farman Ali and Gen. Niazi immediately prepared plans for a surrender that was communicated to the Indians through the Americans on 15<sup>th</sup> December. Later on 16<sup>th</sup> December the cease-fire was officially accepted by both parties in a ceremony held at the Ramna Race Course in Dacca. The following day India declared a unilateral cease-fire also for the West frontier, that was accepted immediately by the Pakistani headquarters, with the endorsement of all the global powers.

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406Ibid., 219.

407“Signal G-0013”, in Government of Pakistan, “Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report,” 117.

## ***7. The Indian victory and the following developments in South Asia***

The 1971 Indo-Pakistani war marked the beginning of another era for Pakistan and Bangladesh, while India's status in the region increased since it gained from the division of Pakistan and from the emergence of the Bangladeshi state guided by a friendly government. At the international level, the United States verbally recognised the new hegemonic position of India in South Asia, and from the following year began to make some efforts to try to improve the strained relations with New Delhi. On the contrary, the Soviet Union became in the eyes of Indian a trustable friendly power, enhancing its influence over the region, without however reducing India to a client state.

### ***7.1 The emergence of Bangladesh and of a new Pakistan***

Another era began for the Bengali people: the Government of Bangladesh set in Dacca on 20<sup>th</sup> December, and on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1972, after a short stop in New Delhi where he met Indira Gandhi<sup>408</sup>, Mujib Rahman (after nine months in prison) returned as the new acclaimed president of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the situation in Bangladesh remained explosive in for the following months. For example, the discovery of almost 200 bodies of Bengali professionals and intellectuals killed by the Pakistani forces during the last days of the war spread anger among the Bengali people<sup>409</sup>. The same Indian Army in some cases acted as an *occupying* more than a *liberating* force, stealing goods and weapons<sup>410</sup>. However, the complex operation for

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408Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 126.

409New York Times, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1971.

410Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 122.

the return of the Bengali refugees, who had escaped to India during the year, soon started after the cessation of hostilities. It was successfully concluded with the assistance of the *Mukti Bahini* by 19<sup>th</sup> March 1972, when the Indian Army effectively left the country<sup>411</sup>. Moreover, during the same day, a 25 year *Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace* was signed by India that established and regulated the bilateral relations between the two states. However, the political life in Bangladesh remained crossed by several internal rivalries among political factions and parties, and in 1975 a military coup killed Mujib Rahman, changing yet again the history of this country<sup>412</sup>.

Instead, in what remained of Pakistan at the end of the third Indo-Pakistani war, President Yahya Khan resigned from all the military and political charges after a threatened mutiny of some large sections of the Pakistani military forces. The presidency and the position of martial law administrator were given to Bhutto, with the indication of forming a civilian government<sup>413</sup>. Moreover, the peace negotiations between India and Pakistan were held in Simla during the summer of 1972 and were concluded on 2<sup>nd</sup> July when the President of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi signed an agreement that laid down the principles on which the relations between the two countries should be regulated in the following years. The conference had a bilateral character, differently from the one that followed the 1965 war, and it was called to try and settle the Kashmir issue; the repatriation process of the prisoners of war and of minorities that had been created by the 1971 war; and the withdrawal of the Indian troops from the occupied territories in West Pakistan still retained by India from the end of the conflict. The negotiations were conducted by the Foreign Minister Aziz Ahmed that led the Pakistani delegation, and by P. N. Haksar who substituted D. P. Dhar who had fallen sick some

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411 Mukherji, "The Great Migration of 1971," 449–451.

412 For length reasons it is not possible to consider here the complex domestic political dynamics that Bangladesh had to face after the emergence. On this topic see, for example: Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh from Mujib to Ershad: An Interpretive Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Lifschultz and Bird, *Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution*; Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*.

413 Zaheer, *The Separation of East Pakistan*, 428–430.

days before the conference in the Indian city of Simla<sup>414</sup>. The Indian decision-making process was again, as already underlined in this chapter, limited to the few key advisers of the Prime Minister that formulated the strategy in almost complete autonomy. The PAC and the Indian Parliament were informed only after the signature of the Simla Agreement<sup>415</sup>. At the conference the two countries agreed to restore communication and trade. On one hand, India agreed to return the occupied territories, to collaborate for the return of minorities and prisoners of war even if it was declared necessary to involve Bangladesh in the process, which wanted to have some Pakistani war prisoners detained by India to put them on trial for crimes against humanity. On the other hand, Pakistan subscribed to settle all its disputes with India from that moment onwards, including Kashmir, by peaceful and “bilateral” means<sup>416</sup>, satisfying India. Indeed, one of the first Indian goals at the conference was to cancel the possibility that Pakistan could in the future call a referendum regarding the status of the disputed territory of Kashmir, which despite the UN’s suggestions had not been held since 1949<sup>417</sup>. In order to reach this, the Indian delegation in Simla opted for a *soft line*, refusing to impose a unilateral solution of the issue that would have humiliated Pakistan<sup>418</sup>. The aim was to second Pakistan that argued that it was not possible for them to accept a definitive solution of the Kashmir issue in Simla: the military groups in Islamabad would not have accepted such “political” humiliation in the wave of the military defeat, and would probably have dismissed the civilian government led by Bhutto<sup>419</sup>. As a consequence of Pakistan accepting to resolve all future problems with India on bilateral bases from that moment and onwards, India thus decided to withdraw from the areas it occupied in Kashmir, Sind, and Punjab

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414Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 190.

415“Letter from a member of the parliament to the Prime Minister, dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 1972”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 238; and “Letter from Haksar to Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, dated 11<sup>th</sup> July 1972”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 181, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

416Kux, *India and the United States*, 309.

417Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010).

418P. N. Haksar explained the Indian decision making reference to the European history and to the error made at the “Versailles accord” where the beaten were humiliated and pushed to seek revenge: “Letter of Haksar to Rajni Patel dated July 1972”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 181, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

during the war, and to collaborate for the return of prisoners of war. This also allowed Pakistan to be able to celebrate the agreement as a success, since India returned the territories and agreed to give back the prisoners of war, without Pakistan having to sign a no-pact war, nor to accept a final solution for Kashmir<sup>420</sup>. As a result, Pakistan and India in the Simla agreement recognised the 1949 UN cease-fire line as the *Line of Control* (LOC) in Kashmir that defines the exact border between them<sup>421</sup>. Both states agreed not to “alter it unilaterally, irrespective of mutual differences and legal interpretations” and to “refrain from the threat or the use of force in violation of this line”<sup>422</sup>. Although, as already mentioned, no written reference was made to a definitive solution of the Kashmir issue, Bhutto and Gandhi also verbally agreed to commit their government to finding it one the months to follow.

By the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October New Delhi and Islamabad jointly announced that the LOC had been traced and recognised by both the two parts, and by the end of 1972 the Indian Army completed the withdrawal of its troops from the Pakistani territories. As the next paragraph will show, the repatriation of the prisoners of war was a bit more complex but was solved however by 1974. The only positive development for India in the following years over the specific question of Kashmir, was that after the Simla agreement the United States shifted ground in their approach over the issue, and made no more reference to the UN plebiscite, but demonstrated to be open to support a possible solution made in agreement with India and Pakistan<sup>423</sup>. However, the Kashmir issue remained unsolved and it affected India and Pakistan relations

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419This perception is confirmed by the internal Indian documents that during the first months of 1972 evaluated Bhutto was under strong military pressure for the question of the territories occupied by India and the prisoners of war. A letter sent by A. S. Chib, Joint Secretary at the Pakistan section, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1972 informed indeed the Prime Minister about the changes that occurred in the Pakistani Army: the old guard loyal to Yahya Khan was moved away and a new cohesive group of young officers was organised around Gen. Tikka Khan. On this see: in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 234; “Note on Indian Army sent to Haksar, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1972”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 235, NMML Archives, New Delhi; and the “Joint Intelligent Paper No. 30 (73), dated 7<sup>th</sup> November 1973”, in MEA, PP (JS) 4/2/74, National Archives, New Delhi.

420Talbot, *Pakistan*, 237.

421Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 191.

422“The Simla Agreement signed on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1972 by Bhutto and Gandhi”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, I&II inst., f. n. 31, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

423Kux, *India and the United States*, 309.



later, especially since the Nineties and onward, when tensions along the border erupted again. When this happened several voices in India attacked and criticised the Simla agreement and the policy undertaken by India's government accusing it of having lost the political momentum to solve that specific issue<sup>424</sup>. Needless to say, these critics of course were favoured by the same kind of Indira Gandhi's decision-making process that did not consult the Parliament nor the Cabinet; and by the fact that despite the promises exchanged at Simla, Bhutto and Gandhi in the following years did not find any final settlement regarding Kashmir<sup>425</sup>.

After the Simla agreement the question of the repatriation of a large number of Pakistani prisoners of war (around 93.000 people, of which 86.000 military personnel)<sup>426</sup> captured by the Indian Army and moved to jails and detention centres in India, was discussed by India and Pakistan at the bilateral level in the following years. The solution of this issue took a long time since Bangladesh claimed 195 prisoners of war, especially top ranks, to put on trial for war crimes. However, Pakistan officially recognised the existence of the government of Bangladesh only later, in 1974, and therefore the negotiations over this issue remained blocked until that time, during which Pakistan raised an international campaign against India's violation of the Geneva Convention. In addition, the question was further complicated by the issue of minorities: on the one hand, like the Non-Bengali in Bangladesh who wanted to go to Pakistan, and the Bengali in Pakistan that wanted to go to Bangladesh<sup>427</sup>. Among the non-Bengali in Bangladesh there were around 260.000 Bihari who collaborated with the Pakistani authorities during the last months, and who after the war wanted to migrate to Pakistan to avoid revenge, and to escape from the camps where they were confined by the new Bangladeshi

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424See for example: Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy*, 187–230 and Gupta (Indian Express, 17th December 2011). The general impression that Simla is considered as a lost occasion for India emerged from almost all the interviews the author made in New Delhi in the fall of 2011.

425Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict*, 189–224.

426"Letter from Defence Secretary to Haksar, dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 1972", in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst. f. n. 179, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

427Antara Datta, "The Repatriation of 1973 and the Re-making of Modern South Asia," *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no. 1 (2011): 62–64.

government<sup>428</sup>. On the other hand, in Pakistan there were around 150,000 – 190,000 Bengali that showed intentions to go back to Bangladesh, but their position was delicate. In fact, since they had remained in West Pakistan during the war, the Bengali who instead fought for the liberation war questioned their loyalty<sup>429</sup>. To complicate the problem even more, Pakistan was reluctant to accept the return of the Non-Bengali population from Bangladesh<sup>430</sup>. The decisive step was finally made on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1973 when an international agreement was finally signed in New Delhi by India and Pakistan, with the external participation of Bangladesh, paving the way for the solution of the complex situation<sup>431</sup>. The question was then completely solved by 1974 when Pakistan recognised Bangladesh and all the prisoners of war and the minorities were repatriated<sup>432</sup>.

## ***7.2 India in the South Asian region and in the world***

At the end of 1971 India could argue to have obtained some important results in its foreign policy thanks to its deployment of a military strategy to confront the crisis of East Pakistan. New Delhi indeed had victoriously supported the Bengali liberation movement for the whole time, and solved the critical issue of the refugees that had poured into its territories during that year. Moreover, in favour of India's reputation, the same military strategy followed by India led the 1971 war to be depicted in the

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428Howard S. Levie, "The Indo-Pakistani Agreement of August 28, 1973," *The American Journal of International Law* 68, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 95–97.

429Datta, "The Repatriation of 1973 and the Re-making of Modern South Asia," 67.

430"Summary of discussion between Foreign Minister Swaran Singh and Haksar, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1973", in Haksar papers, I&II inst., f. n. 31; and "Copy of the Pakistan's government aide mémoire, dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1973", in P. N. Haksar private papers, I&II inst., f. n. 31, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

431Datta, "The Repatriation of 1973 and the Re-making of Modern South Asia."

432In reality the question of the repatriation of the Non-Bengali was not completely solved in 1973. Pakistan accepted only 83,000 people of the 260,000. Those who remained in Bangladesh were not recognised as Bangladeshi citizens, and continued to live in temporary camps. Not surprisingly some of them left Bangladesh in the following years fleeing illegally to Pakistan through India and Nepal, while some other official repatriation turns were only organised in 1974, 1975, 1977, and 1979. *Ibid.*, 70.

manuals of international law as the first conflict fought for humanitarian reasons in world history, and not as an unjustified aggression<sup>433</sup>. India with its military campaign in East Pakistan solved the question of those training camps that East Pakistan had set up in its territory to drill the North-East rebels, like the Naga and Mizo, destroying them during the East Pakistan campaign<sup>434</sup>. The military victory also had positive effects at the political level: firstly, Indira Gandhi reached “the zenith of her power and glory”<sup>435</sup>, and she was celebrated as “Durga”, the Hindu goddess of war, in the Parliament by the opposition, and by *The Economist* as the “Empress of India”; and secondly, it partly favoured the Congress party's victory at the state elections in the spring of 1972. Even if to do this New Delhi had to accept signing a formal agreement with the Soviet Union, it is possible to argue that the gains were greater than the losses. In fact, although Moscow finally recognised its influence over India, New Delhi did not become a client state of the Soviet Union. Soviet military centres were not built on Indian Territory, and military exercises were not held in the following years<sup>436</sup>. India did not feel obliged to positively answer to the Soviet proposals of collective security, like for example the one President Leonid Brezhnev proposed in 1973 during a visit to India<sup>437</sup>. On the contrary, the agreement with Moscow allowed New Delhi to solve the problematic question of the intervention of the UN forces in the East Pakistan crisis, to face more confidently the sending of the American nuclear aircraft-carrier to the Bay of Bengal, and to formalise and reinforce the strict relationship already set up in the previous years on the military and economic field with its major economic and military partner<sup>438</sup>.

In addition to this, the military strategy adopted by New Delhi to face East Pakistan's crisis and the signature of the Indo-Soviet Treaty did not prevent the

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433Simón Chesterman, *Just War Or Just Peace?: Humanitarian Intervention and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71.

434Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*, 286.

435Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, 86.

436Mansingh, *India's Search for Power*, 51.

437Jyotindra Nath Dixit, *Across Borders: Fifty Years of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Picus Books, 1998), 114.

438Sanjay Gaikwad, *Dynamics of Indo-Soviet Relations: The Era of Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1990), 110.

improvement of the Indo-American relations in the following years. Although the tense and hostile personal relations between Nixon and Mrs. Gandhi, and the same course of events, critically challenged the following relations between the two countries, the United States could not allow India only to be partner to the Soviets, and soon after the war the discussion to re-launch bilateral relations began. Facing criticism at home for his handling of the South Asian crisis of 1971<sup>439</sup>, in 1972 Nixon had already made an important opening, appointing Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a democrat, as the new ambassador in India<sup>440</sup>. Moreover, during 1972-3 the American Embassy and Consulate demonstrated their concrete interest in warming relations with India searching to enlarge contact with the Indian government<sup>441</sup>. Similarly India showed a lot of interest in ameliorating relations with the United States from 1972<sup>442</sup>, and the same Indira Gandhi in 1972 made some accommodative gestures to the US stating: “we do not believe in permanent estrangement”<sup>443</sup>. As evidence of the improved relations, in 1974 a significant gesture was made by the Nixon administration: the problem of the rupees held by the United States had largely been solved. This issue was created by the fact that since 1954, when the Public Law 480 was enacted by the Congress, the Indians had paid for the American food aid in rupees, and not in dollars. Although the rupees would have been used for the expenditures of the American Embassy and Consulate in India, the sum held by the United States had become enormous by 1972, reaching the sum of \$ 3 billion, and

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439As already mentioned before, the Nixon administration had to face domestic criticism about its moral failure to condemn the violence perpetuated by the Pakistani military junta in East Pakistan, and about its decision to send task-force 74. The latter was judged by many as a risky and unnecessary gesture that could have transformed a regional and confined dispute into a potentially global conflict. Kux, *India and the United States*, 307.

440Ibid., 309.

441 “Note of the Intelligence Bureau sent by Joint Secretary to Prime Minister Office, dated 19<sup>th</sup> September 1972”, in P. N. Haksar papers, I&II inst., f. n. 55, NMML Archives, New Delhi; and “Telegram sent by Joint Secretary Teja to all heads of missions on Indo-American relations, dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 1972”, in MEA, AMS, WII/103/4/73-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

442 “Record of the discourse of Foreign Minister in Lok Sabha dated 30<sup>th</sup> November 1972”, in MEA, AMS, WII/103/4/73-I, and “Letter of Deputy Director, AMS, to Foreign Minister and Director, dated 27<sup>th</sup> November 1972”, in MEA, AMS, WII/103/4/73-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

443Gandhi, *India and Bangla Desh; Selected Speeches and Statements, March to December, 1971* [By] Indira Gandhi, 75.

transforming itself into an important political problem<sup>444</sup>. Therefore, paradoxically (considering the level of estrangement reached during the 1971 war) it was the Nixon administration that on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1974 signed an agreement to give back \$ 2,2 billion of the rupees as a grant, solving thus *the Rupee Deal*, and paving the way for Indians to ask for the resumption of aid<sup>445</sup>.

In addition, the military strategy successfully adopted by India changed the perception of India's power position in South Asia, in New Delhi, and elsewhere. Several declassified Indian documents indeed underlined the fact that after the 1971 war India had been recognised as the undoubted major power in South Asia by both China<sup>446</sup>, and the United States<sup>447</sup>. However, even if the victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war surely boosted the power of India in the region, in order to correctly comprehend the relation of power in South Asia it is important to underline three factors. Firstly, India won the East Pakistan military campaign, and not that of the western sector. In fact, as an expert in Pakistan's policy has recognised, who has argued that “the primary responsibility [of the partition of Pakistan] lay in Islamabad – chauvinism had compounded folly in the dangerous denial of Bengali democratic urges”<sup>448</sup>, the fall of East Pakistan in November 1971 was almost certain. Instead, a war on the western sector would have been a completely different event. In the West

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444Kux, *India and the United States*, 312–314.

445Blechman and Kaplan, *Force Without War*, 214–218.

446“Letter by the Joint Secretary of RAW, K. S. Nair, to Cabinet on Pakistan's intentions dated 30<sup>th</sup> March 1972”, in Haksar papers, III inst., f. n. 231, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

447See, for example: American Assistant Secretary Sisco who recognised India as the stronger player of South Asia on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1973 in on of his intervention at the American Congress, reported in: “Telegram from Indian Embassy in Washington to New Delhi, dated 13<sup>th</sup> March 1973”, in MAE, AMS, WII/109/1/73-I; also American Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near and Middle East and South Asian Affairs, Alfred Antherton, recognised India as the major power of South Asia. In fact, he announced that the United States would have refrained in arming Pakistan to keep the military balance with India as they had done before 1971. This is reported in: “Telegram from Indian Embassy in Washington to New Delhi, dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 1975”, in MEA, PP(JS) WII/4/3/74. The recognition of India's new position was also made by both the British Prime Minister, and by the American President during a bilateral meeting. For this see: “Telegram from Rasgotra to foreign secretary dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1973”, in MEA, AMS, WII/103/4/73-I. Lastly, similar recognition was also granted by Warren Christopher, American Department Secretary, in: “Letter from N. Dayal, Counsellor of Indian Embassy in the United States, to Indrajit Singh, Department Secretary in MEA, New Delhi, dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 1977”, in MEA, AMS, WII/104/28/77, National Archives, New Delhi.

448Talbot, *Pakistan*, 212.

the forces were balanced<sup>449</sup>, and India would not have easily won in 1971. Secondly, the loss of the eastern wing did not weaken it as much as it seemed with a superficial glance: since 1972 the new smaller Pakistan was easier to defend, and did not have to invest resources in the development of the East, as it had begun to do from 1965/1966, though just in a partial way<sup>450</sup>. Finally, as an effect of its defeat, Pakistan embarked on project to arm itself. First, the new Pakistani president, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, as soon as January 1972 declared his intention to equip Pakistan with a nuclear bomb: his declaration was to contrast the supremacy of India in South Asia and to recover his country from the defeat, even at the cost of having to “eat leaves, or go hungry”<sup>451</sup>. Second, Bhutto also supported the military plans of re-arming in order to bring them back to the same level of military equity as India like they were before the 1971 war, even if India already had the upper hand<sup>452</sup>. In order to do that Pakistan turned to China and to the Arab world to obtain military sales and aid<sup>453</sup>, therefore, investing in rebuilding Pakistan's navy and air forces that had almost been completely destroyed during the conflict<sup>454</sup>. Despite all these factors, the fact that Pakistan felt the necessity to become a nuclear power, and to produce a nuclear bomb in order to overcome India's superior position of strength, is a clear signal that New Delhi had sufficiently demonstrated its superiority to Islamabad through the military strategy undertaken in 1971.

At this point, it is only possible to identify two long-term negative consequences for India from the military strategy it undertook in 1971. First, the American and the Soviet naval task forces remained in the Indian Ocean for some time after the

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449Interview with Gen. Shergill, hold in New Delhi on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011.

450Rahman, *East and West Pakistan*, 32–36.

451Talbot, *Pakistan*, 238.

452R. Rikhye, “Assessing Pakistan’s Military Expansion Since 1971,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 8 (February 25, 1989): 395–398.

453“Letter of Under Secretary R. K. Kapur to Joint Secretary (PP) dated May 1975”, and “Joint Intelligence Report, dated 24<sup>th</sup> February 1976”, in MEA, PP(JS) /4/3/74, National Archives, New Delhi.

454See for example: “Letter of Gen. Manekshaw to Haksar dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1972”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 235; “Letter by Joint Secretary of RAW, K. S. Nair, to Cabinet Secretariat on Pakistan's intentions dated on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1972”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 231; and “Letter of Haksar to Prime Minister dated on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1971”, in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 180, NMML Archives, New Delhi.

cessation of the hostilities between India and Pakistan. This gave the United States a stronger argument about the need to build an American military bases on the island of Diego Garcia, which had been under British control since before 1968<sup>455</sup>. This fact obviously led both India and China to blame the naval presence of the two super powers<sup>456</sup>. However, this would have taken place in any case, since the future of the British base of Diego Garcia had not been determined before 1971. The second negative consequence can instead be identified at the level of domestic policy. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the victory of the 1971 war may have reinforced the personal tendency of Indira Gandhi to rule concentrating all the powers and decision in her hands, and in those of the small coterie of her advisers. In 1975 this aspect resulted in Indira Gandhi suspending India's democratic policy to impose her dictatorial power, significantly weakening the democratic character of India's institutions.

## ***8. Conclusion***

From the analysis developed so far, it is possible to argue that during 1971 India successfully implemented its foreign policy enlarging its power inside the South Asian region. New Delhi seized the opportunity that emerged from the eruption of the East Pakistan crisis, offering both hospitality and support to the Bengali forces that were challenging the authority of the Pakistani military junta of Islamabad. This

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455On the question of the strategic control of the Indian Ocean see, for example: Barry Buzan, *A Sea of Troubles?: Sources of Dispute in the New Ocean Regime* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1978). W. K. Andersen, "Soviets in the Indian Ocean: Much Ado About Something—But What?," *Asian Survey* 24, no. 9 (1984): 910–930; On the naval strategy India followed after 1971 see: Marcus B. Zinger, "The Development of Indian Naval Strategy Since 1971," *Contemporary South Asia* 2, no. 3 (1993): 335–359.

456Peking Review, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1972.

decision put India in a difficult position during May 1971, when millions of Bengali crossed the border with India to find shelter from the violence, and created several problems for India at the economic, social, and political level. However, this development did not modify India's stance. New Delhi instead increased its political and military support for the Bengali guerrilla groups, and raised its voice towards the great powers and the international community to press Pakistan to stop the violence and to find a political solution with the Bengali forces. Nevertheless, the international community did not react as India would have liked. Instead, it supported Pakistan's proposal to send UN forces into East Pakistan to facilitate, at least in theory, the refugees' return. India opposed this option since New Delhi would have preferred the international community to oblige Islamabad to discuss with the Bengali political forces – that had formed the Government of Bangladesh in exile – in order to solve the refugee burden once and for all. Despite the Pakistani attempts to assume a much more conciliatory posture at the formal level, in fact, in June the refugee influx did not show signs of reversing, or at least of ending. Thus, New Delhi had begun to consider the option of resorting to war to solve the refugee situation: this rendered the UN involvement undesired by New Delhi. However, the international community threatened to bring the issue to the UN Security Council, obliging India to seek the support of one of the big powers and escape its isolationism. This led New Delhi to seriously consider the possibility of signing a military treaty with the Soviet Union. In addition, in July even the parallel evolution of the Sino-American normalisation of relations pressed India to secure Soviet support in case of an escalation of the war with Pakistan: the news of Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing during his official visit to Pakistan indeed alarmed New Delhi. India began to fear that the new axis among Washington-Islamabad-Beijing could influence the American or Chinese approach towards a possible Indo-Pakistan war, leading them to intervene in defence of Pakistan. The same posture the Nixon administration had adopted since March, and kept during July, seemed to confirm this thesis. All these factors led India to exploit the Cold War dynamics in its favour and to sign the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation* that Moscow had been



proposing to New Delhi since 1969. This was the strategic step that allowed India to adopt a military strategy to solve the problem of the Bengali refugees, without worrying too much about the international community's reactions, or that of the United States. During the fall tensions grew along the borders with Pakistan. India started a serious diplomatic campaign to better promote its position regarding the East Pakistan crisis to the world. At the end of November, New Delhi authorised its troops to cross the borders with East Pakistan. This provoked Pakistan, who on 3<sup>rd</sup> December reacted by launching an air strike attack, after which an open war was declared. During the conflict India demonstrated its complete military superiority in the Eastern front, and resisted to the Pakistani attacks in the Western sector. During the final days, tensions rose at the international level: in fact, the United States took the decision to send a nuclear aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal in order to demonstrate its power and symbolically reassure Pakistan of the fact that they would not allow India to continue the war in the West sector. The day after the Eastern Pakistan Commander surrendered, New Delhi declared a unilateral cease-fire that definitively ended the war. Therefore, Pakistan was separated, and a new state, Bangladesh, emerged from the ashes of East Pakistan led by those Bengali forces that India supported in their fight. Moreover, after a few months the issue of the refugees was solved and they returned to their homes, and by the summer of 1972 all possibilities for Pakistan to call for a UN plebiscite over the status of Kashmir were cancelled.

As a result, it is now possible to argue that during 1971 India reinforced its status of power in the South Asia region, becoming its undoubted hegemony. In fact, India implemented its strategy and successfully reached its objectives through the exploitation of the Cold War rivalries in its favour, reinforcing its relations with the Soviet Union, without damaging those with the United States too much. Before concluding, two more points should be considered. The first helps to reinforce the interpretation that India pursued its power goals during 1971 with realism: in fact, the analysis developed in the chapter argues that the Indian political leadership, in spite of its socialist inclinations, did not sign the Treaty with the Soviet Union only

because of its ideological grounds, but also as the result of a serious rational and realistic evaluation. The second, instead, is a methodological consideration: it is crucial to underline the importance of India's archival material. In fact, the Haksar papers<sup>457</sup> taken from the Archives of the Nehru Memorial and Museum Library, and those collected at the Ministry of External Affairs were of crucial importance to prove the following considerations. First, the relative secondary influence played by the United States. India indeed ceded to the Soviet insistence to come to a military alliance already in June 1971, thus before the announcement of the success of the Kissinger's trip to China. Second, the Indian documents consulted allow one to argue that the international perception of India significantly changed after the end of the 1971 war, and that India came to be considered as the dominant power in South Asia.

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<sup>457</sup>The fact that the P. N. Haksar private papers were those providing more information in relation to the Treaty issue should not be surprising since, as shown in the third paragraph P. N. Haksar was one of the key figures that influenced India's foreign policy decision-making process in 1971, much more than the Ministry of External Affairs.



## **THIRD CHAPTER:**

# **INDIA'S PEACEFUL NUCLEAR EXPLOSION AND THE IMPACT ON GLOBAL PROLIFERATION**

### *1. Introduction*

Following the victory against Pakistan in 1971, Indira Gandhi's government obtained another important result in 1974 by exploding a nuclear device near Pokhran (Rajasthan): India was the sixth country in the world to have carried out a nuclear explosion. Although this only came ten years after the first Chinese test, the technological result had important political significance. The 1974 explosion was a demonstration of India's power, not only reinforcing its hegemonic position in the South Asian region, but also contributing to establishing itself as an emerging middle power at the international level. India becoming the sixth nuclear state in the world indeed triggered alarmed reactions especially in the West, which again felt directly challenged by the loss of its technological military superiority. In answer to this, great powers renewed their efforts in establishing more stringent norms on nuclear exports in the years that followed.

With the aim of critically analysing how India obtained this technological and political success, this chapter will consider the development of the Indian nuclear power programme since its establishment in 1948. This historical analysis will help

in inferring that the political decision to explode a nuclear device had been taken long before Indira Gandhi assumed power in 1971, though she was responsible for concretely authorising the detonation of the device in 1974. This chapter will argue that the preparation process for a nuclear blast was indeed initiated by Nehru's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, as a reaction to the first Chinese nuclear device detonation in 1964, two years after the Indians were defeated by China. However, this chapter will also infer that the basis on which Shastri's decision was made had been posed even earlier, during the Nehruvian period.

Therefore, the second paragraph of this chapter will, first of all, briefly focus on the legal framework on which the Indian nuclear power programme was established in 1948, highlighting the high level of secrecy and autonomy that it was granted. The same nuclear power strategy formulated by the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Homi Bhabha, will be commented on, together with the analysis of the posture towards nuclear disarmament adopted by India. This analysis will show that India assumed an ambivalent posture: on one hand it declared its complete adversity towards nuclear weapons, and established several different international collaborations in the civilian field; on the other, it refused to sign those non-proliferation initiatives which could have impeded its development of a nuclear bomb in the future, thus keeping its nuclear option open. The impact the first Chinese nuclear explosion had on India's public opinion will then be analysed. With respect to this, it will be shown that the Indian leadership decided to authorise the construction of a *Peaceful Nuclear Explosive* without needing to modify its international position over non-proliferation issues. Continuing with the analysis, the technical problems the Indian scientific community faced in the second half of the Sixties will be considered, in parallel to India's reactions to the emergence of a more stringent non-proliferation regime as a consequence of the Chinese explosion. The third paragraph will then assess the events from the moment Mrs. Gandhi took power in 1971 until 1974. The international collaboration with Canada and the United States in the nuclear field will therefore be analysed, together with the fact that from 1971 India had repetitively announced its intentions to explode a peaceful nuclear

device as soon as possible. It will also be shown how the international events of the East Pakistan crisis contributed to expanding India's public support for exploding a nuclear device. Another topic of discussion will be the growing domestic problems faced by Mrs. Gandhi's government after 1973; events that could have induced the Prime Minister to authorise the detonation of the nuclear device as soon as declared ready by the scientists in order to divert public attention. The second part of the third paragraph will then analyse the first reactions to the nuclear explosion triggered in India and abroad. As a conclusive paragraph, the fourth will analyse the long-term effects of the 1974 explosion. It will thus consider the impact it had on the global non-proliferation regime, and on the domestic situation in India until 1977. It will then consider how, the new non-proliferation regime subsequently impacted India's nuclear programme, and how New Delhi reacted to it. Finally, an evaluation of the long-term effect the 1974 explosion had on India's nuclear power programme will be drafted.

## ***2. India's nuclear program from 1947 until 1971***

The term *nuclear power* is generally used improperly and often with a touch of frightening ambiguity. In its most broadly generic definition, access to the world on an atomic scale could have multiple meanings: from everyday life with hospital and airport x-ray scanners, to electricity production by means of nuclear power plants, as well as enrichment technology for fuel production in weapon development programs. In India this confusing ambiguity is even more evident than in other countries: as proven by its nuclear programme history. This paragraph will trace the development of India's nuclear program from the emergence of an Independent India in 1947, until the beginning of Indira Gandhi's second government in March 1971. The aim is to

present the origins and the main bullet points of programme in order to highlight its historical equivocation.

### *2.1 India's legal framework and organization of its decision-making process*

As a preface to the analysis of India's nuclear programme, it is important to underline how decisions had been taken concerning nuclear policy from 1947. Therefore, the Indian legal framework regulating the nuclear sector will be briefly presented, depicting two of its most important characteristics. First, giving complete autonomy to the institution in charge and forcing it to answer directly to the Prime Minister, it enhanced the already highly centralised and personalized foreign policy decision-making process analysed earlier in the second chapter. Second, by covering all the nuclear activities and programme with secrecy, the Indian legal framework made it difficult for external powers to access information.

The Atomic Energy Act of 1948 regulates nuclear research and activities in India: it sanctions that the Indian government has complete control of the atomic energy sector, thus prohibiting private activity in the field, and making the Indian government the owner of all atomic energy matters. The 1948 Act created the legal framework on which the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was formed in August 1948. The AEC was formally put under the control of the Science and Technology Ministry with the aim to develop and formulate India's nuclear power programme, to train scientists and to manage mineral deposits. The fact that the Indian Prime Ministers had historically always covered the position of Minister of Science and Technology, directly centralised the nuclear programme control in their hands, making them de facto the only institution that could interfere in the AEC activities. It is thus not surprising that George Perkovich – author of the most detailed analysis of

India's nuclear programme existing up to today – states that: “successive chairmen [of the AEC] have exerted extraordinary influence over India's nuclear activities and policies”<sup>1</sup>.

All other Indian governmental bodies only played a passive role. The Political Affairs Committee (PAC), which reunited the more influential Ministers of the Cabinet, should have actively participated in the defence and foreign policy decision-making process, but the Indian Prime Ministers' habit of taking decisions by mainly consulting personal advisers, made the influence of this organism minimal. The only notable exception was that of Indira Gandhi during her first government (1966-1971) who, instead, largely relied on the Cabinet in formulating India's policy towards the Non Proliferation Treaty. Also the Ministry of External Affairs was generally not involved in decisions regarding the testing and development of nuclear technologies, although it played an important role in formulating India's position over non-proliferation issues in international fora. Similarly, the Ministry of Defence did not have an active role in the formulation of the nuclear programme, though after 1958 its Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) worked as the technological designer and producer of the nuclear explosive devices that the Indian government decided to test in 1974 and 1998<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore the Finance Minister always had a limited role in the development of nuclear policies too, and was only consulted when projects and policies proposed by the Atomic Energy Commission and by the DRDO had to be included in the national budgets. Coming to the Parliament, again limitation of power came into play: because of the sole possibility of questioning ministers about the programme already formulated, its influence was almost irrelevant. Nevertheless as shown later, the development of the Indian nuclear programme demonstrates that the public opinion, as well as the opposition parties

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1 George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 9.

2 Itty Abraham, “India's ‘Strategic Enclave’: Civilian Scientists and Military Technologies,” *Armed Forces & Society* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 4 This institution was indeed formed in 1958 by the merge of the Defence Science Organisation (DSO), and the Technical Development Establishments (TSEs) with the aim of taking care of the production of sensible weapons and military equipment that could not be imported. DRDO official website: <http://drdo.gov.in/drdo/English/index.jsp?pg=genesis.jsp> (retrieved on 15th October 2012).



voices, effectively had some influences on the Prime Minister's decisions. Finally, it is interesting to note that the Indian Armed Forces also played no role in influencing nuclear programmes. To understand this account it is important to remember here what has already been underlined in the second chapter: differently from Pakistan's case, the founders of Independent India decided to give the Armed forces a secondary role only in the decision making process<sup>3</sup>. The reason was not to allow the Army, which during the fight for independence had been loyal to the British until the last, to gain prominence in politics and to raise allocations to the defence<sup>4</sup>. Although the defeat in the 1962 war with China triggered major involvement of the Indian armed forces in the decision making process relating to foreign policy, this was not in the nuclear field.

As a consequence, the formulation of the nuclear policy remained almost entirely restricted to the Prime Minister and the AEC scientists. The fact that Jawaharlal Nehru not only remained Prime Minister from Independence until his death in 1964, but also for the whole period the Minister of External Affairs and the Minister of Science and Technology, enhanced the centralisation of powers in Prime Ministerial hands. Better was the case of Lal Bahadur Shastri (Nehru's successor) and of Indira Gandhi, who at least added the role of Minister of Science and Technology to their duties as Prime Minister, and not that of Minister of External Affairs. As a consequence, decision making power over the nuclear field was almost totally centred on the relationships between the Indian Prime Ministers and the AEC chairmen.

A second important characteristic of the Indian Atomic Energy Act of 1948 is the government's entitlement to restrict information: “any information not so far published relating to the theory, design, construction and operation of nuclear reactors, or an existing or proposed plant used or proposed to be used for the purpose

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3 Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 173–4.

4 N. S. Sisodia and Chitrapu Uday Bhaskar, *Emerging India: Security and Foreign Policy Perspectives* (New Delhi: Bibliophile South Asia, 2005).

of producing, developing or using atomic energy”<sup>5</sup>. Indian laws imposed more secrecy than the British or American legislations did<sup>6</sup>, punishing any secrecy violation with up to five years imprisonment. This legal framework led the Indian government not to keep written records of any discussions nor decisions, as the officials who participated in the process testify<sup>7</sup>. In order to justifying such a high level of secrecy in 1948 the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made reference to the need to protect India's knowledge and materials from exploitation by more advanced countries, and to assure states like the United States and the United Kingdom that in case of cooperation with India, their secrets would be protected<sup>8</sup>. When asked at the Lok Sabha on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1948 about the need for the imposing secrecy even though the peaceful intentions of the programme had been declared Nehru interestingly answered: “Somehow we cannot help associating atomic energy with war. [...] we must develop this atomic energy quite apart from war – indeed I think we must develop it for the purpose of using it for peaceful purposes. [...] Of course, if we are compelled as a nation to use it for other purposes, possibly no pious sentiments of any of us will stop the nation from using it that way”<sup>9</sup>. With these statements the Indian Prime Minister disclosed the crucial fact that the secrecy would have been useful in the unfortunate case of India having to resort to nuclear technology for military purposes.

Generally Indian commentaries deny that India's quest for nuclear power had been ambiguous since Nehru's time. Typically it is argued that Nehru only considered nuclear power for peaceful purposes. For example, T. T. Poulouse writes that: “Nehru's nuclear decisions were [...] deeply rooted in his scientific temper, [and in his] abhorrence of nuclear weapons and nuclear allergy after the supreme tragedy at

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5 B. Banerjee and N. Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008), xi. The Atomic Energy Acts of 1948 and of 1962 can be found in Appendices A8 and A9.

6 On this see: Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 17.

7 See the account provided by the Indian scientist Homi Sethna to *ibid.*, 170. The fact is also confirmed by Shyam Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb* (Sahibabad: Vikas, 1979), 145.

8 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 20.

9 *Ibid.*

Hiroshima and Nagasaki”<sup>10</sup>. Instead, it was the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), Homi Bhabha, the man who gave the dual purpose (civil and military) to India's nuclear program<sup>11</sup>. According to this interpretation, being the AEC research director, and in 1954 also the Department of Atomic Energy Secretary, the physicist was able to exploit the unusual institutional freedom for which he could develop a nuclear programme leaving the door open to the development of nuclear weapons<sup>12</sup>. The fact that the Indian Prime Minister Nehru had a friendly and strict relationship with Homi Bhabha, and considered him to be the most reliable collaborator, apparently gave him even more freedom to develop the nuclear programme in almost complete autonomy. Nevertheless, to avoid explaining the reasons why literature had decided to give this vision of the Indian Prime Minister, it is crucial to recall the words pronounced by Jawaharlal Nehru in the quote a few lines above. In fact, if on one hand Nehru was morally against the use of nuclear weapons, on the other he was realist enough to support the adoption of atomic science and technology both for the country's civilian development and defence. His words quoted by Dorothy Newman further strengthened this ambivalence: “... I hope Indian scientists will use the atomic force for constructive purposes. But if India is threatened she will inevitably try to defend herself by all means at her disposal”<sup>13</sup>. As a consequence, it seems more credible to assume that Nehru's mind was clear when it came to the decision to support the legal framework that gave such large autonomy to the AEC scientists, as well as covering their activities with secrecy.

When the 1962 Atomic Energy Act was voted, the secrecy that covered nuclear policies and the centralisation of power in the hands of the Prime Minister were further reinforced. This second act concentrated even more power in the AEC, making investigating and questioning its activities almost impossible for the other

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10 T. T. Poulouse, “India’s Nuclear Policy,” in *Perspective of India’s Nuclear Policy* (Young Asia, New Delhi, 1978), 102.

11 Brahma Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation: The U.S.-Indian Conflict* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993), 1–4; Ashok Kapur, *India’s Nuclear Option: Atomic Diplomacy and Decision Making* (New Delhi: Praeger, 1976), 107; Bhatia, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 106 and 150.

12 Robert S. Anderson, *Building Scientific Institutions in India: Saha and Bhabha* (Montreal: McGill University, 1975), 40.

13 Dorothy Newman, *Nehru: The First 60 Years*, vol. 2 (New York: John Day, 1965), 264.

Indian political institutions. Although this aspect had raised diffuse criticism until today<sup>14</sup>, the legal framework has never been modified, neither when the Department of Atomic Energy and Space was founded in 1972, nor later. As a result, despite its declared intentions for peaceful purposes, and thanks to the highest secrecy and autonomy granted to the institutions in charge, it is possible to argue that the Indian nuclear programme was based on a legal framework that exploits the necessary ambiguity for making research for both civilian and military nuclear technology applications possible.

## ***2.2 The Indian birth of the nuclear programme and the strategy development under Jawaharlal Nehru***

Indian policy-makers had already realised the importance of atomic research for the economic and technological development at the time the Republic of India was founded in 1947<sup>15</sup>. The ability to master the atom meant modernity, prosperity, national pride and international power at that time. The aim of studying the atom was to free India from electrical energy shortages that were identified as major obstacles for the development of the Indian industry. The traditional sources for electricity production used in India, like hydro-power and coal, were indeed only partially able to answer the population's needs<sup>16</sup>. As a consequence, when the nuclear power program was launched in 1948 stress was put on the need for self-reliance: it was evaluated that the capability of producing commercial nuclear power would have freed India from oil imports, from more expensive fuel cycle costs, and from the

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14 Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998), 115–120; Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 78.

15 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 25.

16 Still nowadays several areas of India are depending on monsoons for sufficiently providing electricity. The unpredictability of Monsoons still cause severe power crisis.

polluting coal-fired thermal stations<sup>17</sup>. Nuclear power was therefore identified as the crucial sector in which investing was important. Though because of its complex nature it required greater efforts with respect to other sources, especially during the initial phases of its development.

Homi Bhabha actively worked to develop India's nuclear program from the foundation of the AEC. In November 1954, the Indian nuclear programme was presented at the conference on the Development of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes, held in New Delhi<sup>18</sup>. Adopted six years later by the Indian government in the Third Five-Year Plan, the plan was based upon the discovery that India had larger reserves of thorium than of uranium. According to Indian estimates, nowadays India indeed still possess 360.000 tonnes of thorium (Th-232)<sup>19</sup>, and only had scarce reserves of around 70.000 tonnes of uranium (U-238)<sup>20</sup>. This discovery directly contributed to the formulation of a nuclear programme based on the exploitation of the thorium reserves. As a consequence the nuclear strategy was articulated in three stages. Each stage would allow an increase in the production of electricity, while exploiting successive reactor technologies to produce the fissile material<sup>21</sup> required by the next generations. In the first stage, making use of international assistance, India would build natural uranium (U-238) fuelled reactors to produce plutonium (Pu-239). In the implementation of this simple reactor, heavy-water<sup>22</sup> to control the reaction was envisaged, together with a close cycle waste reprocessing system to separate the produced Pu-239. In the second stage, more sophisticated types of

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17 Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 12–3.

18 Ganesan Venkataraman, *Bhabha and His Magnificent Obsessions* (New Delhi: Universities Press, 1994), 158.

19 Among other information the atomic number gives an indication on how “reactive” with other elements an atom can be. The more reactive the less stable. Therefore more capable of producing energetic chemical reactions, but also more dangerous. In nature uranium can be found with atomic numbers U-238 and U-235, the first being a poor reactive material the latter a very good one. Enriching means “distilling” U-235 atoms out of uranium rocks transforming it in a more efficient radioactive source suitable for nuclear reactors.

20 See the official Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) website at: [http://www.barc.gov.in/about/anushakti\\_sne.html](http://www.barc.gov.in/about/anushakti_sne.html) (retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

21 The fissile material is used to break the atoms for creating neutrons which will then break other atoms, thus starting a chain reaction that will produce power, which in turn will be transformed in electricity.

reactors called Fast Breeder Reactors (FBR) were planned to be used to process Thorium (Th-232), using Pu-239, to produce an isotope of uranium (U-233), more efficient for energy production. Besides making use of a control material based on sodium that was easier to find (also known as liquid metal), the more advanced reactor scheme therefore exploited India's large resources of Thorium to produce better fissile materials required by the next generation of nuclear reactors. The third and final stage, implied the use of the so-called Breeder Reactors (BR). In this very advanced reactor schema, making use of smaller quantities of U-233 as a fissile material to break larger quantities of Th-232 atoms would have led to the production of more U-233; as the by-product of an efficient fission chain reaction. Thus freeing India from the dependency to import uranium from abroad<sup>23</sup>.

With the aim of freeing India from the necessity of importing, Bhabha's strategy was innovative for the times. Only India had followed the path of adopting a national nuclear strategy focussed almost entirely on a thorium fuel cycle until today; other states like Germany, the United States and Japan abandoned the idea after short studies on the thorium cycle "due to new discovery of uranium deposits and their easy availability" during the Seventies<sup>24</sup>. The fact that this strategy was feasible is demonstrated by recent developments in the field of international nuclear research. Over the last fifteen years several programmes have been set up focusing indeed on the development of a thorium fuel cycle for energy production. It was also an interesting source of energy for other countries<sup>25</sup>. Today it is generally recognised

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22 In nuclear thermal power stations light (normal) or heavy-water (enriched with deuterium) is generally the element used as a moderator. Neutrons are subatomic particles responsible for igniting chain reactions, thus nuclear energy production. A moderator reduces the speed of neutrons during the process of nuclear fission (the process of breaking atoms). The main purpose is therefore to avoid overheating of the fissile materials, otherwise leading to potential nuclear explosions. A combination of graphite control rods and water (in one of the two forms) is used to control nuclear reactions. Light water is typically used when enriched uranium (U-235) or plutonium (Pu-239) is used as a fissile material; while heavy-water when natural uranium (U-238) is the main fuel, due to its major heat-resistance.

23 It is crucial to note that still today the reactor for the third process is under development.

24 International Atomic Energy Agency, "Thorium Fuel Cycle: Potential Benefits and Challenges" (International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, May 2005), 96, [http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/TE\\_1450\\_web.pdf](http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/TE_1450_web.pdf), (retrieved on 16th October 2012).

25 India, Brazil and Turkey are the countries with the global largest deposits known today. *Ibid.*, 45.

that “there is probably more energy available for use from thorium in the minerals of Earth's crust than from both uranium and fossil fuels”<sup>26</sup>. In addition to its availability, there are also other reasons that make thorium particularly attractive. First, all mined (natural) thorium can be potentially used in a reactor, compared to just 0,7% of natural uranium, and it can produce 40 times the amount of energy per unit mass compared to natural uranium<sup>27</sup>. Second, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in its report from 2005 considered the power cycle technology based on thorium (Th-232/U-233) to be better than the one based on uranium (U-235/U-238/Pu-239) in terms of reduced radioactive waste problems, and risks of accidental explosions<sup>28</sup>. Indeed, thorium produces waste with a half-life<sup>29</sup> that is 10 to 10.000 times shorter than uranium, and does not sustain chain reactions, therefore stopping fission by default when not externally induced<sup>30</sup>. Lastly, differently from uranium, thorium does not sustain a chain reaction if not continuously primed, thus making an accidental runaway chain reaction improbable<sup>31</sup>. As a consequence of these discovered advantages, in 1997 the American Department of Energy began a research program on thorium, which includes the IAEA and Russian research institutes. Other countries like Germany, Canada and more recently also China, are pursuing the same goal<sup>32</sup>.

Despite the innovative character and theoretical validity of the strategy formulated by Bhabha, India's nuclear programme developed slowly and not without problems. The first evident problem was its great cost. It required large investments even if justified as a strategic activity that was “the 'only chance' of raising the

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26 Ayhan Demirbas, *Biohydrogen: For Future Engine Fuel Demands* (New York: Springer, 2009), 36.

27 Ibid., 37.

28 International Atomic Energy Agency, “Thorium Fuel Cycle: Potential Benefits and Challenges,” 84 (retrieved on 16th October 2012).

29 Half-life means the time it takes for a substance to lose half of its radiologic activity, and thus it gives an estimation of how long it can be considered dangerous for human beings.

30 Demirbas, *Biohydrogen*, 38.

31 Ibid.

32 Takashi Kamei and Saeed Hakami, “Evaluation of Implementation of Thorium Fuel Cycle with LWR and MSR,” *Progress in Nuclear Energy* 53, no. 7 (September 2011): 820–824.

standard of living in India”, according to Bhabha's words<sup>33</sup>. Significant percentages of the total research and development expenditures were thus allocated in Indian national budgets for atomic energy: 27% in 1958/1959, and 30% in 1965/66<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless, New Delhi took decisions that at a later stage resulted suboptimal from an economical perspective. Just to mention a few, it was decided to develop heavy-water based reactor technology instead of light-water, trading additional costs (to produce deuterium rich water) with the possibility of using natural uranium fuel (U-238); or to build small reactors instead of large plants, trading risks and (apparent) lower construction costs with energy production efficiency<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, due to technical problems for separating Pu-239 with the closed cycle schema, and to the high costs of the plutonium treating process, Bhabha's strategy relented, resulting still today in an unaccomplished plan, stuck in its development second stage<sup>36</sup>. Surely, these problems became complicated in the Seventies due to the international export control policies pursued by the nuclear supplier states towards India. Common issues occur with those states that are pursuing independent nuclear programs outside non-proliferation regimes, as better explained later on. Besides technical problems of a different nature, it is however crucial to point out that in 2012 India only got 2,5% of its total electricity generation from nuclear power plants<sup>37</sup>.

After this brief (but fundamental) presentation of India's nuclear technical strategy, the country's approach to non-proliferation issues will be analysed, together with its international cooperation in the nuclear sector. The aim at this point is to focus the attention on the fact that from 1947 India developed an ambiguous strategy allowing the nuclear-weapon development option to remain open, though publicly appearing as a champion of disarmament. On one hand, New Delhi argued that its nuclear capabilities would have been used for peaceful purposes only, and actively

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33 Statement pronounced by Bhabha, quoted in Roberta Wohlstetter, *The Buddha Similes: Absent-minded Peaceful Aid and the Indian Bomb* (Los Angeles: Pan Heuristics, 1977), 39.

34 Abraham, “India's ‘Strategic Enclave’,” 242.

35 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 32.

36 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 27.

37 See the BARC website at: [http://www.barc.gov.in/about/anushakti\\_sne.html](http://www.barc.gov.in/about/anushakti_sne.html) (retrieved on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012).



looked for the establishment of international cooperation projects with other more technologically advanced states. On the other, India refused to accept the international campaigns set up by states in possession of nuclear weapons since such initiatives were aimed to prevent other states from acquiring nuclear weapons technology, rather than to establish a complete nuclear disarmament as advertised.

This ambivalent approach is demonstrated by the actions taken by India from 1948 onwards. As one of the first steps, India assumed a critical position on the *Baruch Plan*: the first international effort towards non-proliferation proposed by the United States at the first meeting of the United Nation Atomic Energy Commission in 1946. Taking its name from its author, Bernard Baruch, the plan proposed the creation of an international Atomic Development Authority “to own and operate all materials, technologies, and facilities with potential nuclear weapon applications”<sup>38</sup>. The aim of such action was to establish international controls preventing the production of nuclear weapons world wide, however promoting the knowledge of nuclear technology for peaceful use across nations. According to the plan, the United States, which in 1946 still had an unbroken nuclear monopoly, would have dismantled their nuclear arsenal after the international controls establishment. Not surprisingly however, the *Baruch plan* did not encounter positive reactions: the Soviet Union and Poland officially opposed it at the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC), permanently demising it in 1952. India sided with the Soviet Union and Poland, arguing that the international ownership of fissile materials would only have been a new dangerous form of colonial strategy by the United States<sup>39</sup>.

Meanwhile, New Delhi began intense diplomatic work for assuring international help for its ambitious nuclear programme. As a consequence, in 1951 and 1952 India signed its first nuclear cooperation agreement with France, which despite not yet being a nuclear weapons state already had an advanced technological knowledge. The Indo-French collaboration gave life to a research facility in India at Trombay, called *Zerlina*, which was then used for research scopes by India from 1961, when it

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38 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 21. On this see the official American Department of State website: <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/BaruchPlans>.

39 Ibid.

went critical, until 1983<sup>40</sup>. India actively sought contacts establishment with other states as well, like Canada, and the United Kingdom, who were also interested in collaborating<sup>41</sup>. As soon as the first international agreements for nuclear cooperation were signed by the other nuclear supplier states, and following the Soviet Union first nuclear explosion in 1949, and that of the United Kingdom in 1952, the United States modified their precedent policy of stringent limitations to nuclear cooperation and exports.

The American president Dwight D. Eisenhower's *Atoms for Peace* speech, pronounced on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1953 at the UN General Assembly, launched the basis for a new American policy based on the international promotion for the peaceful use of nuclear technologies. The American president proposed once again to establish an international entity, this time called the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of the United Nations, which would have been entitled to supervise the nuclear programs of all countries in order to avoid the spread and acquisition of atomic weapons<sup>42</sup>. However, as a direct consequence of the new approach, American laws were rewritten: information on certain civil technologies were thus declassified, while nuclear material exports liberalised at the condition to sign specific bilateral agreements assuring the use only for peaceful purposes<sup>43</sup>. Surely the aim of the new more permissive American approach was to allow the United States and its companies to participate in the rising profitable activity of world wide nuclear technology, and to race their Soviet and British competitors.

India gained an advantage with the new relaxed policy, even though the proposal of establishing the International Atomic Energy Agency at the United Nation was officially criticized by New Delhi. The Indian Prime Minister in his speech at the

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40 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 31.

41 Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (Zed Books, London and New York, 1998), 78–81.

42 The speech is available online on the official Eisenhower Archives' website at: [http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/atoms\\_for\\_peace/Binder13.pdf](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/atoms_for_peace/Binder13.pdf) (retrieved on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

43 Warren H. Donnelly et al., *Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and the International Atomic Energy Agency: An Analytical Report Prepared for the Committee on Governmental Operations, United States Senate* (U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1976).

Lok Sabha on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1954 indeed stated that: since the UN was practically unable to control non-member nations (notably China), the American plans could have turned problematic<sup>44</sup>. Once again the establishment of an international agency controlling the atomic industries around the world was felt as a new form of colonialism. However, this did not prevent India and the United States from exploiting the new relaxed regulation system of the American exportation together. As a consequence, in 1955 the United States Joint Committee on Atomic Energy visited India in order to expand bilateral cooperation and strengthen the American influence over atomic energy production for peaceful purposes. After the visit almost one thousand Indian scientists and engineers were sent to the United States for training on new technologies<sup>45</sup>, and new bilateral agreements were signed with both the United States and Canada.

The new American approach indeed resulted in a general increase of international collaborations in the nuclear research field. In 1955 for example the construction of the first Indian nuclear reactor *Apsara* began thanks to assistance from the United Kingdom. Although Bhabha's plans for the development of the Indian national programme on thorium fuel cycle had already been formulated, the *Apsara* reactor was fuelled with enriched uranium (U-235), and with light water as the moderator. This represented a compromise for the Indian strategy since India was short on uranium enrichment technology. New Delhi was thus obliged to import enriched uranium from the United Kingdom in order to operate the reactor. However, the agreement had important value for India who was interested in acquiring the technological knowledge and materials necessary to start commercial nuclear power production in the short term. Financial and organizational conditions were all good, as demonstrated by the fact that in 1956 *Apsara* was already built and in operation<sup>46</sup>.

The agreement for the construction of a second reactor, much larger than *Apsara* and based on a completely different approach, was signed by India on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1956

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44 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 25.

45 Gary Milhollin, "Stopping the Indian Bomb," *The American Journal of International Law* 81, no. 3 (July 1987): 607–8.

46 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 30.

with Canada. Later named *Canadian-Indian Reactors United States (CIRUS)* because of the United States participation in the provisions of heavy-water, this reactor was completed within four years, in 1960. The Canadian-Indian agreement foresaw Canada building a 40 Mega Watt reactor in India at its own expense (\$24 million) as part of the Colombo Plan, together with half of the initial natural uranium (U-238) fuel<sup>47</sup>. Meanwhile on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1956 the United States had signed an agreement with the Indian Atomic Energy Commission to provide the necessary heavy-water (18,9 metric tonnes) for processing natural uranium. Compared to *Apsara*, CIRUS was a much better deal for India for two fundamental reasons: first, it would have produced the first key element (Pu-239) of the entire Bhabha strategy based on thorium; second, it would have processed natural uranium (U-238) for producing plutonium (Pu-239), allowing India to exploit its own natural uranium reserves, or alternatively to import the far less expensive and more commonly available natural uranium. Not having developed the capability to indigenously produce heavy-water until 1962, when the first heavy-water processing plant became operative, the necessary quantity of moderator material to put the CIRUS reactor into operation was then the only other element that New Delhi had to import.

CIRUS was also important for India for a broader range of reasons. The first important aspect is that being based on natural uranium fission, CIRUS produced a rather large quantity of weapons-grade Pu-239 if compared to other nuclear technologies and fuels, as for example in the case of the U-235 fuelled light water reactors like *Apsara*, which instead produced Pu-240 as a by-product of the nuclear reaction, which is not a suitable material for explosive devices<sup>48</sup>. Therefore, CIRUS would have been able to provide India with Pu-239, which could have been used easily and directly for the fabrication of nuclear explosive devices both for peaceful purposes (e.g. mining) or as nuclear weapons. The second crucial issue was that India

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47 The Colombo Plan was an organisation founded on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1950 in Sri Lanka among Commonwealth countries. Its aim was to foster international cooperation between richer Commonwealth nations and poorer ones, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. After 1977 the organization was opened to other non-Commonwealth countries and was renamed "The Colombo Plan Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific".

48 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 28.

succeeded in concluding both agreements with Canada and the United States without impositions of specific safeguards on the materials provided, nor the reactor, nor the spent fuel; thus making the fabrication of a peaceful nuclear explosive, or of a nuclear bomb, with spent fuel possible. Canadians were simply reassured by India declaring the use of CIRUS products for atomic energy peaceful applications only<sup>49</sup>. Similarly, even the Indo-American agreement only ratified India's promise to use the heavy-water for peaceful applications<sup>50</sup>.

At that time no consensus had yet been reached in the international community concerning how to constitute an international body regulating the international nuclear cooperation: what later on became the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Analysing the approach adopted by India during the conference on the IAEA statute in Geneva, it is possible to argue that obtaining CIRUS without safeguards was a great success for India. India's intention to be free to dispose of the enriched uranium and plutonium produced by CIRUS indeed clearly came out in the speech Bhabha pronounced in Geneva on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1956, where he participated as the chairman of AEC and secretary of the DAE. In that occasion he said: "We consider it to be the inalienable right of States to produce and hold the fissionable material required for the peaceful power programmes", especially because developed countries, not needing AIEA aid, would not have been subject to those safeguards, applied instead to the lesser technological developed states<sup>51</sup>. Safeguards would have effectively limited, or at least restricted, India's complete control over the CIRUS reactor and especially its output<sup>52</sup>. It is crucial to underline at this point that India's point of view at the Geneva conference, which was supported also by many other non nuclear countries, also influenced the final AIEA statute<sup>53</sup>. As a consequence, this regulation only ensured safeguards on nuclear fuels and on reactor construction,

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49 Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 6.

50 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 154–6.

51 J. P. Jain, *Nuclear India* / J.P. Jain. (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1974), 44-46.

52 Achin Vanaik and Praful Bidwai, "India and Pakistan," in *Security with Nuclear Weapons?: Different Perspectives on National Security*, by Regina Cowen Karp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 261.

53 Available online on the AIEA website: <http://www.iaea.org/About/statute.html#A1.12> (retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

but not on the spent fuel produced: a part of which notably included weapon-grade materials<sup>54</sup>. Because of this lack of safeguard specifications, once again, the CIRUS plant allowed India to keep the door open on the fabrication of nuclear explosives suitable both for peaceful and military applications.

Yet another crucial consideration is that neither the Indo-Canadian agreement, nor the Indo-American one prevented India from using the CIRUS spent fuel for producing *Peaceful Nuclear Explosions* (PNEs): this resulted in what was officially called the Pokhran-I test carried out by India in 1974. It is not so surprising: until at least 1964 PNEs were considered by the United States as potentially important for civil activity usage, like for example mining. Although criticism on the risks of using that technology for military purposes had emerged since 1958, still in 1964 Americans advertised the engineering and scientific advantages of the PNEs at the United Nations Conference of Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy<sup>55</sup>. The international community continued to recognise PNEs as important peaceful applications for even longer, until the Seventies<sup>56</sup>. Therefore, when during the early Sixties the United States and the international community decided to strengthen safeguards forbidding non-nuclear states to conduct PNEs in autonomy, it was too late: India and also other countries had already legally acquired nuclear explosive production capabilities.

India's nuclear program and its internationalization evolved at a steady pace throughout the Sixties. The construction of a third reactor, called *Phenix*, began under Bhabha's supervision in 1961 in the Trombay area, and was completed by 1964. Built by Indians with the technical support of an American firm (Vitro International) this plant (like CIRUS) processed natural uranium (U-238) for producing plutonium (Pu-239); even though in the Sixties it was mainly used for the delicate and complex reprocess operation for separating plutonium from the spent

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54 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 28.

55 Kanwal Kishore Pathak, *Nuclear Policy of India: a Third World Perspective* (New Delhi: Gitanjali Prakashan, 1980), 123.

56 The IAEA organised a series of meetings from 1970 to 1976 on the topic of civilian uses of the PNEs. Proceedings are printed in: International Atomic Energy Agency, *Peaceful Nuclear Explosions*, 5 volumes, Vienna, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1976.

fuel produced in CIRUS<sup>57</sup>.

The United States and Canada had been conscious of the risks connected to nuclear proliferation since the beginning of their collaboration with India on nuclear technology in 1956. However, they did not initially insist on imposing severe and strict international safeguards over their bilateral collaboration with India during the Fifties. As noted by Perkovich, they were indeed probably more interested in acquiring markets for nuclear technology, and to expand their influence in foreign countries like India, rather than alienating them<sup>58</sup>. Thus they allowed Indian scientists to train in the United States, as well as fostering local projects in India. Declassified American documents show that in 1961 the American Department of State considered the possibility of favouring India's acquisition of nuclear weapons in order to balance the Chinese nuclear programme; an option that, however, was then completely rejected<sup>59</sup>. However, in 1962/1963 Washington and Canada began to significantly alter their position in reaction to the first French nuclear blast in the Algerian desert in 1960, and that of the Soviet Union in 1961; both violating the moratorium against exploding further nuclear devices that had been decided by the great powers to contain nuclear arms race. As a consequence of those events, the United States began to reformulate a more stringent non-proliferation strategy, reflected in the new conditions imposed by the United States and Canada to India in the early Sixties, as will be shown in the following part.

In 1962 negotiations for the American construction of two nuclear power reactors in Tarapur (near Bombay) had begun in a period where bilateral relations between India and the United States were particularly fertile because of the Sino-Indian war in the same year. Negotiations were concluded in 1963 under favourable financial conditions for India<sup>60</sup>. However, as both a consequence of the IAEA

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57 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 108.

58 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 30.

59 See the "Memorandum from George McGhee, State Department, to Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, dated on 13th September 1961", and the "Memorandum from Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, to Lucius Battle, State Department Executive Secretary, dated on 7th October 1961", National Security Archives, Washington D. C., quoted in *ibid.*, 52–3.

60 Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 26.

foundation and the American development of a more stringent approach to non-proliferation, the Indo-American agreement, signed in August 1963 in Washington was rigidly written. When enforced on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1963, it included IAEA safeguards on the entire cycle of the Tarapur power stations, and thus on the fuel, on the plants, and also on the by-products of the process<sup>61</sup>. By 1963 the United States had already begun to impose IAEA safeguard regulations to all countries buying nuclear sources or equipment from them. Due to India's refusal of the general safeguards on all its nuclear facilities, severe regulations were only imposed on the Tarapur power stations. Clearly, this precluded India from diverting materials from the Tarapur plants for other purposes. In addition to this aspect, the Indo-American agreement of 1963 represented a compromise for India for another reason: the Tarapur reactors were based on enriched uranium (U-235) with pure water as the moderator, like *Apsara*, diverging again from Bhabha's original nuclear plans. The apparent favourable financial conditions of the agreement and India's willingness to have two proven reactors operating in a short time led New Delhi to accept not only the limited IAEA safeguards, but especially the American conditions<sup>62</sup>. According to the agreement, India should have imported the enriched uranium only from the United States for the entire life of the plants, thus becoming completely dependent on American imports<sup>63</sup>. This dependency became the greatest irritation factor for Indo-American relations after India's decision to detonate its first nuclear device in 1974, as will be shown later. Moreover, imports of enriched uranium became extremely expensive in the following years, thus revealing the rationale behind the favourable financial conditions granted by Washington to New Delhi<sup>64</sup>. The construction work of the two Tarapur reactors began in 1964 and were only completed in 1969, with a one-year delay due to technical problems.

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61 Ibid., 27.

62 When the reactor became operative, the station produced the 30% of Gujarat's and 15% of Maharashtra's electricity requirements, even if later in the Nineties this became just 10% due to the increased electricity production capacity from other sources. Ibid., 22.

63 A. G. Noorani, "Indo-U.S. Nuclear Relations," *Asian Survey* 21, no. 4 (April 1, 1981): 399–416.

64 In 1980 the American price for the provision of the enriched uranium for the Tarapur reactors was of \$11.1 million, equal to 10% of the entire cost of the construction of the plant. Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 19.



On 16<sup>th</sup> December 1963 India signed another agreement with Canada. It was more harmonised with the nuclear plans made by Bhabha<sup>65</sup>. Ottawa started building a natural uranium (U-238) reactor moderated with heavy-water in Rajasthan, called the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station Unit I (RAPS-I), which later went critical in 1972. This time the heavy-water moderator was provided not only by Canada and the United States, but also by the Soviet Union, which had signed an agreement with the aim of continuing nuclear cooperation with India begun earlier in 1961<sup>66</sup>. As a reflection of the raising consensus over establishing controls on nuclear cooperation projects, this new agreement granted Canada the right to inspect the plant of RAPS-I in India. Similarly to the agreement signed with the Americans on Tarapur, this measure not only assured the heavy-water and the plants would have been used for peaceful purposes, but also that by-products of the two reactors would have been exclusively used for peaceful applications<sup>67</sup>.

In 1963 the development of China's nuclear program began to worry the United States, but not only. The Indian defeat in the 1962 war against China had already enlarged the political consensus towards nuclear weapons among Indian political circles. In December 1962 the Jan Sangh party made its first formal request in Parliament explicitly calling for a revision of India's nuclear policy and for the production of nuclear weapons<sup>68</sup>. Despite the Indian Prime Minister Nehru officially refusing to consider the option, the Jan Sangh continued to advocate in its favour during the Lok Sabha debate of 1963<sup>69</sup>. Therefore, the fact that the imminence of a Chinese nuclear blast could spur other countries to develop a nuclear weapons programme as well, pushed the United States to actively sponsor a nuclear test ban treaty<sup>70</sup>. The American efforts were only partially successful because of the Soviet

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65 Ashok Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond: India's Nuclear Behaviour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159.

66 *The Statesman*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1961.

67 Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 157–166.

68 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 46.

69 Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 108–9.

70 "Memorandum of Secretary of Defence to the President dated 12th February 1963" in Virginia Foran, U. S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy, 1945-1991, Chadwick-Healey, London 1992, no. 00941, quoted in Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 57–8; For a detailed analysis of the developments of American concerns over proliferation see: Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond*, 114–120.

Union resistance towards a comprehensive ban treaty. Therefore only a Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1963 in Moscow by the representatives of the United States, of the United Kingdom and of the Soviet Union. Making it illegal to test nuclear devices in the atmosphere, in water or in outer space, but underground, the treaty was also promptly signed by India<sup>71</sup>. This was the last Indian international action made under the direction of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who died on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1964.

### ***2.3 Lal Bahadur Shastri and the effects of China's first nuclear blast on India's nuclear strategy***

Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter died in May 1964. Shastri was a man with scarce international experience, a rather poor knowledge on foreign affairs when nuclear matters were concerned. In October 1964, long before the new Prime Minister could consolidate his position and power, the first Chinese explosion of a nuclear device shook the entire nuclear programme India had developed until that time; therefore urging Shastri to take crucial decisions without solid grounds. The Prime Minister decided to modify the long-standing nuclear programme authorising the technological development necessary for India to explode a nuclear device for *peaceful* purposes. In the following paragraph this important shift will be analysed tracing the events from 1964 to 1966, and highlighting how beyond this change India's nuclear programme and approach to non-proliferation matters remained as ambiguous as before.

The first result in India's nuclear programme was reached few months after Nehru's death: entering the first quantity of spent fuel in the *Phenix* plutonium

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71 The Treaty is available online on the American Department of State website at: <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/4797.htm> (retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

reprocessing proto-type plant in Trombay<sup>72</sup>, India officially inaugurated the second phase of Bhabha's nuclear strategy in July 1964. Although this made India the fifth country in the world able to reprocess plutonium on paper, several problems were soon encountered in reality: the plant faced difficulties in the initial activity of separating plutonium from the rest of the nuclear waste. It has been reported that these problems were partially solved only in 1968<sup>73</sup>. However, despite this positive achievement, India's attention in 1964 was caught by the imminence of China's detonation which indeed began to trigger the Indian debate<sup>74</sup>.

When the Chinese blasted a uranium-235 based implosion fission device of 22 kilotons on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1964 in Lop Nur, the Indian Prime Minister officially communicated a shocked reaction the following day in the Lok Sabha<sup>75</sup>. On 19<sup>th</sup> October in a radio broadcast Shastri added that such a terrible event would *not* have brought India to emulate China's example<sup>76</sup>. However, in the following days some opposition leaders, like Nath Pai of the Samyukta Socialist Party<sup>77</sup>, and some Congress politicians, like for example the President of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, Mushtaq Ahmed, began to support the idea of a shift in the nuclear programme and of equipping India with the same military technology<sup>78</sup>. Moreover, on 24<sup>th</sup> October the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Homi Bhabha, intervened in an All India Radio program, arguing in favour of the deterrent power and cheap cost of nuclear weapons<sup>79</sup>.

It is probable that this pressure coming from both the Congress and the opposition parties influenced the Prime Minister, who therefore decided to gather a

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72 Kanwal Kishore Pathak, *Nuclear Policy of India: a Third World Perspective* (Gitanjali Prakashan, New Delhi 1980), 39.

73 Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 141.

74 The reference is to the Indian press, where for example, an editorial evaluated the pros and cons of the nuclear weapons choice, in *The Statesman*, 24 August 1964; while the journalist Inder Malhotra already before China's nuclear explosion had called for the necessity to produce Indian nuclear weapons, in *The Statesman*, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

75 Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 109.

76 Ibid.

77 *Indian Express*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1964

78 Ibid., 28<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

79 Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 114; For a complete analysis of Indian reactions to the Chinese explosions see also: Ibid., 109–131.

small group of people on 29<sup>th</sup> October to discuss the Indian reaction. According to Perkovich, the External Affairs Minister, the Railway Minister, the Congressman S. K. Patil, and Bhabha were the ones who supported the military options, while only the Defence Minister, Y. B. Chavan, and the Food and Agriculture Minister, C. Subramaniam opposed it<sup>80</sup>. Therefore, it seems credible that it was on this occasion that the Indian governments' modification of its nuclear program took place. The option of developing the necessary technology for exploding nuclear devices for peaceful applications was thus chosen as the intermediate step India could take without officially declaring the development of a nuclear arsenal. This latter option was probably excluded for its high costs and for its far more controversial character that would have triggered negative international reactions. Instead, exploding *peaceful* nuclear devices would have demonstrated to the rest of world India's technological capability of firing nuclear devices, and in turn nuclear weapons too.

In the following days a debate also emerged in Indian newspapers: some declared themselves in favour of developing a nuclear arsenal, like Inder Malhotra<sup>81</sup>, and others, like Romesh Tapar<sup>82</sup>, highlighted India's great economic and social problems, like the food crisis India was facing in those years, as the issues to resolve first. On 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November, two days of sharp debate absorbed the Lok Sabha's attention, and saw the Prime Minister intervention in the issue. In his speech the Prime Minister restated his position against nuclear proliferation, but also stated: "I cannot say that the present policy is deep-rooted, that it cannot set aside, that it can never be changed [...] an individual may have a certain static policy [...] but in the political field we cannot do so. [...] If there is a need to amend what we have said today, then we will say—all right, let us go ahead and do so"<sup>83</sup>. With these words he therefore opened the possibility to modify the position assumed by the government until that time. Shastri made another important announcement some days after, in order to face the continuous controversies and diffused criticism about the

80 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 70.

81 *The Statesman*, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

82 *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1964.

83 Shastri, quoted in G. G. Mirchandani, *India's Nuclear Dilemma* (New Delhi: Popular Book Services, 1968), 34.

government's reticence to order the development of a full nuclear weapons arsenal, raised by the opposition parties like the Jan Sangh and the Samyukta Socialist Party, and from the same Executive Committee of the Congress Parliamentary Party<sup>84</sup>. As a result, on the 27<sup>th</sup> November, for the first time, the Indian Prime Minister announced India's consideration for the technological developments for peaceful nuclear explosions, exclusively for mining applications<sup>85</sup>. These last two speeches were the turning point in India's nuclear policy: opening the door for peaceful nuclear explosions that, as already stated, at the technical level were not much different from rudimentary nuclear weapons.

Although this shift toward PNEs was a crucial turning point for India's nuclear and political history, it is important to underline that the Indian government did not consider developing nuclear weapons: as clear evidence no plans for building a nuclear weapon launch facility were ever formulated. Moreover, opening towards the PNE option was included in the ambiguous approach India had pursued at the international level until that moment, without having the need of modifying it too much<sup>86</sup>. From late 1964 India had indeed embarked on an official attempt, which was then continued by the successor of Shastri, seeking Soviet and American defence against the nuclear threat posed by China. Having to resort to nuclear power for self defence purposes, Shastri first publicly considered the necessity for such a deterrent during his visit to the United Kingdom in December 1964. On that occasion the Indian Prime Minister's proposal only received mild reactions from the British government, and later only scarce attention by the American government, and no answer from the Soviets<sup>87</sup>. The second Indo-Pakistani war of 1965, during which Beijing verbally supported Islamabad, and the explosions of other Chinese nuclear devices in 1965 and 1966 further enhanced New Delhi's state of alarm, fuelling

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84 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 81.

85 Ibid., 82.

86 Deepa M. Ollapally, "Mixed Motives in India's Search for Nuclear Status," *Asian Survey* 41, no. 6 (2001): 925–946.

87 A. G. Noorani, "India's Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee," *Asian Survey* 7, no. 7 (July 1, 1967): 491–493.

politicians to call for India to acquire nuclear weapons<sup>88</sup>. The suspension of the American aid programme further increased the Indian sense of isolationism, leading to an insistent call for international nuclear guarantee. As a result, in his speeches at the Lok and Rajya Sabha on 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May 1966, Foreign Minister Swaran Singh highlighted the importance of an international multilateral assurance provided by nuclear powers to non-nuclear states<sup>89</sup>. During the spring of 1967, an Indian senior civil servant, L. K. Jha, was sent as the Prime Minister's personal envoy to Washington and Moscow to evaluate the great powers' dispositions. As a result of this insistent effort, in 1967 London officially declared the possibility of creating a structure within the UN that provided nuclear support to non-nuclear states. However, India refused the British proposal, judging the mechanism too slow to play a concrete role in case of a serious nuclear threat; defining the Soviet or American governments the only institutions capable of providing credible direct support<sup>90</sup>. Other clear evidence of this ambiguity is the fact that in 1965 the chairman of the AEC, Homi Bhabha, tried to secure American technical support to help India in the process of acquiring technological skills for conducting nuclear blasts, as some declassified American documents demonstrate<sup>91</sup>. From the same American sources it is also possible to deduce that the idea of helping India to develop nuclear military capabilities was effectively taken into consideration by the American government in 1964<sup>92</sup>: the clear goal was to counter balance China's power in Asia. However, such considerations were definitively rebuffed in 1965 when Washington chose to adopt a stricter non-proliferation strategy, as explained in the following paragraph.

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88 Pathak, *Nuclear Policy of India*, 56.

89 *Time of India*, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1966; *The Hindu*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1966.

90 Noorani, "India's Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee," 498–9.

91 "Memorandum of conversation between Ambassador of India, B. K. Nehru, Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy, Homi Bhabha and Under Secretary of State, George Ball, dated 22nd February 1965, in Foran, U.S. Nuclear Non-Proliferation policy, 1945-91, no. 01108, cited in Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, 126.

92 "United States Atomic Energy Commission, Discussion Paper on Prospects of Intensifying Peaceful Atomic Cooperation with India, sent to Deputy Under Secretary, L. E. Thompson, on 23rd November 1964", National Security Archive, in Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, p. 91; and the Defence Department staff study attached to "Memorandum from Deputy Under Secretary, L. E. Thompson, to Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, dated on 4th December 1964", National Security Archive, in *ibid.*, 91–2.

Such a behaviour led commentators, like for example A. G. Noorani, to define India's approach as “confuse and inept” on this account<sup>93</sup>; or to harshly raise criticism against the Indian government for its inactivity, like in the case of Itty Abraham<sup>94</sup>. If analysed in its entirety, India's approach to the necessity of having Soviet and American nuclear guarantees appeared to be intentionally wavering, and the obvious result of the long-standing strategy of ambiguity adopted by New Delhi with respect to non-proliferation issues. Feeling threatened by the Chinese nuclear power, India wanted to secure on one hand the guarantees of protection from great powers in case of a military conflict with China, but on the other wanted to keep the door open for developing its own nuclear military technology. As a consequence, it is not surprising that after the Chinese blast, New Delhi continued to restate its long standing policy of international non-alignment, even when calling for international nuclear assurance<sup>95</sup>.

#### ***2.4 The development of India's nuclear policy position during Indira Gandhi's first government, 1966-1970***

To fully understand the development of the Indian position from 1966 to 1971 this paragraph will first briefly present the domestic situation and the leadership change that took place after the sudden deaths of the Indian Prime Minister and of the AEC chairman in 1966, as well as the slow progress of the PNE project until 1968 and the controversies it arose. In parallel, the international developments in the non-proliferation regime generated by the Chinese nuclear explosion of 1964 and India's reaction to them will be traced as well.

The sudden deaths of both Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on 11<sup>th</sup> January

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93 Noorani, “India’s Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee,” 501.

94 Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, 127.

95 See Foreign Minister's Swaran Singh statements in *Hindustan Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March, and 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1966.

1966, and AEC chairman Homi Bhabha on 24th January 1966 left India's nuclear programme without political and scientific direction. The newly nominated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi found herself taking the rein of the Indian nuclear policy alone. The first action Mrs. Gandhi took was naming Homi Sethna, a senior chemical engineer working at the Trombay plant, as the new director of the Atomic Energy Establishment of Trombay. This was an obvious choice since Sethna was generally considered as the natural successor of Bhabha for that position within that institution.

A controversial decision was instead taken when Indira Gandhi decided to nominate Vikram Sarabhai, a Cambridge-trained physicist and AEC member, as the new chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. Despite the high scientific profile of the candidate, who had specialised in space research, Sarabhai was not considered as the natural successor of Bhabha by the scientific community working at Trombay<sup>96</sup>. The new AEC chairman was not only external to the community, but he was also a declared Gandhian and as such considered by Trombay people to be against nuclear weapons. It is unlikely that Sarabhai, being a scientist, could have been totally against the Indian nuclear strategy developed until that moment. It is instead very likely that the new AEC chairman did not share the enthusiasm drifting in the scientific community of Trombay since Shastri's authorization for a PNE development in late 1964. Ashok Kapur, a political analyser, defined the rationale of Indira Gandhi's decision to nominate Sarabhai, a mere political choice<sup>97</sup>. According to this interpretation, Indira Gandhi named Sarabhai to influence the political games and fortunes of her party in Gujarat: obtaining the support of Sarabhai's family, influential in the state, could have indeed allowed the Congress party to better face the political challenge launched by Moraij Desai, who was leading the Congress (O) at the national level, and who was a Gujarati based politician<sup>98</sup>. The motivation behind this official choice remains unclear still today, because all written documents (if any were kept) come under the Indian nuclear policy secrecy. Whatever the reason for making him leader of the AEC, the crucial point is that Sarabhai, with his sudden

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96 Raja Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage, an Autobiography* (New Delhi: Viking, 1991), 75.

97 Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option*, 195.

98 Padmanābha Joshi, *Vikram Sarabhai, the Man and the Vision* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Pub., 1992).



entrance as the head of the AEC, probably created tensions inside the scientific community at Trombay. It was no secret that Sarabhai did not share the idea of India assuming an aggressive military posture without possessing the necessary means to sustain it. In fact, the new AEC chairman made his criticism clear in his speech at the press conference on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1966, when he also underlined the priority of domestic considerations, the prohibitive cost of a full-scale development of a nuclear weapon programme, and argued that “an atomic bomb explosion is not going to help our security”<sup>99</sup>.

Considering the moderate welcome that the scientific community had reserved for Sarabhai, it is not surprising that the new chairman was later accused of suspending the PNE project in 1966. According to the interviews and accounts released by some Indian senior scientists like Homi Sethna and Raja Ramanna who were working in the Atomic Energy Establishment in Trombay, Sarabhai's personal opposition to the PNE project led him to decide on its suspension in order to freeze further funding<sup>100</sup>. Since no official documentation exists about the Indian decisions with regards to that matter, and that Sarabhai died on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1971, it is not possible to know what really happened. However, it is crucial to remember that K. Subrahmanyam, the former Director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) who had a personal relationship with Sarabhai, challenges Ramanna and Sethna's accounts in his memories, arguing that Sarabhai's personal inclinations towards PNEs were not as negative as reported by them<sup>101</sup>. Moreover, it is important to consider that the Indian nuclear programme was lagging behind the planned developments. As considered by Shyam Bhatia and P. R. Chari<sup>102</sup>, the optimistic declaration released by Homi Bhabha after the first Chinese nuclear explosion, in which he had suggested India would be ready to explode a nuclear device in eighteen

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99 Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, 130.

100Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option*, 195; Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 122; Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage, an Autobiography*, 75–6.

101K. Subrahmanyam, “Indian Nuclear Policy, 1964-98: a Personal Recollection,” in *Nuclear India*, by Jasjit Singh (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, 1998), 33.

102P. R. Chari, “Pokharan-I: Personal Recollections,” *Institute of Peaceful and Conflict Studies* 80 (2009): 1.

months if only wanted, proved to be unreliable. As a matter of fact, although the government had chosen a plutonium based nuclear device, the easiest to build, reality shows that in 1966 the availability of plutonium in India was not sufficient to further develop the PNE project<sup>103</sup>. Bhatia indeed affirms that only in 1968 the necessary quantity was reached, thus allowing studies on explosive devices to be restored. The fact that Ramanna and Sethna did not make any reference to this structural delay of the Indian nuclear programme cast doubts on their accusations that Sarabhai was responsible for the delay in having ordering the suspension of the PNE project. Therefore, it seems probable that the scientists preferred to blame Sarabhai to cover the sad reality of the slow and difficult technological development of the PNE project.

For the same reasons, it is possible to reject another interpretation raised more recently by Ashok Kapur: in his book *Pokhran and Beyond: India's Nuclear Behaviour* the author claims that the suspension of the PNE project must be ascribed to Indira Gandhi<sup>104</sup>. This hypothesis appears even less credible since Indira Gandhi never officially repudiated the project; instead in 1970 she authorised Indian representatives to publicly announce India's decision of conducting a PNE at international conferences, as shown later. Moreover, her personal scarce knowledge of nuclear policy and her reliance on her Cabinet to formulate India's position toward the Treaty of Non Proliferation also contributed to casting doubt on the possibility of Indira Gandhi personally ordering the suspension of the PNE project in 1966<sup>105</sup>.

The hypothesis that the Indian scientific community was simply running late

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103Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 141; Producing instead an explosive device based on enriched uranium was far more difficult, both at the technological level, and since India did not have the possibility to divert it from its plants. Enriched uranium was indeed provided only by the United States for the Tarapur plant and it was under IAEA control. Narasimhiah Seshagiri, *The Bomb!: Fallout of India's Nuclear Explosion* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1975), 67–68.

104Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond*, 138.

105In reality, analysing Indira Gandhi's political career it is possible to argue that she was able to take her own independent decisions, like for example about the rupee devaluation, and she had no fear of changing her position in politics, as her shift towards the left after the 1967 elections shows. However, it is possible to argue that generally Indira Gandhi was more focused on decision making to gain political consensus rather than on her personal values. The fact that this news was not publicised directly excluded Mrs. Gandhi from obtaining political gains from it, thus also excluding this hypothesis.

compared to the plans announced by Bhabha, and that an official suspension was neither ordered by the AEC chairman, nor by the Indian Prime Minister, is further corroborated by the development of India's international posture from 1966 until 1971. During this period, as the following sections will show, India indeed did not show intentions to modifying Shastri's decision to carry out a PNE. It is rather clear that India maintained its long-standing ambiguous approach, permitting New Delhi to refuse the superpowers' initiatives to reinforce the non-proliferation regime. Before proceeding with the analysis of India's position, a brief presentation of the superpowers' will to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime after China's nuclear blast is necessary.

The monopoly of the two main superpowers was broken by the United Kingdom exploding its first nuclear device in 1952, by France in 1960, and China in 1964, the United States began to be more concerned in preventing other states from equipping themselves with nuclear weapons. This led Washington to push for the conclusion of an international agreement to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, in the wave of making the climate even more unstable and challenging the already fragile cold war deterrent relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. More nuclear-weapon states would have augmented miscalculation, accidents, tension escalation, and nuclear conflict risks, thus reducing security for the whole world. On this basis, on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1965, the UN Disarmament Committee passed the American resolution about the necessity that UN members would move at the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Conference (ENDC) for formulating a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty<sup>106</sup>. As a consequence, in late July 1965 the talks on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation matters began at the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Conference (ENDC) of the United Nation in Geneva.

International negotiations in Geneva caught the attention of the Indian public that began to focus more on the non-proliferation issues, rather than on the necessity to find a security strategy able to respond to the Chinese challenge. As a consequence, only a few articles were published during 1966 on the question as to

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<sup>106</sup>Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 103.

whether India had to acquire a nuclear arsenal or not. Not casually, the one published by the director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) at that time, D. S. Dutt, highlighted the risks India would have run by beginning an arms race with China<sup>107</sup>. Not even the fact that China in May 1966 tested its first thermonuclear explosion, triggered particular reactions in India. Great domestic economic and political problems were also occupying India at that time, as already highlighted in the first chapter, contributing to pushing India's nuclear programme into the background. However, the lack of public attention did not prevent India from pursuing its commercial program and to strengthen international collaboration. In December 1966 India signed an agreement with the United States and Canada for the supply of American plutonium for research purposes<sup>108</sup>, while in the following month Canada accepted to collaborate for the construction of a second reactor in Rajasthan, RAPS-II<sup>109</sup>. Reflecting the growing global concerns over nuclear-proliferation both the agreements signed included IAEA controls on the use India would have put to the concerned materials and reactors<sup>110</sup>. Despite directly experiencing the growing international consensus on non-proliferation, New Delhi's approach to the question remained unchanged. The Indian representative in Geneva at the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Conference (ENDC), V. Trivedi, restated again in 1966 what had for years been the position of India: to demand nuclear weapon states eliminating their arsenal first that non-nuclear states had to renounce to acquire nuclear weapons, and in the while also providing nuclear security support<sup>111</sup>. On those occasions Trivedi also informed the international community of India's opposition to a ban that could have prevented nuclear explosions, supporting the view that PNEs could indeed be useful also for "economic purposes"<sup>112</sup>.

However, in 1967 the negotiations in Geneva became more focused on the first

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107Drone Som Dutt, *India and the Bomb* (New Delhi: Institute for Strategic Studies, 1966).

108Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 131.

109"Note of the Ministry of External Affairs about the list of Indo-Canadian agreements, undated but probably written in 1974" in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/2/74, in National Archives, New Delhi.

110For example, RAPS-I was put only under Canadian inspections, while RAPS-II was under IAEA ones. Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond*, 162.

111Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 104.

112Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 135.

three articles of the Non-Proliferation Treaty<sup>113</sup>, rather than on the issues of disarmament, and of security guarantees, as the message sent by the American President Lyndon B. Johnson to the ENDC demonstrates. In this memorandum the President clearly underlined the fact that the United States did not recognise any practical differences between a nuclear weapon and a peaceful nuclear explosive, restating again the necessity to ban all the tests without contemplating vertical disarmament<sup>114</sup>. The non-proliferation test ban treaty saga almost came to an end on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1967, when a joint draft treaty was proposed by the United States and the Soviet Union. Notably, the agreement made no reference to security guarantees and nuclear disarmament, while instead it made a distinction between the states that had exploded a nuclear device before 1<sup>st</sup> January 1967 (thus including China), which were then called Nuclear Weapon States (NWS), and the others, named instead Non Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS). According to the agreement, the first group of states did not have the right to transfer technology and materials considered useful for creating nuclear weapons nor explosive devices to the second group; while the second kind of states had to accept the safeguards and investigations of the AIEA for any nuclear activities aimed at checking any illegal military usage.

Of course this triggered the criticism of non nuclear weapon states, like Germany, Italy, Japan, Sweden and India, which became even more vocal. Therefore, in 1967 the Indian representative Trivedi, restating India's position again, accused the nuclear weapons states to have adopted a discriminant and morally unequal approach to the question<sup>115</sup>. Since by that time India's requests were almost unrealistic due to negotiations development, the fact that India stressed the disarmament of the nuclear weapon states as a precondition for signing the NPT, indicates that, as noted by Bhatia: "New Delhi was preparing the ground for its own ultimate rejection of the NPT in order to preserve all its nuclear options, including the development of PNE

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113The final text of the Treaty is available at:

<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/Others/infcirc140.pdf> (retrieved on 17th October 2012).

114Mirchandani, *India's Nuclear Dilemma*, 134.

115Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 134.

technology”<sup>116</sup>. This being New Delhi's main concern, is confirmed by the records of the official, but private, meetings with the Americans in which Indians directly expressed their opinion<sup>117</sup>, and by the conclusions reached by the Americans in evaluating the Indian behaviour at the ENDC<sup>118</sup>. The fact that on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1967 the new Indian Foreign Minister M. C. Chagla announced at the Lok Sabha that India would not accept a treaty on nuclear non-proliferation as had been formulated until that time in Geneva seems to have been a direct consequence<sup>119</sup>. After this decision, Indian representatives did not however abandon the conference, but continued to argue for disarmament and international guarantees.

In the following months two specific articles, Article IV and VI, were added in order to make reference to the necessity to stop the nuclear arms race, and to contemplate the need for a full technical cooperation over the peaceful use of nuclear technology. Nevertheless, the Indian cabinet unanimously refused to sign<sup>120</sup>, probably also influenced by public opinion polls<sup>121</sup>. The NPT was endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in June 1968, and opened for signatures the following month. It then came into effect in 1970 with the ratification of 70 states, including some of those that had been explicitly against it during 1968, like Sweden, Japan and West Germany. Pakistan did not sign the treaty, justifying its decision with the argument that India was not a signatory state<sup>122</sup>.

In the meantime, in India by late 1967 the Atomic Energy Establishment in Trombay, renamed *Bhabha Atomic Research Centre* (BARC) in honour of the father of the India's nuclear programme, began to work to solve ongoing problems for the construction of a nuclear explosive, according to the accounts of the scientists

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116Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 135.

117Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 136.

118“Confidential note sent by Mouser, Department of Near Eastern Affairs and South Asia, dated 8th July 1969” in Kalyani Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond* (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2010), 370–372.

119Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 135.

120Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond*, 163. According to him the decision was influenced by the reading of public opinion polls, which showed a consensus on refusing to sign the treaty.

121Ashis Nandy, “The Bomb, the NPT and the Indian Elites,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 7, no. 31/33 (1972): 1537–1539.

122India and Pakistan are still today the only countries along with Israel to have not signed the treaty, while North Korea signed the treaty in 1985, but withdrew from it in 2003.

working there at that time<sup>123</sup>. Some of the crucial problems to solve were for example the plutonium state equation derivation, which explains when it becomes critical and thus able to begin a chain reaction, and the realisation of the design for the explosive device. Raja Ramanna, together with Rajagopala Chidambaram, later the chairman of the AEC and the man who presided over India's 1998 nuclear explosions, P. K. Iyengar, physicist at BARC, and the Defence research and Development Organisation laboratories began to work on them<sup>124</sup>. Moreover, in 1970 the scientists began to work on the construction of a small experimental *Purnima*<sup>125</sup> reactor to be used as a nuclear explosive device, which later became operative in May 1972<sup>126</sup>. According to the BARC scientists the decision, this time, was taken with the reluctant support of Sarabhai, who did not allocate any specific budget for the project, and did not consult the Prime Minister<sup>127</sup>. The consensus that was growing inside the Indian bureaucratic apparatus is shown by an official Indian document proving that in 1969 a part of the Indian bureaucracy was a fervent supporter of the necessity to equip India with nuclear weapons, and to develop missile and submarine capabilities to launch medium range nuclear weapons<sup>128</sup>. This is an important aspect since it allows to argue that the decision taken by the Shastri government in 1964 was supported not only by the following governments, but also by a part of the same Indian bureaucratic apparatus.

The new 10-year Indian plan for atomic energy and space research presented in 1970 called for large investments, and for the development of space research for civilian applications, but did not mention the PNE<sup>129</sup>. However, in 1970 the new AEC chairman Sarabhai commissioned a study of the cost of developing a nuclear

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123Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage, an Autobiography*, 75.

124R. Chidambaram and C. Ganguly, "Plutonium and thorium in the Indian nuclear programme," *Current science* 70, no. 1 (1996): 25.

125Purnima is the acronym of Plutonium Reactor for Neutronic investigations in Multiplying Assemblies, and in Hindi means "full moon".

126*Indian Express*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1994.

127Ibid.

128"Note on Pakistan situation", undated but probably from 1969 from the analysis of the Pakistani situation described in the document, in P. N. Haksar private papers files, III inst., f. n. 290, in NMML, New Delhi.

129Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb*, 113–4.

weapons programme to N. Seshagiri of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, in order to have an independent opinion. The result of the study was that developing a nuclear weapons arsenal would have been too costly for India, but that producing and using PNE for engineering purposes was economically possible<sup>130</sup>. The study provided the basis on which Sarabhai and representatives of the Indian government made their interventions for justifying the choice of conducting the PNE. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1970 the Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, indeed told the Lok Sabha that studies about underground PNEs were ongoing<sup>131</sup>, while on 17<sup>th</sup> May the AEC chairman confirmed that India was not trying to have nuclear weapons, but that it would only retain the possibility of carrying out underground nuclear tests for peaceful purposes<sup>132</sup>. Later, in July 1970 Sarabhai announced that India was almost able to conduct underground nuclear explosions, and that exploding a PNE would not have been an international violation since New Delhi had not signed the NPT. Lastly, on 31<sup>st</sup> August the Indian Prime Minister herself confirmed that technical issues related to PNEs were under study by the government<sup>133</sup>.

The official announcements released in 1970 by the Indian government had two consequences. First, it led the public debate during the summer to grow in intensity again, dividing between those in favour, like the director of the Termini Ballistic Research Laboratory in Chandigarh, Sampooran Singh<sup>134</sup>, and those against, like the head of the that of IDSA K. Subrahmanyam's, who advocated for a much more cautious initiative on the line drawn by the Sarabhai plan<sup>135</sup>. The second even more significant consequence, was that the official Indian announcements also alarmed the government of the United States. Aware of the probability of India heading towards a nuclear explosion, on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1970 the United States sent an aide-mémoire to India in which Washington warned New Delhi that a plutonium nuclear explosion

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130Narasimhiah Seshagiri, *The Bomb!: Fallout of India's Nuclear Explosion* (Vikas, 1975), 67-8.

131Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 143.

132Ibid, xi.

133Bhabani Sen Gupta and Cānakya Sena, *Nuclear Weapons?: Policy Options for India* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1983), 5.

134Sampooran Singh, *India and the Nuclear Bomb* (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1971).

135K. Subrahmanyam, "Options for India," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses Journal* 3 (1970).



would have been considered a violation of the Indo-American agreement on nuclear cooperation<sup>136</sup>. However, India answered by rejecting American interpretations of the agreements signed in 1956 and 1963. The Indian Prime Minister informed Washington that a PNE would not have meant a legal violation of the Indo-American agreements, since the latter did not expressly prohibit PNEs<sup>137</sup>, as it effectively was.

### ***3. India's nuclear programme in the Seventies and the peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974***

During the Seventies India continued its technological race to the development of the peaceful nuclear device, publicly announcing its intentions to detonate once ready. Despite the criticism raised, New Delhi was able to sign another agreement in 1971 for the continuation of the cooperation with Canada on the two reactors in Rajasthan. The 1971 events further fostered an expansion of the domestic consensus concerning the necessity of a nuclear blast to show national power and technological advancement. As this paragraph will show, in parallel to the resolution of technological problems in 1972/1973, the Indian government faced a growing domestic political turmoil that had probably contributed to the political decision to explode the nuclear device as soon as scientists were ready. Fired in 1974, the technological success was also exploited for diverting the public attention from domestic problems, though it triggered also negative international reactions.

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<sup>136</sup>Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 35.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

### *3.1 Preparations for the 1974 peaceful nuclear explosion*

During 1971 the awareness that India was heading towards a nuclear explosion grew in the West. Indeed, during the summer the Indian Prime Minister again returned to the question of nuclear explosions, making a distinction between peaceful nuclear explosives and nuclear weapons, though stating India's intention not to acquire a nuclear weapons arsenal<sup>138</sup>. In September 1971, the AEC chairman Sarabhai restated even more clearly that Indian scientists were working on the development of a nuclear explosive at the Fourth International Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy in Geneva<sup>139</sup>. Repeating the long-standing Indian position over disarmament, Sarabhai seized the opportunity on that occasion to remind everyone that it was a right his country's to fully explore the potential of nuclear technology for peaceful applications, without legally violating international laws.

Notwithstanding India's declarations and the growing concerns of India's partners like Canada and the United States, commercial interests prevailed in Geneva. Therefore, a new version of the Trilateral Agreement between India, Canada and the IAEA was signed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1971 to extend the international collaboration on RAPS-I and RAPS-II for another 5 years, and to establish the American provisions of heavy-water conditions necessary to operate the Indian reprocessing plants<sup>140</sup>. The only aspect that disclosed Canadian concerns, beyond the imposition of IAEA safeguards in place of bilateral ones on RAPS-II, was the letter the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau felt the necessity to write to Indira Gandhi on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1971. In ways similar to the Americans' the year before, that letter stated: “the use of Canadian supplied materials, equipments and facilities in India, that is, at CIRUS, RAPP I or RAPP II, or fissile material from these reactors,

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<sup>138</sup>*Times of India*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

<sup>139</sup>Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 159.

<sup>140</sup>It was decided that 460 tonnes of heavy-water would be provided by the United States over the following 5 years, but that its use would have been limited exclusively to peaceful purposes in the Rajasthan reactor, which was regulated by IAEA safeguards. The new version of the agreement is attached to the “Letter from N. Krishnan, Joint Secretary at the UN, to R. Menon, Joint Secretary in MEA, New Delhi, dated 26<sup>th</sup> October 1971”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/6/71, National Archives, New Delhi.

for the development of a nuclear explosive device would inevitably call on our part for a reassessment of our nuclear co-operation arrangements with India”<sup>141</sup>. Prime Minister Trudeau also reminded them of the possibility (according to the NTP) for India to conduct PNEs with the assistance of a NWS. She responded with a letter to the Canadian Prime Minister dated 12<sup>th</sup> October where she cordially refused Trudeau's suggestions and argued that there was no need to modify the contents of the agreement recently signed in Geneva. Mrs. Gandhi reminded them once again that India had not signed the NTP, and therefore its rights to conduct in autonomy PNEs were still valid<sup>142</sup>.

Despite India's declaration of intents, the PNE project was only ready to be tested by late 1973, when problems that emerged with the production of the neutron initiator<sup>143</sup> (called *Flower*) and with the arraying of the polonium were finally solved by the scientists<sup>144</sup>. As a result, the non-nuclear explosive was then firstly tested in 1973 in Andhra Pradesh by the Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO) of the Indian Ministry of Defence<sup>145</sup>, and Pokhran was chosen and prepared by the army as the place to detonate the device<sup>146</sup>. Seshagiri, who was one of the scientists working on the PNE project, claims that Indian scientists were ready to conduct the test by late 1973<sup>147</sup>. According to him the moment was particularly appropriate since the 1973 oil crisis had just showed the unsustainable situation of those states, among which India, which were still largely relying on oil and coal energy, rather than on electricity production from hydrological, thermal or nuclear sources<sup>148</sup>. The Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in a conversation with the American writer Rodney Jones confirmed that: “We did it when the scientists were

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141 Wohlstetter, *The Buddha Similes: Absent-minded Peaceful Aid and the Indian Bomb*, 117.

142 Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 159–160.

143 A modulated neutron initiator is a neutron source capable of producing a burst of neutrons on activation. It is a crucial part of some nuclear weapons, as its role is to "kick-start" the chain reaction at the optimal moment when the configuration is prompted critical.

144 Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage, an Autobiography*, 90.

145 Bhatia, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 144.

146 *Indian Express*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 1994.

147 Seshagiri, *The Bomb!*, 14.

148 India's production of oil is limited by the scarce presence of raw materials. The coal reserves are instead larger, but in the Seventies were estimated to be around only 81 billion tonnes, able to sustain the energy production for at only 30–40 years. *Ibid.*, 16–23.

ready”<sup>149</sup>.

It is interesting to note that while the scientists were working, political interests to test the device intensified for two reasons: first, the 1971 events enlarged the political consensus about the necessity to further demonstrate India's power to the world; second, domestic political troubles made the government of Indira Gandhi even more interested in carrying out the test to divert attention. These two elements will be briefly analysed in the following section, in order to better contextualise the domestic situation in which the testing of the PNE took place in May 1974.

As already highlighted in the second chapter of this thesis, during 1971 India faced the East Pakistan crisis; a fact that contributed to enhancing perceptions of insecurity. Despite some overrate the importance of the American symbolic gesture of dispatching the nuclear aircraft-carrier<sup>150</sup>, it is possible to argue that this display of power had an important impact on the Indian leadership who received the confirmation about the necessity for demonstrating India's nuclear power to the world. As the debate emerged later in the Indian parliament demonstrates, the *Enterprise* event indeed had a greater impact than when the new Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto announced in 1972 his intention to equip Pakistan with nuclear weapons even at the cost of: “eat leaves, or go hungry”<sup>151</sup>, due to the obvious fact that it would have required quite a long time for Pakistan to be ready for the production of a nuclear explosive device. The Indian press increased the interventions in favour of nuclear weapons, as the case of *Seminar* demonstrates: in October 1971 an entire number of the Indian monthly magazine was indeed dedicated to the issue<sup>152</sup>. In addition, in 1972 the political pressure to build nuclear weapons became even more significant at the Indian Parliament. On 17<sup>th</sup> March the government was asked about its strategy to counter the possibility that another

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149Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 175.

150Mariele Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan: gli anni della presidenza Carter* (Roma: Carocci, 2009), 59; Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Hodder, 2010), 105.

151Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, Second ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 38.

152*Seminar*; October 1974, p. 10-13. Almost all the authors, like Major General, D. K. Palit, of the Military Academy in Dehra Dun, Romesh Tapar, Major Gen. D. Som Dutt, former director of the IDSA, despite slight differences, were in favour of a nuclear weapon in India; with one exception, Sugata Dasgupta.

international nuclear blackmail (as the *Enterprise*) could be repeated. Moreover, when the defence budget<sup>153</sup> was discussed in May all the parties except for the two communist ones called for the necessity to demonstrate India's power through the acquisition of nuclear weapons; or at least the demonstration of possessing nuclear power through peaceful nuclear explosions<sup>154</sup>. On both occasions the Defence Minister, Jagjivan Ram, opposed the pressure and firmly stated India's intention not to develop a full-scale weapon programme<sup>155</sup>, but rather to plan an underground nuclear explosion as soon as possible<sup>156</sup>. Again in November 1972, the debate on nuclear weapons resurfaced in Parliament, and the government was questioned about the progress made in developing nuclear devices for peaceful purposes<sup>157</sup>.

The developments that took place at the domestic level in 1973 and 1974 also provided the Indian political leadership with another reason to finally carry out the nuclear test in May 1974: diverting attention from internal political problems. In 1973 India's government was facing a growing popular discontent triggered by its incapacity to carry out the promised socio-economic reforms<sup>158</sup>. The situation was then worsened by unfavourable external factors, like the severe drought of 1972, and the 1973 oil crisis explosion, favouring inflation and worsening the financial position of India.<sup>159</sup> However, the situation worsened even more at the beginning of 1974: in January Gujarat erupted in unprecedented mass rioting that forced the imposition of

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153Funding were allocated to the Department of Atomic Energy in accordance to the 10 years Sarabhai' plan: Rs. 105 crores (\$141 million) in 1971/1972, and Rs. 126 crores (\$163 million) in 1972/1973. Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 170.

154*Link*, 7 May 1972. Whoever was against the development of nuclear weapons before 1971, in 1972 became favourable, as for example the Swatantra Party.

155Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 169.

156Ibid.

157Ibid., 170.

158Politicians close to the Socialist Forum began to claim for more redistributive policies, as those promised by Indira Gandhi during the 1971 electoral campaign, and never realised. Ramashray Roy, "India in 1972: Fissure in the Fortress," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 2 (1973): 234; The fact that, in order to protect her position, the prime minister had promoted politicians with no political base to lead state politics in 1972 made these new leaders to become easy targets of internal attacks within the Congress, leading to factionalism and to political in turmoil in several states. For example, President Rule was imposed in Andhra Pradesh in January 1973, in Orissa in March 1973, in Uttar Pradesh in June 1973, and in Gujarat in February 1974. Corruption scandals did not help further eroding general mistrust toward politicians and their promises. Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003), 23.

the President's Rule at first, and then to dissolve the state legislative assembly in 15<sup>th</sup> March 1974<sup>160</sup>. Few days later in the state of Bihar, opposition parties launched a mass agitation against the government, which later assumed a national character under the guidance of the national Gandhian leader, J. P. Narayan<sup>161</sup>. When the nuclear test was effectively carried out, on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1974, the largest railway strike in the Indian history was taking place. Railway workers had begun their national strike on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1974 in order to obtain wages and bonus parity with other workers in the public sector, meeting such a high participation to paralyse the country for almost twenty days. Furthermore, when the nuclear device exploded, the Indian government was violently repressing the strike, arresting almost 50,000 activists, thus the justification of the PNE as a diversion expedient stands as a found hypothesis<sup>162</sup>.

Therefore, it makes sense to argue that when the scientists informed the government of being ready in late 1973/ early 1974, the government led by Indira Gandhi had no reasons to delay the test also due to its growing domestic problems. Therefore, the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone could have appeared tempting to the Indian Prime Minister, as it often happens in politics when politicians try to exploit technological, or foreign policy successes for reinforcing their political position in the country.

Therefore, in February 1974 the decision to carry out the test was finally taken. As usual with the Indian decision-making process, only few people were involved: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who actually had the last word; P. N. Haksar, the

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159Prices of first necessity goods rose by 13% from 1972 to 1973, while in the following year inflation reached 30%, hitting particularly the poorest strata of Indian population. Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004: The Gradual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 515.

160Ram Joshi, "India in 1974: Growing Political Crisis," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 2 (1975): 86.

161Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011), 478.

162Also the American intelligence considered domestic politics as one of the political reasons for the 1974 Indian test. Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 377–379; For a specific analysis of the strike see for example: M. R., "The Fall-Out," *Economic and Political Weekly* 9, no. 23 (June 8, 1974): 892–893; Stephen Sherlock, "Railway Workers and Their Unions: Origins of 1974 Indian Railways Strike," *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 41 (October 14, 1989): 2311–2322.

former principal secretary to the Prime Minister; P. N. Dhar, who was the principal secretary to the Prime Minister at that time; Dr. B. D. Nag Chaudhuri, scientific adviser to the defence minister; Homi Sethna, chairman of the AEC after the death of Sarabhai on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1971; and Raja Ramanna, director of the BARC, instead of Sethna<sup>163</sup>. The Indian defence minister, Jagjivan Ram, was informed about the decision to explode the nuclear device only on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1974, while the Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, was informed a mere 48 hours in advance<sup>164</sup>. Ashok Parthasarathy, who was the Prime Minister's scientific advisor in the PMO, reports that both P. N. Dhar and P. N. Haksar pledged that the international repercussions could have been significant both at the level of the American and Canadian cooperation<sup>165</sup>. However, their opinions were sided by the scientists' euphoria and by the pressures Ramanna and Sethna put on the Prime Minister, who clearly made the ultimate decision to authorise the test.

### ***3.2 Pokhran-I and the first national and international reactions***

On 18<sup>th</sup> May 1974 India exploded a nuclear device of 12-kiloton near Pokhran in the Rajasthan desert 107 meters below ground. The experiment was named *Smiling Buddha*, and in literature it is also generally referred as Pokhran-I, due to the fact that in 1998 India carried out other nuclear tests in the same locality. Declaring it as *peaceful* India maintained its long-standing approach to the nuclear strategy: although possessing the capabilities of developing a nuclear arsenal, it would have refrained from doing that for moral considerations, if not strictly necessary. As this paragraph will show, if national reactions were of jubilation<sup>166</sup>, at the international level India had to face not only some positive reactions from the non-aligned

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163Ramanna, *Years of Pilgrimage, an Autobiography*, 89.

164Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option*, 198.

165Ashok Parthasarathy, *At the Core of Technology* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley India, 2007), 125.

166Chari, "Pokhran-I: Personal Recollections," 5.

countries, but also the strong and firm decision from Canada to end all the cooperation in the nuclear field, although India had not legally violated bilateral agreements. The government of the United States had a milder reaction, while Pakistan responded giving even more impulse to its own nuclear programme.

To confirm the result, the Prime Minister commented on the explosion stating that: “This is part of our research and study and we remain deeply committed to the peaceful uses of atomic energy.”<sup>167</sup>, and that, according to the Partial Test Ban Treaty that India signed in 1963, the experiment had been carried out underground<sup>168</sup>. Similarly, the Atomic Energy Commission confirmed that India did not intend to develop nuclear weapons, and that the objective of the *peaceful* explosion was to enhance the power status and authority of India at the international level<sup>169</sup>. Foreign secretary, Kewal Singh, also reassured the world restating that India only had peaceful intentions, and that his country did: “not have the economic capability to devote to military use” the technological capability reached<sup>170</sup>. The Indian press reacted with enthusiasm: on 19<sup>th</sup> May the *Times of India* was titled “Thrilled Nation Lauds Feat”, while the *Sunday Standard* stated “Monopoly of the Big Five Broken”. Similarly, almost all the other major newspapers welcomed the news and celebrated the achievement of the AEC as a national result. The nuclear explosion also triggered the positive reactions of those opposition parties which had been in favour of a nuclear explosion for a long time, like the leader of the Jan Sangh L. K. Advani<sup>171</sup>. As a consequence, the nuclear explosion also had some positive results for the popularity of the Prime Minister, as some public surveys conducted at the beginning of June demonstrate<sup>172</sup>. Scientist were celebrated by the Indian press as heroes, and

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167Seshagiri, *The Bomb!*, 7.

168“Record of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi speech at the Lok Sabha on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1974, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/27/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

169Washington Post, 19th May 1974. Sen Gupta for example argued that the 1974 explosion was carried out to transform India into a regional power, to support India’s independence from the Soviet Union, and to demonstrate India’s power to the United States. Gupta and Sena, *Nuclear Weapons?*.

170Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 397.

171*New York Times*, 20 May 1974.

172Indian Institute of Public Opinion, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 19: 8, 1974 cited in Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 180.



discussions about the costs went silenced by the words of the Prime Minister who highlighted the fact that no specific budget allocation had been made for the PNE<sup>173</sup>. Of course, some were against the action, like for example did George Fernandes, the socialist leader who had led the railway protests against the government, and the *Statesman Weekly*, which defined the PNE as provocative, and indefensible<sup>174</sup>.

At the international level the first reactions to the Indian PNE were instead mixed and contrasting. Telegrams of congratulations expressing support to India were sent by several non-aligned countries, like for example Nigeria, Colombia, Argentina, Panama, Mexico<sup>175</sup>. Positive comments were also formulated by neighbouring countries Nepal and Bangladesh. This led P. N. Haksar to argue that in general the: “non-aligned world as a whole has applauded the competence of our scientists and technologists”<sup>176</sup>. Also from the West some voices were raised in support of the explosion: the warmer ones came from France who sent official congratulations to India through its Atomic Energy Commission<sup>177</sup>. Because of the adoption of a new international approach officially favourable to a stricter non-proliferation regime, the Soviet Union could not officially welcome the Indian explosion, but the fact that it formally accepted the depiction of the blast as *peaceful* was quite important. A further sign of their non-opposition was demonstrated by the fact that the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi publicly interpreted the Soviet comments as supportive of India's explosion in her speech released at the Lok Sabha on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1974<sup>178</sup>. Also China did not express any formal criticism and initially just

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173Times of India, 28 May 1974. American estimates calculated that the costs of the explosion was around \$200 million, quite similar to the ones reported by Seshagiri in his book. Seshagiri, *The Bomb!*, 7 However, the official declaration of the Indian government referred only to about \$400.000. “Telegram from Indian Foreign Secretary, New Delhi to all heads of missions, dated on 29th May 1974”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

174Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 179 It is interesting to note that in 1998 when India detonated five devices without pretending they were “peaceful”, Fernandes was the Defence Minister of the Indian government and that he supported the explosions.

175To see all the telegrams expressing support see in MEA, AMS, WII/103/21/74, National Archives, New Delhi.

176Parmeshwar Narain Haksar, *India's Foreign Policy and Its Problems* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers, 1989), 193.

177Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 183.

178“Record of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi speech at the Lok Sabha on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1974, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/27/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

remained silent, releasing only some general assurances to Pakistan against India's nuclear blackmail in the following months; therefore not directly eroding Sino-Indian relations<sup>179</sup>. Relations between New Delhi and Beijing instead slowly improved in the following years, as demonstrated by the opening of diplomatic relations in 1976, which had remained frozen since 1962. New Delhi's decision to appoint N. R. Narayanan as its ambassador to China on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1976 was indeed soon reciprocated by Beijing that sent Chen Chao Yuan as its ambassador to New Delhi<sup>180</sup>. As a result of these slow rapprochements, in 1977 trade relations were also resumed.

However, elsewhere reactions were far less enthusiastic: as in the case of Canada, the United States, Pakistan, Japan, Sweden and Australia. All these countries indeed officially equated the declared peaceful Indian nuclear explosion to the acquisition of a nuclear weapon capability, and thus blamed India's actions even if in quite different ways. Being conscious of the fact that with high probability the plutonium utilised by India in the PNE was the one produced in the CIRUS reactor, which had been built with Canadian assistance without imposition of any kind of safeguards, Canada was the state that expressed the strongest disappointment. On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1974 Canadian Secretary of State Michell Sharp declared India as a new member of the nuclear club, since the nuclear explosions had been considered peaceful<sup>181</sup>. As a predictable consequence all Canadian nuclear aid was therefore suspended (as well as all the technological cooperation projects to both India and Pakistan), economic relations put under review, the rescheduling of India's debt cancelled, and bilateral talks called for July 1974<sup>182</sup>. The only sector where economic assistance was not suspended was the agricultural one, where food aid and fertilizers were not discontinued. Canada's reaction was defined as exaggerated by some Indian

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179Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option*, 233.

180Norman D. Palmer, "India in 1976: The Politics of Depoliticization," *Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (1977): 177.

181The official speech was resumed in "Telegram sent by U. S. Bajpai at the High Commission in Ottawa, to Foreign Secretary on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1974", in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

182Indian Express, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1974; "Letter from Joint Secretary, J. S. Teja, to Indian Foreign Secretary, dated on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1974", in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

commentators<sup>183</sup>, since India had not violated any Indo-Canadian agreement. Moreover, only RAPS-I and RAPS-II had been put under the IAEA and Canadian safeguards. Instead, the CIRUS reactor had not been under international control. As a consequence, in 1974 India could have conducted underground PNEs with the plutonium produced in CIRUS without violating any agreements nor international treaties.

In order to thoroughly understand the Canadian reaction that was to accuse India of betrayal, two factors have to be analysed: first, the domestic pressures the Canadian government was facing; and second, the fact that Canada was probably also trying to hide from its responsibilities. The reaction of the Canadian government can be better understood when one considers that the country was in the final period of its national election campaign, according to which, elections were fixed for 8<sup>th</sup> July 1974. The liberal Prime Minister Trudeau was thus particularly vulnerable to attacks from the opposition about the liberal policies adopted up until that time in the nuclear cooperation with India, and his strong criticism expressed against France not signing the NPT<sup>184</sup>. Not surprisingly the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, and his Secretary of State, Mitchell Sharp, were among those who reacted more harshly to the blast<sup>185</sup>. The Prime Minister defined himself as: “very, very disappointed”, that India had used Canadian technology: “to explode a bomb”; while Foreign Minister Sharp declared to be: “very distressed and concerned”, by the misuse the Canadian aid by India<sup>186</sup>. Although the Foreign Minister Sharp had to admit at the beginning of June that India did not violate any agreements with

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183Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option*, 219.

184“Telegram from U. S. Bajpai, HighComm Ottawa, to Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, New Delhi, dated on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1974”, and “Telegram from U. S. Bajpai, HighComm Ottawa, to Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, New Delhi, dated on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1974” in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

185No further debate emerged after the elections, neither within the liberal party, nor among conservatives. “Letter from high commissioner for India, U. S. Bajpai, in Ottawa to foreign secretary, Kewal Singh, in New Delhi, dated on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1974”, in MEA files, AMS; WII/103/20/74-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

186“Note of MEA to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, undated, but probably from late June 1974”, in MEA files, AMS; WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

Canada<sup>187</sup>, Canadians repetitively questioned India regarding which reactor the plutonium used in the Indian nuclear explosion had come from<sup>188</sup>. India officially refused to recognise the fact that the plutonium came from the Canadian supplied CIRUS reactor, as was actually the case, and they instead argued that it came from the *Apsara* reactor<sup>189</sup>. To sustain this version of events, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1974 the Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh made a speech at the High Commission in Ottawa where he reminded them that India had not violated international agreements, and stated that Canada, the UN and the IAEA had been invited by the Indian chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Homi Sethna, to visit India<sup>190</sup>. Nonetheless, these official declarations did not convince Canada: the visit was refused, and the government led by Trudeau continued to depict India's behaviour as a “betrayal” during the bilateral talks that began in July 1974. At the same time Canada pressed the United States and the United Kingdom to strengthen international non-proliferation norms<sup>191</sup>.

If domestic politics had contributed to the harsh Canadian reaction, it seems also evident that Ottawa in its firm and strong reaction tried to officially downplay its direct responsibilities by not forcing India to put CIRUS under international safeguards. Clearly, economic and commercial interests prevailed over ideological and security values. Looked at from this perspective Canada's moralistic reaction appears to be more formal than substantial. This hypothesis is corroborated by the declarations of some Canadian members of the parliament pronounced a year after India's blast during the Commonwealth Parliament Meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1975: they justified Canada's criticism as mainly coming from the policy Ottawa had

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187 “Report made by MEA on Canadian reactions, dated 20<sup>nd</sup> July 1974”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/27/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

188“Telegram from U. S. Bajpai, HighComm Ottawa, to Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, New Delhi, dated on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1974” in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

189“Telegram from New Delhi to all heads of missions dated on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1974”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

190“Report of the speech released by the Indian Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, at the High Commission of India in Ottawa on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1974”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/20/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

191“Report made by MEA on Canadian reactions, dated 20<sup>nd</sup> July 1974”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/103/27/74-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

formally decided to adopt at the international level to discourage further nuclear proliferation, rather than as a reaction to India's unexpected betrayal. As a matter of fact the conservative Senator Allister Grosart even expressed his personal and total understanding for India developing nuclear weapons to face the Chinese threat<sup>192</sup>, while others, like for example the liberal member of the parliament Maurice Dupras, showed complete personal indifference with respect to the event<sup>193</sup>.

Whatever Canada's real motivations were, what is sure is that the suspension of the nuclear collaboration with Canada had a considerable cost for India. In a letter sent by the Joint Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, J. S. Teja, to the Foreign Secretary in New Delhi, Kewal Singh, indeed highlighted the fact that Canada still had to provide 416 tonnes of heavy-water for RAPS-I and RAPS-II, and \$16,4 million as a loan in accordance with the agreements signed before 1974<sup>194</sup>. These provisions never took place, also due to the fact that the Indo-Canadian collaboration was then definitively ended by Canada in 1976. This created problems for India since indigenous production of heavy-water was far from being able to satisfy the needs of the functioning reactors in India in 1974. In fact, although some governmental studies carried out in 1972 claimed that by 1979 the indigenous production of heavy-water would have fulfilled requirements, this was not the case: the four new enriching water facilities, which had to become operative by 1973-4, were de facto completed only in 1978, 1980, and 1985 respectively<sup>195</sup>. Moreover, the ending of Canadian assistance also slowed down the construction of RAPS-II, which finally became operative only in 1980<sup>196</sup>. However, it is also true that the suspension of Canadian assistance, as supported by the Indian scientist Seshagiri, came “at a time when Indo-Canadian interaction in the technology was no longer substantial”,

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192“Note from Joint Secretary, J. S. Teja, to Foreign Secretary, Kewal Singh, New Delhi, dates 31<sup>st</sup> October 1975, about the lunch with Canadians at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1975”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/162/63/75-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

193“Letter from Joint Secretary, J. S. Teja, to High Commissioner, U. S. Bajpai, in Ottawa, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1975” in MEA files, AMS, WII/162/63/75-I, National Archives, New Delhi.

194Ibid.

195Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 51 India's dependency from abroad for the provisions of heavy-water was reversed only during the Nineties, when New Delhi began to export heavy water first to Korea, and later also to China, and the United States.

196Ibid., 39.

therefore making the form of protest more symbolic than concrete<sup>197</sup>. Indeed, the RAPS-II was at a stage that made it possible for Indians to finish it without external help, while heavy-water and fuel were available on the international market, even if after 1974 they were generally put under IAEA safeguards, as later described.

The official reaction from the government of the United States was not as harsh as the Canadian one, especially before the American Congress began to officially exert pressure on the Ford administration in 1975. According to Kux: “the State Department's initial inclination was to criticize the Indian test as a damaging breach in the non-proliferation wall”<sup>198</sup>. However, Kissinger disagreed with the bureaucrats and opted for a much milder and neutral wording for officially commenting on the event. The necessity to avoid badly influencing Indo-American relations contributed to Kissinger's decision; together with the fact that there was no specific leverage on which the United States could claim a violation of American agreements<sup>199</sup>. As a consequence the government of the United States, unlike Canada, decided not to end nor suspend their economic assistance to India and confirmed their aid of \$29 million in June 1974<sup>200</sup>. In the same month Washington also delivered to India, as promised, the enriched uranium fuel for the Tarapur reactors.

However, the reaction of the press was more diverse: for example, Columbia Broadcasting simply announced: “Now there are six. India has joined the exclusive nuclear club”; while the *Times* expressed its sadness for the declared non-violent India going nuclear; and the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* expressed their criticism about the fact that a country as poor as India could become a nuclear weapon state<sup>201</sup>. Although public opinion was largely absorbed by the Watergate scandal which eventually led President Richard Nixon to resign on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1974, the non-proliferation lobby, far stronger among Democrats than Conservatives, began

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197Seshagiri, *The Bomb!*, 8; Onkar Marwah, “India's Nuclear and Space Programs: Intent and Policy,” *International Security* 2, no. 2 (October 1, 1977): 119–120.

198Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), 315.

199Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 365.

200Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 184.

201New York Times, 20th May 1974; Wall Street Journal, 31st May 1974. Seshagiri, *The Bomb!*, 8.

to claim for punishing India as Canada had done. The amendment to the International Development Assistance Act that the American Congress passed in August 1974 should be seen as a direct consequence of the Democratic pressure. It was created to assure that the American representatives at the World Bank would vote against any loans to those states that had, and would have, exploded nuclear device without having signed the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, once again, the American government only partially supported the action: although the Americans generally applied the measure to India, they never pressed other states to do the same. This legal measure therefore assumed only a partial symbolic meaning, demonstrated also by its abolition in 1977<sup>202</sup>.

Nevertheless, during the summer of 1974 the pressures of the non-proliferation lobby<sup>203</sup> led the United States' government to renegotiate with India a new set of safeguards and assurances to continue the provision of additional fuel for the Tarapur reactors. Through the exchange of several letters, the new Ford administration was thus able to reach a new agreement with New Delhi in September: Indians officially confirmed that all the material and equipment provided by the United States for the Tarapur power plants would have been used exclusively in those stations, and nowhere else<sup>204</sup>. Although not enough to conclude the controversy connected to the Tarapur fuel provisions, this first step allowed the United States to obtain the reassurance that the Congress was claiming. Another clear example of the position the American administration held towards India was the visit made by the American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, in October 1974. On that occasion he made an important speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs in which he recognised India's pre-eminence in South Asia and wished the development of a "mature" relationship between the two countries<sup>205</sup>. According to Perkovich, Kissinger went to India with the goal to restrain India from carrying out other nuclear explosions at

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202Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 184.

203The interdepartmental Under Secretaries Committee, in a National Security Study memorandum (202), for example argued in favour of limiting proliferation. Samuel Walker, "Nuclear Power and Nonproliferation," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 2 (2001): 223–224.

204Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 49.

205Kux, *India and the United States*, 328.

least before the NPT Review Conference planned for May 1975, and to ensure India would not export its knowledge and nuclear materials to other countries without following the IAEA regulations<sup>206</sup>. The American secretary of state also went to India with the intention of trying to convince New Delhi to accept the IAEA safeguards for *all* its nuclear reprocessing plants in order to control the production of plutonium. Since the latter goal was almost unrealistic, Kissinger was ready to recognise some room for the use of plutonium for some: “designated explosives applications”<sup>207</sup>. That this can be considered quite a relaxed and open approach, especially if compared to that of Canada, is further demonstrated by the fact that Kissinger offered its congratulations to the Indian Prime Minister for the successful result of the nuclear experiment, and called for the opening of peaceful dialogue between the two states<sup>208</sup>. From American declassified documents it seems that in late 1974 India agreed, at least, not to export nuclear explosive technology, even if it remained recalcitrant to submit all its nuclear activities checking by the IAEA, as the Americans would have wished<sup>209</sup>.

However, shortly after Indo-American bilateral relations were complicated by the American decision to restart their arms sales to Pakistan in 1975, and by the emergence in the American Congress of a large consensus in strengthening the non-proliferation regime, as will be better demonstrated later. As it is presumable, Pakistan reacted with alacrity to India's blast. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto stated that the PNE was a threateningly “fateful development”, and that Pakistan was determined not to remain in a position exposed to India's potential blackmail<sup>210</sup>. As a sign of protest Pakistan then cancelled the talks with India scheduled for June 1974 to normalize their telecommunication relations, though they were resumed in

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206Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 185.

207Ibid.

208Ibid.

209Memorandum from State Department Policy Planning Staff Director Winston Lord and Assistant Secretary for Near East Asia, Alfred L. Antherton Jr., to Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, “Nuclear dialogue with India” dated on 19th August 1975 in State Department files, cited in *ibid.*, 193.

210 New York Times, 20 May 1974. See also “The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Z. A. Bhutto's Reply of 5<sup>th</sup> June 1974”, reproduced in *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. XXVII, no 3, pp.198-200.



September. In order to calm the situation down, Indira Gandhi sent a letter to the Pakistani Prime Minister in which she explained that India had no intentions to develop nuclear military capabilities and that India: “remained committed to settle all our differences with Pakistan peacefully through bilateral negotiations in accordance with the Simla Agreement.”<sup>211</sup>. Bhutto predictably answered underlying the fact that there were no distinctions between a military or a peaceful nuclear experiment, and thus requesting international guarantees from nuclear weapon states<sup>212</sup>. It is possible to argue that India's PNE surely had the effect of reinforcing the Pakistani decision to acquire nuclear weapons, which had however already been taken two years before, in the wave of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war and of Bhutto's rise to power<sup>213</sup>. New nuclear plans were indeed released in Pakistan in October 1974, while on 18<sup>th</sup> October a new agreement was signed with France for the construction of a plutonium reprocessing plant in *Chashma*<sup>214</sup>. At last, it is probable that India's nuclear blast contributed indirectly to reinforcing Pakistan's call for a revocation of the American ban on conventional military sales; a measure imposed on Islamabad and New Delhi during the 1965 war. This can be confirmed by the letter Bhutto sent to president Nixon already on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1974. On that occasion, the Pakistani Prime Minister seized the opportunity to threaten the United States with the possibility that Pakistan would also have embraced nuclear anarchy, if nuclear weapon states failed to provide them with nuclear guarantee and protection<sup>215</sup>. The possibility of granting the removal of the ban to soften Pakistan was considered by the United States, as is further confirmed by the State Department's analysis of possible American reactions to India's PNE, which in fact suggested to: “ease our arms supply policy to permit the enhancement of Pakistan's defensive capability... [in order to]... steady Pak nerves”<sup>216</sup>. As a result, in February 1975, following Bhutto's official visit to the

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211Angadipuram Appadorai and Mannaraswamighala Sreeranga Rajan, *India's Foreign Policy and Relations* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1985), 578–9.

212Ibid.

213Feroz Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 79.

214Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 186.

215Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond*, 380–3.

216Ibid., 393.

United States, Pakistan saw the removal of ban on the sale of weapons. The United States announced that, in exchange for the guarantee that nuclear weapons would not be developed, they were ready to provide \$100 million in conventional arms<sup>217</sup>.

The other states that also officially reacted to India's PNE were: Australia, whose reaction remained however cautious; Japan, which adopted a formal resolution of protest against India and cut its bilateral aid<sup>218</sup>; and Sweden, which instead expressed its serious concerns for horizontal nuclear proliferation. The latter also seized the opportunity to blame the great powers' behaviour for not having done enough to begin the nuclear disarmament, as sanctioned in the VI Article of the NPT.

#### ***4. The long-term effects of operation Smiling Buddha***

Beyond these immediate reactions and effects, India's PNE also had significant long-term effects on the international non-proliferation regime, which was indeed reinforced by the publications of the Zangger committee's understandings, and by the foundation of the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG). As this paragraph will show, the effects on the Indian domestic political situation were instead minor, and operation *Smiling Buddha* could do little to contain the erosion of the popularity of the government led by Mrs. Gandhi. During 1974 and 1975 the Prime Minister and her government became even more challenged by the national protest movement led by J. P. Narayan, which was contrasted only in June 1975 through the imposition of the national Emergency laws; a measure that allowed the Prime Minister to assume

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217The offer was not a grant, and had to be paid by Pakistan in cash, as effectively he later did. "Report of the speech pronounced by the Deputy Secretary, A. N. Abhyankar, at the Lok Sabha on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1976", in MEA files, AMS, WII/125/29/76, National Archives, New Delhi; and "Note for supplementaries attached to a note to the Deputy minister, Bipindal Das, dated on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1976", in MEA files, AMS, WII/125/37/76.

218Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 32.

almost dictatorial powers. The long-term international effects of the 1974 nuclear explosion on India's nuclear programme will be evaluated in the second part of this paragraph.

#### ***4.1 The reinforcement of the non-proliferation regime and the deterioration of the domestic political situation in India***

International efforts to limit nuclear proliferation were already proceeding on their own when India exploded its first nuclear device in 1974. For example, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1974, two months after the explosion, on the wake of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement to limit underground nuclear weapon testing beyond a yield of 150 kilotons, although its implementation only began after 31<sup>st</sup> March 1976<sup>219</sup>. In 1975 instead the first NPT review conference was planned to bring all signatory states together to evaluate the treaty measures and objectives. Nevertheless, as argued by Perkovich: “India's nuclear test prompted an intensive tightening of the international non-proliferation regime”<sup>220</sup>, especially with respect to the horizontal proliferation.

The first evident reaction towards the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion of May 1974 was the fact that the Zangger committee<sup>221</sup> finally reached an agreement in June

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219Kapur, *India's Nuclear Option*, 243.

220Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 187.

221The Zangger committee regrouped fifteen states with the aim to coordinate restrictions on nuclear materials and technology exportations in order to prevent horizontal nuclear military proliferation. The committee had been formed after the NPT came into force in 1970, and it took its name from its first chairman, Prof. Claude Zangger. Its existence originated from the Article III of the NPT, and in particular from the second section of that article, which states that some rules should be defined to regulate the flow of nuclear materials and technology to the non-nuclear, and that IAEA safeguards should be applied to the state that imports such materials. Therefore, the objectives of the Zangger meetings were to reach a common understanding to define a list of equipment and material that would require the imposition of the AIEA safeguards, and of the nature of the same AIEA inspections and safeguards. Fritz Schmidt, “NPT Export Controls and the Zangger Committee,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 7, no. 3 (2000): 137. For more information see the official website of the Zangger Committee available at: <http://www.zanggercommittee.org/Seiten/default.aspx> (retrieved on 29th October 2012).

1974. Even if a common understanding had been reached in 1972 between the nuclear supplier states, in the months that followed India's PNE the discussions were accelerated and brought to a first conclusion. The Zangger committee reached the definitive agreement over the *trigger list* of material and equipment considered dangerous because they could be not only for civilian usages, but also to produce a nuclear weapon. When those materials were sold IAEA safeguards had to be imposed on the purchaser state<sup>222</sup>. As a consequence, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August ten member states wrote identical letters to the Director General of the IAEA stating their intentions to act in accordance to the common understanding reached during the meetings of the Zangger committee, thus promising not to export the materials included in the *trigger list* to non-nuclear states if the receiving state did not accept IAEA safeguards<sup>223</sup>. The outcome was that the Zangger committee's agreement was then published by the IAEA in September 1974 in a document INFCIRC/209<sup>224</sup> that was circulated among all the state members of the International Atomic Energy Agency. In the document INFCIRC/209 therefore, two memorandum reported the Zangger committee's understanding. The first defines the two categories of nuclear material that should require the application of the IAEA safeguards: natural or depleted uranium and thorium; and special fissionable material, such as plutonium (Pu-239), uranium (U-235), and enriched uranium (U-233). The second memorandum lists the plants, equipment, and material that should be subjected to IAEA inspections and safeguards, like for example: “the nuclear reactors, non-nuclear materials for reactors, reprocessing, fuel fabrication, uranium enrichment, heavy-water production, and the conversion of uranium and plutonium.”<sup>225</sup>. The publication of the INFCIRC/209 document was an important step even though it was not binding for the IAEA members or for the Zangger committee members. In fact, it laid the foundation on which future nuclear bilateral agreements between nuclear supplier

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222Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 187.

223Ibid.

224To consult directly the document see the following website: <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Infcircs/Others/inf209.shtml> (retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

225Schmidt, “NPT Export Controls and the Zangger Committee,” 145.

states and the non-nuclear states would likely be shaped. Since India exploded its first nuclear device only after 1<sup>st</sup> January 1967 – the date the NPT recognised as the divide between Nuclear Weapons States (NWS), and Non Nuclear Weapons States (NNWS) – it was not recognised by the Zangger committee's understandings as a NWS, despite the Indian explosion of May 1974. This of course directly affected India's nuclear activities from 1974 onwards since all the nuclear supplier states began to require the respect of the Zangger understandings, as later will be shown later.

However, India's peaceful nuclear explosion had another more important impact on the development of the non-proliferation policies. The 1974 Indian nuclear explosion indeed led the United Kingdom and the United States to seek further reinforcement of the non-proliferation regime regulated by the NPT and the Zangger committee. In order to understand this development, the specific American domestic situation has to be analysed to fully appreciate the long terms effect of *Smiling Buddha*.

Despite the mild reaction of the American government to the Indian blast, a small group within the Congress became active in calling for tougher measures to correct the previous American policy of promoting nuclear power in the world. What was known as the *Atoms for peace* strategy, became perceived by them as a potential great danger for the entire world<sup>226</sup>. In parallel, the idea that the United States had to restrict its policy of nuclear exports began to acquire even more consensus inside the State Department, even though the Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger continued to sustain it<sup>227</sup>. American declassified documents reveal indeed that in 1975 the United States, despite India's announcements against further explosions, considered a second Indian nuclear explosion a probable and dangerous step. Such an event would have precipitated the Indo-American and Indo-Canadian relations, as well as embolden Bhutto's plans to modernize the Pakistani army<sup>228</sup>. As a consequence of the contrasting pressures made on the one hand by the Congress and the State

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226Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 190.

227Walker, "Nuclear Power and Nonproliferation," 223–224.

228See for example: *Ibid.*, 225.

Department, and on the other by the Ford administration, in 1975 Washington began to internationally behave with the clear intention of reaching two goals. Firstly, developing a stricter non-proliferation regime that could impede the Non Nuclear Weapon States recognised by the NPT to continue their cooperation with certain nuclear supplier states. Like for example France, which until that time had not yet begun to require the imposition of the IAEA safeguards on their exports. Secondly, to keep the dialogue with India open, without suspending nuclear cooperation, but rather trying to press them to adhere as much as possible to the new international non-proliferation regime.

The first American strategy mentioned above saw the British and Americans making common efforts from as early as 1975 to promote a series of conferences about non-proliferation that also included those states such as France, West Germany, and Japan, which were not part of the NPT at that time, but nevertheless exported nuclear materials<sup>229</sup>. The aim was to refrain France and West Germany from continuing the cooperation initiated with Pakistan, North Korea and Brazil, and to diminish the risk of horizontal proliferation. In 1975 therefore the United Kingdom – which was also the permanent secretariat of the Zangger committee – invited six other nuclear suppliers<sup>230</sup> to several conferences in London to discuss how to reinforce the non-proliferation regime<sup>231</sup>. The meetings of these six nuclear supplier states, called the *Nuclear Supplier Group* (NSG or more ironically the *London Club*), contributed to the definition of those guidelines that were later published as IAEA Information Circular INFRCIRC/254<sup>232</sup> in February 1978. These guidelines were almost the same as those identified in the common understandings produced by the Zangger committee in 1974, thus including a *trigger list* of the material that would

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229 Ian Anthony, Christer Ahlstrom, and Vitaly Fedchenko, *Reforming Nuclear Export Controls: What Future for the Nuclear Suppliers Group?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16–17.

230 Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States.

231 India followed the discussions carefully. See for example: “Letter sent by Foreign Secretary, A. P. Venkateswaran, Indian Embassy in Washington to Secretary for East, A. Vellodi, New Delhi, dated on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1977; and “Letter from First Secretary, K. V. Rajan, in Indian Embassy in Washington to New Delhi, on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1977”, in MAE files, AMS, WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

232 For the official text of the document consult the following website: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/nsg/text/inf254.htm> (retrieved on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012).

have required acceptance by the NNWS of the IAEA safeguards on its territory and nuclear activities. The only notable difference that justifies the NSG was the fact that it included statements in the non-proliferation regime that were not part of the NPT: thus precluding NNWS non-signatory states like Pakistan and India, to by-pass the IAEA safeguards buying nuclear material and technologies from non-signatory nuclear supplier states from the NPT, like France for instance<sup>233</sup>. Since France participated in the NSG and accepted its conditions<sup>234</sup>, by 1977 the international non-proliferation regime became significantly more stringent, rendering imports/exports of nuclear material, equipment, and technology almost completely controlled by the IAEA. China indeed remained the only recognised Nuclear Weapon State that refused the non-proliferation regime until much later. It did, in fact, only sign the NPT in 1992, and became a member of the Zangger committee in 1997, and of the NSG in 2004.

Although the United States made efforts to develop the NSG and to make the nuclear non-proliferation policies more stringent, the American administrations also worked to maintain Indo-American relations, and not to worsen them. It is possible to argue, as Perkovich does, that American policies towards India in the wake of the 1974 PNE reflected the *Realpolitik* view: expansion of nuclear weapons was in some way inevitable in large states like India, and that therefore the United States did not want to needlessly erode bilateral relations<sup>235</sup>. The fact that in a memorandum sent in August 1975 by the American State Department to Kissinger that suggested to the Secretary of State to approach the issue of the Indian nuclear programme keeping in mind that: “our basic policy of not pressuring the [Government Of India] GOI on their nuclear explosive program.”, clearly demonstrates this intention<sup>236</sup>. The letter

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233Anthony, Ahlstrom, and Fedchenko, *Reforming Nuclear Export Controls*, 17.

234The fact that France did not sign the NPT and therefore did not participate in the Zangger committee is explained by the fact that Paris wanted to be free to continue exploding PNEs. Since participating in the NSG did not require similar ties, France accepted.

235Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 193–4.

236Memorandum from State Department Policy Planning Staff Director Winston Lord and Assistant Secretary for Near East Asia, Alfred L. Antherton Jr., to Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, “Nuclear dialogue with India” dated on 19th August 1975 in State Department files, cited in *ibid.*, 193.

was sent in preparation for a meeting between the Secretary of State and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Y. B. Chavan, who visited the United States in early October 1975. As a consequence, at least until Indira Gandhi remained in power, the United States administration did not directly put any specific nor direct pressure on India to discontinue its nuclear weapons programme, even if not in favour of its development.

However, the American administration also had to face the American Congress' more incisive anti-proliferation approach. According to Brenner, India's blast was indeed a catalyst in transforming: "official U. S. thinking about the dangers of nuclear proliferation"<sup>237</sup>. As a result, within a few years the American Congress began to claim safeguards on *all* the nuclear activities of the importer state, going thus far beyond international restrictions adopted by the NSG. These pressures directly influenced the Ford administration that replaced the American Atomic Energy Commission with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRG). When formed, this new body decided to suspend the American fuel provisions to the Tarapur reactors in India, while taking the time to make a deeper analysis of the risks attached to the delivery<sup>238</sup>. Of course this triggered an annoyed reaction from India that denounced the question as an American violation of the agreement signed in 1956, according to which Washington had a contractual obligation to supply enriched uranium (U-233) to Tarapur reactors in India. As a consequence, during the spring of 1976 the Indian government, when questioned in Parliament, answered that it was a domestic controversy of the United States, and that it was waiting to see how it would evolve<sup>239</sup>. In 1976 the NRC works were therefore suspended by the State

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237Michael J. Brenner, *Nuclear Power and Non-Proliferation: The Remaking of U.S. Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68; See for example the criticism toward American nuclear policies expressed by the work of Wohlstetter, *The Buddha Similes: Absent-minded Peaceful Aid and the Indian Bomb*.

238"Letter from First Secretary, K. V. Rajan, in Indian Embassy in Washington, to New Delhi, dated on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1977" in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

239"Memorandum of conversation at the Rajya Sabha, question posed by A. N. Abhyankar upon the stoppage of American nuclear aid, answered by Foreign Minister, Y. Chavan, on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1976", and "Memorandum of conversation at the Rajya Sabha, question posed by Subhash Gupta and S. Kamaran, upon the stoppage of American nuclear aid, answered by Foreign Minister, Y. Chavan, on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1976" in MEA files, AMS, WII/125/28/76, National Archives, New Delhi.



Department in order to try solving the situation without too much damage to Indo-American relations. It was therefore decided to discuss the issue related to the future of the spent fuel produced in Tarapur, which the United States began to demand back, directly with the Indian government <sup>240</sup>.

The pressures wielded by the Democrats in the Congress pushed, however, the administration to declare in 1976 that the American heavy-water, which had been provided to India in 1956, had probably been used by India in the CIRUS reactor for producing the plutonium (Pu-239) later utilised in the 1974 PNE<sup>241</sup>. This admission further triggered heated reactions in the American Congress in June 1976. As a result the *Symington Amendment* for the Foreign Assistance Act was approved: it introduced the concept of sanctions as punitive actions which could have taken against states violating international norms on nuclear non-proliferation<sup>242</sup>. The amendment indeed prohibited American economic, and military assistance, and export credit to those countries that had acquired, or would have acquired, delivered, or transferred nuclear technology without accepting IAEA safeguards on *all* its facilities<sup>243</sup>. The amendment became effective only after 4<sup>th</sup> August 1977, effectively forbidding Washington from exporting nuclear material not only to India or Pakistan, but also to France, which was also one of the principal targets of the amendment in order to avoid its reselling of material to Pakistan. Nevertheless, the Amendment left a margin of flexibility to the government, since it gave the President of the United States the right to to authorise by-passing the law in case vital American interests would be damaged and the country concerned provided reliable guarantees. This effectively had been the case of following American exports to India, Pakistan and also Israel.

Later in 1977, as a consequence of public pressure, the same American presidential campaign saw Gerald Ford and his challenger Jimmy Carter slowly

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240Chellaney, *Nuclear Proliferation*, 52–3.

241Paul F. Power, “The Indo-American Nuclear Controversy,” *Asian Survey* 19, no. 6 (June 1, 1979): 580.

242The Symington amendment derives its name from the Senator Stuart Symington. Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 198.

243Ibid.

assuming similar positions on the non-proliferation issue, both favouring another strengthening twist on controls. As an outcome during that year, the American government officially became even stricter on nuclear proliferation issues: enacting the *Glenn Amendment* to the Foreign Assistant Act in 1977, India was threatened with the stoppage of *all* nuclear cooperation in case they exploded another nuclear device<sup>244</sup>. Only when the new Indian Prime Minister, Moraji Desai, soon after his rise to power, declared that India: “does not consider any more nuclear explosions necessary for peaceful uses”, the fuel provision for Tarapur was restarted<sup>245</sup>. In 1978 the Congress continued in its efforts in restricting proliferation risks, and passed the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act* (NNPA), which merged the *Symington* and the *Glenn* Amendments with the NSG rules, and effectively required IAEA full-scope safeguards on *all* the facilities of the country that imported not only nuclear materials and equipment, but also technology from the United States<sup>246</sup>. Although the NNPA gave eighteen months of time to recipient countries to renegotiate their bilateral agreements with the United States, it immediately reopened the question about fuel provisions for Tarapur, transforming it into a legal and political battle between New Delhi and Washington. Despite India's refusal of the full-scope safeguards, uranium was still supplied both in 1978, thanks to the direct intervention of president Carter, and in 1979 because of the same decision made by the NRC<sup>247</sup>.

Sharply shifting the focus, the long-term effects of the *Smiling Buddha* experiment on the domestic Indian situation was also not as positive as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi probably wished when she authorised the explosion in early 1974. The benefits of the 1974 PNE were indeed short-lived: even if in May 1974 the government enjoyed a slight growth of public opinion support, this enthusiasm

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244The Glenn Amendment, which derives his name by Senator John Glenn, like the Symington, empowered the American President to waive the law in case of national interests. *Ibid.*, 343.

245*Times of India*, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1977.

246 “Note from Indian Embassy in Washington to Foreign Secretary, dated on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

247Noorani, “Indo-U.S. Nuclear Relations”; Later France accepted to continue the provisions of enriched uranium until 1993, when China became the supplier until India tested others nuclear devices in 1998. From 2000 and onwards Moscow is supplying enriched uranium to India, despite American criticism. Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 37.

quickly vanished by September 1974<sup>248</sup>. Soon after the explosion Indira Gandhi's government saw the domestic problems it had been facing since late 1973 continue to worsen. In October 1974 opposition parties, like for example the Jan Sangh, the rival wing of the Congress, and the Socialist party, indeed formed the National Coordination Committee, while J. P. Narayan called instead for a: "total revolution". The protest thus assumed a national character and began to directly challenge the national government led by Indira Gandhi<sup>249</sup>. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1975 the powerful position held by Mrs. Indira Gandhi was then critically challenged by the Allahabad High Court sentence that claimed that her election at the Lok Sabha should be revoked due to supposed corrupt practices adopted during the electoral campaign in 1971. In reality, the Prime Minister was only found guilty for two minor violations of the law, but these were judged by the court as serious enough to debar her from active political life for the next six years. Indira Gandhi still had the option of requesting that the Supreme Court responded to the Allahabad High Court's sentence; however in case her recourse failed, she would have had to resign from her Prime Ministerial position. Considering these options, and evaluating the eroded political situation, aggravated by the defeat of Congress at the Gujarat elections in June 1975, Indira Gandhi coldly decided to take no further risks. Therefore, on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> June she asked President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to proclaim a national Emergency<sup>250</sup>. The President's signature marked the transformation of India's democracy in a dictatorial regime. On the morning of the following day, the Prime Minister and her cabinet authorised the arrest of a large number of opposition members, and others within the Congress party who were considered hostile to the government. Therefore, J. P. Narayan, Moraji Desai and thousands of other

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248Indian Institute of Public Opinion, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 19: 8, May 1974; and Indian Institute of Public Opinion, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 19: 11, August 1974 cited in Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 560–563.

249Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 535.

250For a more detailed analysis of the domestic event it is possible to consult for example: Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), 679–682; Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 536–580; B. G. Verghese, *First Draft: Witness to the Making of Modern India* (New Delhi: Tranquebar, 2010); Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy*; Guha, *India After Gandhi*.

opponents were sentenced to jail<sup>251</sup>. The proclamation of the Emergency gave unlimited power to the government which suspended fundamental human rights, and the authority of the state governments, censored the press, and banned twenty-six political organisations. Although the Emergency was officially followed by calls to introduce innovative policies to promote social, agricultural and economic growth, the results were quite limited. This ineffectiveness was clearly admitted in late 1976 when official documents circulated in the Prime Ministerial Office urging the government to stop the Emergency period<sup>252</sup>. When in early 1977 the Prime Minister finally agreed to end the Emergency regime, it was too late for Indira to recover from popular hostility. General elections in March 1977 brought the coalition of the opposition parties to power, clearly punishing Indira Gandhi and the Congress for the abuse of power perpetuated during the Emergency.

As these events clearly demonstrate, Pokhran-I only triggered temporary enthusiastic reactions, but had short-time effects at the domestic level, thus doing very little to adverse the erosion of the political popularity of the Indian government. Different instead was its impact on the international arena: here the entire non-proliferation regime was reorganized by concerned great powers and nuclear supplier states. What this meant for India and for its nuclear program will be shown in the next paragraph.

#### ***4.2 The impact of the new non-proliferation regime on the development of India's nuclear programme***

In order to highlight the long-term effects of the new non-proliferation regime, this paragraph will first provide an analysis of the posture India assumed after the nuclear explosion of 1974. By maintaining of the long standing ambiguous Indian approach

<sup>251</sup>Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004*, 546.

<sup>252</sup>"Note on general situation in India in 1976", undated, in Haksar private papers, I & II inst., f. n. 57, in NMML, New Delhi.

to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, India's nuclear programme began to face several problems that slowed its development. As a consequence, it will be shown that New Delhi opted to invest more in the indigenous development of the programme, and to diversify its international collaboration thus enlarging its nuclear cooperation with the Soviet Union. The only positive outcome of the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime was that it also relented Pakistan in acquiring nuclear weapons.

Although on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1974 the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi assured the Lok Sabha that India would not: “accept the principle of apartheid in any matters and technology is no exception”<sup>253</sup>, after the forced implementation of the new non-proliferation regime, India and the other NNWSs found more difficulties in continuing their civilian nuclear programme without accepting IAEA safeguards. Even if the new non-proliferation regime was strongly accused by India and the other non-aligned countries, as an interference in their sovereignty, the situation did not change.

India's approach to the new international nuclear non-proliferation regime remained the same as before the *Smiling Buddha* operation. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the government considered the operation to be concrete proof of India's capabilities of producing nuclear weapons, but not a departure from the approach India had adopted until that time in regard to nuclear weapons and the non-proliferation regime<sup>254</sup>. As a consequence, although the Indian scientists had assumed that Pokhran-I would only be the first step of a series of experiments, as had been the case for all the other countries that had been considered as Nuclear Weapons State by the NPT<sup>255</sup>, the Indian government led by Indira Gandhi refused to continue to test nuclear devices<sup>256</sup>. This was in accordance with the long-standing Indian position of refraining from developing a nuclear weapons arsenal. It has been reported that the personal relationship between the Prime Minister and the scientists cooled after

253Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 187.

254“Telegram sent by American Ambassador, Moynihan, New Delhi to Secretary of State, Washington, dated on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1974”, Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume E-8, Documents on South Asia, 1973-1976, published by the U. S. Department of State website <http://www.state.gov> (retrieved on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2012).

Pokhran-I, and that Mrs. Gandhi herself developed moral doubts about nuclear weapons<sup>257</sup>. Raja Ramanna states that after the 1974 explosion: “Mrs. Gandhi said: ‘No more, that’s it’”, while Homi Sethna confirms that Indira Gandhi ordered them to proceed with other explosions only after her approbation, which ultimately never came<sup>258</sup>. Moreover, during the whole Emergency period the same nuclear topic was scarcely considered and analysed by the national press and the Indian public, which was more focussed on the economic and political domestic problems of the country<sup>259</sup>.

Nevertheless, India did not modify its long standing ambiguous approach toward the nuclear issue, and the fact that it refused to sign the NPT, and to accept full-scale safeguards on its nuclear facilities, had quite tough repercussions on the development of the Indian civilian nuclear programme as well. According to Banerjee and Sarma, the end of the Canadian cooperation, and the growing problems linked to the American provisions of nuclear fuel “seriously affected the Indian nuclear power programme making it difficult to import necessary materials which stalled and almost killed the nuclear power programme”<sup>260</sup>.

In order to react to this adverse situation New Delhi strengthened its efforts in building indigenous nuclear power stations for producing electricity and heavy-water, and enlarged its international cooperation with other states that were historically less important for India. As a result, two 200MW reactors were indigenously built at the Madras Atomic Energy Establishment (MAPS-I and MAPS-II) at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu which became operative in 1984, as well as the two reactors at Narora (NAPS-I and NAPS-II) in Uttar Pradesh which began their

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255The estimates provided by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute report that in May 1974, before India exploded its nuclear device, the United States made 744 nuclear tests, the Soviet Union 398, the United Kingdom 26, France 54, China 15. “Appendix 8B. Nuclear Explosions, 1945–2009”, p. 6, in SIPRI Yearbook 2010 (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011) available online at: <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2010/08/08B> (retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012).

256The Hindu, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1974. Only in 1998 India would have exploded other nuclear devices.

257Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, 188.

258Pathak, *Nuclear Policy of India*, 192.

259Kapur, *Pokhran and Beyond*, 177.

260Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 40–44.

operations in 1989<sup>261</sup>. In parallel, New Delhi also turned its attention to its long-standing closer ally for the provision of conventional arms, the Soviet Union, which had cooperated with India in both the nuclear field (since 1961)<sup>262</sup>, and space research (from 1963/64)<sup>263</sup>. In September 1976 Moscow agreed to provide 200 tonnes of heavy-water, without even requiring an immediate signing of an IAEA agreement. As a result, the first 25% of the material was shipped to India by the end of the month without imposing safeguards<sup>264</sup>. However, soon after, also the Soviets began to press India to accept IAEA safeguards on the reactors where their heavy-water would have been used. With no other choice left, in the summer of 1977 the Indian government agreed to accept specific IAEA safeguards on the Soviet heavy-water provided, thus freeing up Soviet deliveries<sup>265</sup>. Despite official denial, after that date it has also been reported that several tonnes of heavy-water had been illegally imported by India from Norway, China and the Soviet Union<sup>266</sup>.

It is reasonable to argue that the decision taken by New Delhi not to adhere to the NPT, and thus not to accept full-scope safeguards contributed to the fact that still today nuclear production of energy in India is prominently limited to only 2.5% of the total energy consumed in the country<sup>267</sup>. The only positive outcome India faced was that new international controls and limits to nuclear weapons proliferation had also hit Pakistan, relenting its nuclear programme<sup>268</sup>. The new rules set up during the 1975-1978 meetings of the Nuclear Supplier Group especially affected Pakistan's

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261Ibid.

262In 1972 the Soviets had already agreed to sell India 80 tonnes of heavy-water.

263See for example the "Report sent by Captain Al Bery on arms supplies for India, dated on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1975", which lamented the high Indian dependency on the Soviet Union supplies, in MEA, PP (JS)/4/3/74, National Archives, New Delhi; and the "Note of the government of India about Indo-Soviet collaboration for the outer space, dated on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1977", in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

264"Note of the Department of the Atomic Energy about Indo-Soviet relations on atomic energy, undated", in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

265Ibid.

266Banerjee and Sarma, *Nuclear Power in India: A Critical History*, 53.

267See the official BARC website: <http://www.barc.gov.in/about/anushakti.html> (retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012).

268This was positively recognised by Indians. On this see, for example, the "Letter from Kvrajan, First Secretary at the Indian Embassy in the United States, to Mafhavan, Joint Secretary in American Division of MAE, New Delhi, dated on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1977", in MAE files, AMS, WII/104/28/77, National Archives, New Delhi.

nuclear programme. As a consequence, from late 1975 France started to demand more safeguards for the *Chashma* reprocessing plant, which was then indeed put under IAEA inspections in February 1976. Moreover, following continuous pressures from the United States, offering Pakistan aircraft in exchange of the end of the cooperation<sup>269</sup>, France finally revoked its cooperation with Pakistan by 1978<sup>270</sup>. This resulted in Islamabad developing its nuclear programme “underground” from that moment onwards, renouncing the production of nuclear weapons from the easier plutonium path. The enriched uranium path was therefore chosen, since it was less easily traced than plutonium by international controls, even if it was technologically more complex to produce a nuclear weapon from it<sup>271</sup>. The switch to the enriched uranium technique for producing nuclear weapons was facilitated by the decision taken by a Pakistani metallurgist, A. Q. Khan working for a Dutch engineering firm, FDO, a major subcontractor of the European Uranium Enrichment Company (URENCO), to leave the Netherlands and return to Pakistan. Khan brought with him a copy of the plans for the URENCO ultracentrifuge enrichment plant that allowed the technological start of enriching uranium plants in Pakistan. In parallel, Islamabad also began a massive clandestine effort to internationally acquire the necessary materials and components to build a plant, which was then officially started in July 1976<sup>272</sup>. According to American declassified documents<sup>273</sup>, it seems clear that Pakistan approached China in order to acquire the necessary technology for enriching uranium and building the explosive device, and that Bhutto's visit to Beijing in May 1976 was probably done for this purpose. From recently declassified Indian documents it is possible to argue that India was also conscious of the crucial role China was playing in helping and supporting the development of the Pakistani

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269“Letter from First Secretary, K. V. Rajan, in Indian Embassy in Washington to Joins Secretary, New Delhi, dated on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1977”, in MEA files, AMS, WII/504/3/77-II, National Archives, New Delhi.

270 Mark Fitzpatrick, *Nuclear Black Markets: Pakistan, A.Q. Khan and the Rise of Proliferation Networks* (IISS, 2007), 16–7.

271Ibid., 17.

272Ibid., 18.

273 File titled “The Pakistani Nuclear Program”, dated on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1983, in State Department files, cited in Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, 196.



nuclear weapons programme<sup>274</sup>. On 24<sup>th</sup> February 1976 the Joint Intelligence Commission indeed filed a report in which the Chinese involvement in the Pakistani program was highlighted, such as the fact that Beijing had already sent 12 scientists to Pakistan, and was considered likely to become even more crucial because Beijing was the only recognised nuclear power to not officially adhere to the international non-proliferation regime<sup>275</sup>. However, these events did not preclude India's decision to relax its relations with China, and with Pakistan during 1976<sup>276</sup>. Indira Gandhi and Bhutto indeed exchanged constructive letters in March and April 1976 with the aim of normalising bilateral relations<sup>277</sup>. This exchange paved the way for the meeting of the foreign secretaries in May in Islamabad, when overflights were finally resumed, as well as modest trade and train connections.

## ***5. Conclusion***

From the analysis developed so far, it is possible to conclude that by exploding a nuclear device in 1974, and becoming the sixth nuclear country in the world, India shook the equilibrium of the international system. A clear demonstration of this is the tightening of the global non-proliferation regime that took place in the wake of the 1974 detonation, and the Pakistani decision to strengthen their nuclear programme. The analysis carried out shows how the basis of that technological and political result

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274“Report of the Joint Intelligence Commission on nuclear weapons in Pakistan sent to the RAW, IB and IM, dated on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1976”, in MEA, PP (JS)/4/3/74, National Archives, New Delhi.

275Ibid.

276For an analysis of the evolution of Sino-Indian relations after 1976 see for example: John W. Garver, “Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations, The,” *China Quarterly* 1991 (1991): 55; Sumit Ganguly, “The Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View from New Delhi,” *Asian Survey* 29, no. 12 (December 1989): 1123–1135.

277Letter from Bhutto to Gandhi, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1976; Letter Gandhi to Bhutto, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1976; Letter Bhutto to Gandhi, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1976, and Joint Statement by India and Pakistan, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1976, in *Pakistan Horizon*, 29: 1, 1976, pp. 194-8.

had been posed long before Indira Gandhi's second government took power in 1971. The option of exploding a nuclear device had in fact been contemplated by the Indian leadership since the foundation of the nuclear power programme. When the legal framework, on which the nuclear programme had been based, was created in 1948, its formulation was thought to assure complete secrecy and large political autonomy to the sector. Moreover, the same approach to the question of non-proliferation was formulated in a way that allowed India to demonstrate bipolar tendencies: on one side, as the champion of nuclear disarmament and the partner of international cooperation projects, and on the other, as the major international challenger of the non-proliferation initiatives proposed by the superpowers, thus permitting India to keep its door open to the nuclear bomb for defence purposes. As a consequence, when in late 1964 – following the first Chinese nuclear blast – the Indian government authorised the project for a peaceful nuclear device detonation, it did not have to reformulate its historical approach to nuclear issues. Only technical delays and problems prevented the Indian scientific community from completing their preparations before 1974. Meanwhile, the events of 1971 and the war with Pakistan contributed to further enlarging the support in India for the detonation that could have had demonstrated its power to China and the rest of the world. Finally, the political turmoil that had began to challenge Mrs. Gandhi's government from late 1972 provided the Prime Minister with another reason for authorising the explosion as soon as the scientist were ready: diverting public attention from the growing domestic problems. As a consequence of the 1974 test, the global non-proliferation regime was significantly reinforced in the second half of the Seventies. Thus, a country like India, which after the 1974 test continued to refuse international safeguards on all its nuclear activities, saw the slowing down of its nuclear power programme. From the analysis developed it is now possible to argue that India in 1974 further reinforced its power status in the South Asia region, and more in general in the international system, even if New Delhi later had to face more problems when pursuing its nuclear programme.

Before concluding, two more considerations should be made. The first is that the

1974 result should be read in a historical perspective: by exploding a nuclear device in 1974, India saw the results of the nuclear strategy born in 1948, when the door was carefully left open for the acquisition of a nuclear device, and of the choice made in 1964, when the decision to acquire the technological capability to explode a nuclear device was actually taken. The 1974 explosion was then the technological and scientific coronation of an effort of ten-years made in order to allow India to answer the perceived Chinese threat. The second is instead a methodological consideration. It is crucial to underline the importance of India's archival material declassified by fall 2011. In fact the documents of the Ministry of External Affairs collected at the *National Archives* in New Delhi have allowed to better trace the developments of the Indo-Canadian relationship after the 1974 explosion, which until now had not been considered by literature. Finally, also the Haksar papers collected in the Nehru Museum Memorial Library archives revealed their fundamental importance: although only a few of them covered the nuclear topic, these revealed that also inside the Indian bureaucracy there existed a section which vocally supported the idea that developing a complete full arsenal of nuclear weapons (a fact that until today has not yet been demonstrated through primary sources).

## **FOURTH CHAPTER: INDIA AND THE ANNEXATION OF SIKKIM**

### ***1. Introduction***

In the same year that India entered the restricted nuclear club, New Delhi was also on its way to permanently solving another question that had been bothering the government since the mid-Sixties: the question of Sikkim. After just a few months, in April 1975, the protectorate was annexed to India, becoming the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Indian Union. The Sikkim merger was mainly carried out in response to India's strategic and security considerations, and was perceived by its small and large neighbouring states as yet another clear demonstration of power by New Delhi. This chapter will show how, in light of new archival sources, it is likely that these events were the result of a specific strategy already adopted by India from 1972 and not just the consequence of some domestic and internal dynamics in Sikkim, which were stoked by India, as has been generally assumed in the most authoritative literature on India's history<sup>1</sup>. The use of primary sources collected both at Indian and British archives are the grounds on which this argument will be supported.

In fact, it is now possible to argue that New Delhi considered the option of intervening in the domestic affairs of Sikkim with the intention of endorsing its own

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the account provided by the more authoritative book published about India's contemporary history: Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2011), 483–484.

interests already in 1972, long before the first popular revolts of April 1973. This happened after the king of Sikkim attempted to gain more independence and autonomy for his state from the second half of the Sixties. In less than one year a popular revolt then took place in Sikkim, and the Chogyal had to call India for help to bring order back to its state. India rapidly intervened, and after bringing Sikkim back to order it began to act as a moderator between the monarchy and the democratic forces. Significant is the fact that the agreement reached in May maintained the Chogyal as the institutional head of state, but also sanctioned a significant increase in the political control India had over the state; therefore almost transforming Sikkim into an Indian *colony*. It is crucial to note that India (being the protecting power of Sikkim) denied foreign journalists and observers to enter into Sikkim not only during 1973, but also for the entire period that ended with Sikkim's merger with India in 1975. When new elections took place in 1974, the pro-Indian democratic forces won against the monarchic parties. A Constitution was then drafted by an Indian legal adviser, and later enacted by the Sikkim Assembly together with a resolution that called for stricter links with India. The Constitution and the resolution gave India the necessary power to directly intervene and change Sikkim's status. In September 1974 the 35<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Indian Constitution was passed by the Indian Parliament, transforming Sikkim into an *Associate State* of India. In April 1975 a referendum was then organized in a great hurry to avoid possible legal troublesome complications, and thus the people of Sikkim were called to vote for, or against, a resolution which abolished the monarchy and called for the state to be merged with India. People supported the resolution, and a few days later the Indian Parliament enacted the 38<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Indian Constitution that transformed Sikkim into the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of India. As a result, the problematic question of Sikkim in less than three years was definitively solved by India. New Delhi indeed brought under its direct control the small but strategic Himalayan state that connected India to Lhasa; succeeding at the same time in depicting the entire affair as the emancipation of an enslaved population from its monarchic rule.

In order to trace the events from an historical perspective, the first paragraph will

be dedicated to the presentation of the situation faced by the new government of Indira Gandhi after taking power in 1971. Therefore, an introduction of Sikkim and of its strategic position will be presented first. Subsequently, a brief analysis of its history during the nineteenth century highlighting how Sikkim became a protectorate of British India, partially losing its independence, will follow. This chapter will then show how the status of Sikkim remained almost unvaried when Independent India emerged from the ashes of the British empire, and how tension between the government of Sikkim and India grew in the second half of the Sixties due to the Chogyal's new ambitions to make Sikkim independent. The third paragraph will then present an assessment of the literature covering the events of 1973-1975, which led Sikkim to be annexed to India. It will thus be shown how biased and partial the literature produced until today on this topic has been: on one hand, the official Indian account, which depicts India as only covering a passive role during the events; and on the other, the critical accounts produced by sources linked to the defeated royal family of Sikkim, which instead accused India of having engineered the demonstrations of 1973, and later forcibly annexing Sikkim. The fourth paragraph will finally present the recent declassified archival documentations. These will cast serious doubts upon the official version provided by India, thus reinforcing the critical voices. To conclude, the last paragraph will provide an assessment of the research done throughout the chapter.

## ***2. Sikkim's history until 1971***

Sikkim's history until 1971 will briefly be summarized in this paragraph, in order not only to present the main characteristics of the Sikkimese state to the reader, but also to demonstrate the political relations this state established with British India at first,

and with India later. In the first part, the history of Sikkim until the British departure from the Indian subcontinent will be considered. This will begin with a brief presentation of those geographical aspects that make Sikkim strategically important for India, and of those sociological features that are important to identify before proceeding with an analysis of its political history. After that it will be shown how Sikkim had a troubled history of subjugation to external powers: in the nineteenth century it had already become a *de facto* British protectorate. Later, the relations with Independent India will be considered. At first it will be shown how the same relation Sikkim had with British India was kept unvaried also after India became an independent state in 1947. The analysis will continue underlying how Indo-Sikkimese bilateral relations then eroded during the Sixties, due to the diffusion of nationalist aspirations of greater autonomy from India in the royal court of Sikkim. This picture will then allow a full understanding of the political developments that took place in the Seventies during the second government of Indira Gandhi, when Sikkim lost its distinct and separate entity and merged into the Indian Union.

### ***2.1 Sikkim's formation as a state and its relationship with British India***

To understand Sikkim's political history it is of crucial importance to geographically place this small Himalayan state. Its strategic position has indeed largely influenced the life of his inhabitants for centuries. Geographically, Sikkim<sup>2</sup> is situated in Eastern Himalayas, while its jurisdiction is the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of India. It is on the border with the Chinese Tibet Autonomous Region to the north and the east, with Bhutan to the south-east, with the Indian state of West Bengal to the south, and with Nepal to the west. It is situated on the south of the Himalayan range, and on the north from west to east it is surrounded by great mountains interrupted only by a few important

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2 According to the original inhabitants the name "Sikkim" means "Nye-ma-el", heaven, probably due to its northern good pastures and forests. H. G. Joshi, *Sikkim: Past and Present* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004), 135.

passes. The Chogla mountains in the east host two important passes to Tibet: Nathu-La (4.310 metres), and Jelep-La (4.267 metres)<sup>3</sup>. On the west the col that connects Sikkim to Nepal through the Singalila mountain is the Chiabhanjan (3.145 metres). Like the other Himalayan states, because of its geographical position Sikkim had always based its economic and political stability on the Indo-Tibetan trade<sup>4</sup>. However, since the Sikkimese route toward Tibet is the easiest and shortest of the Himalayas' to connect Lhasa with Calcutta, Sikkim had always had a special strategic importance for the entire region, as its history demonstrates.

The second element that is crucial to keep in mind to analyse Sikkim's political history is its sociological composition. During the period (the Seventies) on which this analysis is going to focus, its populations consisted of around 200.000 inhabitants<sup>5</sup>. The population was, and still is, divided into three ethnic groups: Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese. The Lepchas are considered the original inhabitants of the region. They probably came from Assam, or North Burma in the ancient past. In the Seventies they were however a minority, constituting 10% of the population<sup>6</sup>. The Bhutias were the second group to enter the Sikkimese territory from Tibet: of Buddhist beliefs, they immigrated during the thirteenth century. They assumed the political control of Sikkim, subjugated the Lepchas, and converted them to Buddhism. In the Seventies however they also made up 10% of the people living in Sikkim. In fact, by that time the majority of the Sikkimese population (80%) was composed of the Nepalese who had begun to settle in Sikkim since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Of Hindu religion, in the Seventies they settled as peasants especially in the southern part of the state<sup>7</sup>. As it will be shown, keeping in mind these ethnic and religious differences is of crucial importance in order to understand Sikkim's political life and history.

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3 "La" is a word in Tibetan that means "mountain pass". Jelep-La is an all season pass, and its name means "the lovely low pass", unlike the Nathu-La which means "the pass of the listening ear".

4 Alastair Lamb, *British India and Tibet: 1766-1910* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1986), 3.

5 In 2011 these had become 607.000. P. Raghunadha Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India* (New Delhi: Cosmo, 1978), 2.

6 Ibid.

7 Joshi, *Sikkim*, 132.



Very little is known about the history of Sikkim, from its ancient past until more recent times. According to a legend of Bhutia origin<sup>8</sup>, in the seventeenth century three Lamas, following the foresight of the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche came from Tibet to choose a man to crown king (Chogyal) of Sikkim. These Tibetan Buddhist Lamas found Phuntsog Namgyal, a descendant of a Tibetan noble (Guru Tashi) in Gangtok and made him the Chogyal (*divine ruler* in Tibetan) of Sikkim at Yoksam in 1641. According to legend, Phuntsog Namgyal became the spiritual and political leader of the kingdom of Sikkim, converting the majority of the Lepcha population to Buddhism and extending his reign to include the Chumbi Valley of Tibet, and the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. However, this is only a legend, as the work of the academic historian Mullard Saul demonstrates: his book, contesting this narrative, proposes a different version about the formation of the state in Sikkim. He claims the entire event was not based on a peaceful religious invitation to rule, but rather on conquest, alliances, and violent subjugation of the Lepcha population by the Bhutia Lamas<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, the important fact is that by the 15<sup>th</sup> century the Bhutias practically assumed the political control over Sikkim establishing a monarchic regime.

The first serious political challenge the Sikkimese monarchy had to face came in 1706, when the Bhutanese intervened in the war of succession which had erupted among the various heirs of the third Chogyal. Instigated by the sister of the Chogyal, the neighbouring Bhutanese thus invaded Sikkim<sup>10</sup>, provoking the escape of the king to Tibet. Tibetans then decided to intervene in favour of the Chogyal, and sent an official to lead the military campaign against the Bhutanese. This expedition turned out successful: the Bhutanese were fought back, and Chador Namgyal re-installed as the political leader of Sikkim. In exchange for the help, the Chogyal granted a large estate in the west of the kingdom to the Tibetan official who remained to live in

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8 This is briefly presented in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 3.

9 For a complete analysis of this period see Saul Mullard, *Opening the Hidden Land: State Formation and the Construction of Sikkimese History* (Leiden: BRILL, 2011), chap. 1–5.

10 Saul Mullard, “The Brag Dkar Pa Family and G.Yang Thang Rdzong: An Example of Internal Alliances in Sikkim,” *Bulletin of Tibetology* 39, no. 2 (2003): 55.

Sikkim from that point onwards<sup>11</sup>.

Seventy years later the *status quo* was again challenged by the other neighbour of Sikkim, Nepal, which was expanding under the Gurkha family. In 1774 the Nepalese were able to conquer at first the province of Limbuana, which although the Sikkimese considered as theirs, had maintained its own autonomy until that moment<sup>12</sup>, and in 1788 to invade and occupy large portions of the Sikkimese territory. The Nepalese actions were dictated by the desire to monopolise the Himalayan trade, and thus bring the new trade route the Tibetans had opened with Sikkim in 1784 under their own control. The clear intention was to by-pass the high taxes Nepal imposed on Tibetan traders on the routes it controlled<sup>13</sup>. The Bhutanese first, and the Tibetans later, came to help the Sikkimese government against the Nepalese. However, this was not enough and Tibet had to call for Chinese military aid. China finally intervened in 1792, defeated the Nepalese, and forced them back from Tibet to Nepal. This resulted both in the growth of Chinese power in Tibet, and in an imposition for Nepal to pay tributes to China every five years (an obligation that the Nepal government kept until 1908)<sup>14</sup>. Although the Chinese intervention allowed Sikkim to keep its independence, the Chogyal lost control over the regions to the south of the Raman river and to the west of the Tista river, as well as the actual Indian Darjeeling district, which remained under the control of Nepal<sup>15</sup>.

Under the reign of the Chogyal Tsugphud Namgyal (1790-1861), Sikkim established its first relations with the British East India Company, which by that time was controlling a large part of Bengal. In 1814-1815 the Chogyal decided indeed to ally with the British in order to push the Nepalese away from the territories Sikkim had lost in the 1788-1792 war<sup>16</sup>. Allying with Sikkim was also functional to the East

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11 Ibid., 56.

12 Kumar Pradhan, *The Gorkha Conquests: The Process and Consequences of the Unification of Nepal, with Particular Reference to Eastern Nepal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 123.

13 Ibid., 130–1.

14 MR Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York and London: W W Norton & Company Incorporated, 1999), 111–112.

15 Mullard, “The Brag Dkar Pa Family and G.Yang Thang Rdzong: An Example of Internal Alliances in Sikkim,” 62.

16 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 4.

India Company, which had begun to appreciate the trade across the Himalayas “as a possible source of specie to redress the adverse balance of the China trade”. The East India Company began to look with particular interest upon the possibility of using the Sikkimese trade route through the Jelep-La and Nathu-La passes to reach Tibet<sup>17</sup>. Their aim was indeed to revitalise the Indo-Tibetan trade that after the Chinese-Nepali war had drastically declined between the subcontinent and Tibet.

Therefore, in 1814-1816 an Anglo-Nepali war was fought and won by the British. The territories Sikkim was claiming as its own were returned, even though at the cost of some specific conditions. These were formalised in the Treaty of Titalia<sup>18</sup> signed by Sikkim and the British on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1817. Although Rao argued that: “the Treaty of Titalia marked the beginning of the end of the Sikkim's independence”<sup>19</sup>, it is evident that it was only another political strategy adopted by the Chogyal, which was not too divergent from political allegiances established until that moment with the Tibetans and Bhutanese. The only news was that the Treaty of Titalia sanctioned the loyalty to the British in a written form, differently from the previous alliance made by the Chogyal with the Tibetans. As a result, Sikkim lost its right to manage in autonomy its relations with Nepal and with its other neighbouring states. It was therefore obliged to refer to the arbitration of the British Government for all questions or disputes that would have arose. Moreover, as clear evidence of the British commercial interests in their campaign against Nepal, the treaty established that Sikkim could no longer increase the taxes on East India Company's goods transiting on its territories towards Tibet<sup>20</sup>.

In 1826, after the assassination of the Prime Minister of Sikkim (Bho-Lod) who was a Lepcha and the maternal uncle of the Chogyal, internal tensions began to emerge between the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. Until that moment they had enjoyed an equal representation in the social and political life of Sikkim<sup>21</sup>. As a

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17 Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, 4.

18 See the text of the Treaty of Titalia (1817) in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 81–83.

19 *Ibid.*, 5.

20 *Ibid.*, 82.

21 Sprigg, R. K., “1826: The End of an Era in the Social and Political History of Sikkim” (1995): 88.

result, numerous Lepcha families left Sikkim and found refuge in the Ilam area, which was situated beyond the border with Nepal. From there they began making incursions in Sikkim. Due to their military superiority and based their right of arbitration over border issues, the British intervened again in the dispute in 1828. In the wake of these operations the British became interested in settling in the Darjeeling area, which was judged as a useful military outpost, trading node, and a perfect location for building a sanatorium. Therefore negotiations with the Chogyal began. According to some interpretations, in 1835 the right to settle in Darjeeling was ceded to the British by Sikkim in exchange for the promise of an annual grant of 6.000 Rupees<sup>22</sup>. However, others argue that the British deceived the Sikkim king, falsely promising him some Nepalese territories in exchange for Darjeeling, and that Darjeeling was thus annexed by force<sup>23</sup>. This latter thesis seems confirmed: from that moment onwards the relations between the British and the Sikkimese king became tense and Darjeeling was transformed into a hub of commercial activities, and almost into a proper sovereign state.

Therefore, Tsugphud Namgyal started retaliating by obstructing British trade with Tibet on its territories, thus further increasing tensions<sup>24</sup>. Another cause of strain was the fact that some sections of the Sikkimese population began to seek refuge from bonded labour in British Darjeeling, which conceded them asylum on the basis of the anti-slavery legislation introduced in the British Empire in 1838<sup>25</sup>. Tension then erupted in 1849 when Dr. Arthur Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling, and Dr. Dalton Hooker, a botanist of the British Government of India, were arrested by the Chogyal functionaries while trying to enter Tibet without Chogyal's permit. Although following a British ultimatum the Government of Sikkim released the two functionaries, the East India Company seized the opportunity and sent a military expedition. This led the Chogyal to cancel the annual 6.000 Rupees promised for

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22 Joshi, *Sikkim*, 84.

23 Sonam B. Wangyal, *Sikkim & Darjeeling: Division & Deception* (Bhutan: Phuentosholing, 2002), 86.

24 Amar Kaur Jasbir Singh, *Himalayan Triangle: a Historical Survey of British India's Relations with Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan, 1765-1950* (London: British Library, 1988), 180–4.

25 Mullard, *Opening the Hidden Land*, 34.

Darjeeling, and the cessation of another area to the British, the Morang district<sup>26</sup>. In 1860 the British Government of India launched yet another military expedition in order to reassert its control over the Sikkimese territory, and over the commercial routes in Sikkim where depredation and kidnapping incidents against British traders had increased. Although the British Government of India easily won the military campaign and occupied Sikkim, they decided not to annex Sikkim based on political, military and economic motivations. Indeed, since an annexation could have opened a dispute with Tibet and China, both of which had historical friendly and political relations with Sikkim, the British decided to avoid such a risk, which would have created more problems than advantages for them<sup>27</sup>. In addition, annexation was not necessary: they were able to impose on the Chogyal all the conditions they required in a treaty signed in 1861<sup>28</sup>. The small Himalayan state accepted therefore to return 7.000 Rupees to the British Government of Darjeeling as compensation for the commercial damage the British claimed to have suffered, and to guarantee safe British trade over its territories<sup>29</sup>. Second, Sikkim endured the abolishment of all restrictions over the circulation of goods and people with British India, only keeping customs taxes on goods passing on its territories towards Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, and the construction of roads for enhancing British trade. Third, Sikkim even renounced to try non-resident British citizens on its own territory when found guilty of violating Sikkim laws, but to deliver them for judgement to the British Government of India instead. At last, Sikkim's military forces were subdued to the British troops, while the highest political charge of Sikkim had to renounce to its own traditional honorific title *Chogyal*, and to assume the title of *Maharajah*<sup>30</sup>, exactly as all the other Indian kings of the Indian subcontinent. This was done in order to give the signal to the Sikkimese population of the process of Indianization that the British began to impose on Sikkim. As a result, Sikkim became *de facto* a

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26 Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, 187–8.

27 Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, 80–1.

28 The entire text of the Treaty is reported in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 87–93.

29 *Ibid.*, 88–89.

30 In the next pages the king of Sikkim will be referred to as Maharajah.

protectorate of British India.

After 1861 the British also began to internally undermine the Maharajah's power both at socio-political and administrative levels. At first, they started to encourage Nepalese settlement in Sikkim to increase the cultivated land to favour the regional economic development. Their other intent is clearly revealed by Rishley: "the influx of the hereditary enemies of Tibet [Nepalese] is our surest guarantee against a revival of Tibetan influence [in Sikkim]..."<sup>31</sup>. Depriving the original Sikkimese inhabitants from land, and favouring the settlement of Hindu Nepalese in Sikkim, the British were also able to destabilise the social equilibrium in Sikkim, and therefore to weaken the bases of the Chogyal authority supported by the Lepcha and Bhutia communities<sup>32</sup>.

In parallel to this political strategy, the British also reinforced the Sikkimese infrastructure to further enhance their trade with Tibet<sup>33</sup>. However, the Tibetans were not reconciled with the growing power of British India over Sikkim: in 1886 tensions between Sikkim, Tibet and the British exploded again. Supported by the Chogyal of Sikkim, Tibetans occupied the Jelep-La pass. As a consequence, in 1888-1890 the British launched a military campaign against Tibet and Sikkim. The British pushed the Tibetans back, and Chinese troops had to intervene to help Tibet. As a conclusion of the hostilities, in 1890 a treaty<sup>34</sup> was signed in Darjeeling between China and the British. The text established Sikkim's status as a British protectorate, Tibet as a part of the Chinese Empire, and the border between the two as the watershed crest of the mountain range. Article two in fact stated that the British government had the "direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations"<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, the British nominated Jean Claude White the first Political Officer of

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31 Herbert H. Rishley, *Gazetteer of Sikkim* (London: Low Price Publications, 1996), xxi.

32 Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, 224.

33 The building of a road to Tibet was begun, as well as that of railways connections to Siliguri. In 1881 took less than one week to reach Tibet from Calcutta. J. Claude White, *Sikkim And Bhutan* (Delhi: Vivek Publishing House, 1971), 28–29.

34 The entire text of the treaty is reported in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 94–96.

35 *Ibid.*, 95.

Sikkim in 1893: from that position he began to act *de facto* as the ruler of Sikkim<sup>36</sup>. The Maharajah therefore lost political and administrative control over his kingdom, maintaining only a mere symbolic role in the political life of his state. Moreover, the king lost his right to reside in the Chumbi valley (Tibet). This again was a clear sign that Sikkim had to reduce its political and cultural ties with Tibet. As it was not enough, British also began to interfere in the royal family's internal affairs<sup>37</sup>. The silent submission of the royal family and of the people of Sikkim clearly testified the extent of the British authority in the state. The political officer even continued the policy of favouring Nepalese immigrations in order to develop the area, and to further diminish Maharajah's authority over the people of Sikkim<sup>38</sup>.

Aimed to fix the political situation to enhance trade between China and the British, the 1890 Treaty was also followed in 1893 by the signature of the *Regulations concerning Trade, Communications and Pasturage*<sup>39</sup>. The Regulations clearly stated that all parties (not only British and Chinese, but also Sikkimese and Tibetans) had to promote trade between British India and Tibet. However, this move did not bring the expected results<sup>40</sup>, and trade remained stagnant due to the Tibetan's reluctance. In 1904 a British mission (the Younghusband expedition) was thus sent to Tibet in order to appraise the situation. The 1904 mission, born as a commercial one, was soon transformed into a military action, ending with the British occupation of Lhasa, and the Tibetan acceptance of a new Treaty<sup>41</sup>. The agreement not only imposed what the British had already negotiated with China in 1890, but also the a monetary reimbursement of the expedition costs, and the British right to settle and

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36 Pradyumna Prasad Karan and William M. Jenkins, *The Himalayan Kingdoms: Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1963), 59.

37 For example, the Maharajah's second son, Sidekyong Namgyal, and later Tashi Namgyal, were designated by the British as the successors, in opposition to the claims of the eldest son of the Maharajah, Tchoda Namgyal. Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 7–8.

38 The Nepalese were indeed Hindu and perceived by the rest of the Sikkimese population (Lepchas and Bhutias loyal to the Maharajah) as diverse. Vibha Arora, "Roots and the Route of Secularism in Sikkim," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 38 (September 23, 2006): 4069.

39 The entire text of this convention is in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 97–100.

40 Vibha Arora, "Routing the Commodities of the Empire Through Sikkim (1817-1906)" (The Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies, The Open University, 2008), 13, <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/commodities-of-empire/working-papers/WP09.pdf>.

41 The entire text is available in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 101–105.

patrol trade marts in the Chumbi valley<sup>42</sup>. Although further controversy about the validity of this treaty emerged<sup>43</sup>, the British were able to finally solve the question by signing a new Treaty with China in 1906<sup>44</sup>, following Beijing's reassurance of its political control over Tibet<sup>45</sup>. In 1908 a new convention on the Tibetan trade was again signed between British India and China: British rights in Tibet were again reconfirmed, even if their travelling rights in Tibet were slightly reduced<sup>46</sup>.

Although Sikkim's border with Tibet was never contested by Tibet, or China, as well as by Sikkim, or by the British, another crucial Tibetan-British convention created some confusion on British (and thus later Indian) trade rights in Tibet along the Sikkimese route: the Conference of Simla, which formally began on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1913<sup>47</sup>. It was a tripartite conference between Tibet, Britain and China and was mainly concerned with the aim of fixing the political status of Tibet and its borders after the fall of the Qing dynasty, and the new reassertion of Chinese power over Tibet<sup>48</sup>. Even if the negotiations were conducted by all three state representatives, the Chinese left the conference refusing to sign the convention. Nevertheless, the British and Tibetan delegates decided to sign a declaration recognising new regulations for Indo-Tibetan trade, and revising those of 1883 and 1908 slightly in their favour to the detriment of the Chinese<sup>49</sup>. A line, later called *McMahon line* was also traced, defining Tibetan borders as those marked by the watershed crest of the Himalayan

42 Even if the official object of the mission was to enhance Indo-Tibetan trade, behind there was also the British interest in checking the Russian influence over the Tibetan government. Arora, "Routing the Commodities of the Empire Through Sikkim (1817-1906)," 15.

43 Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, 244–255.

44 The text of the treaty is again entirely reported in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 106–108.

45 Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj: The Frontier Cadre, 1904-1947* (Richmond Surrey: Routledge, 1997), 33–34.

46 K. Gupta, "Sino-Indian Agreement on Tibetan Trade and Intercourse: Its Origin and Significance," *Economic and Political Weekly* 13, no. 16 (April 22, 1978): 697.

47 For further information see Alastair Lamb, *The McMahon Line: a Study in the Relations Between India, China, and Tibet 1904-1914* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966); Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Pantheon Books, 1970); Neville Maxwell, "China and India: The Un-Negotiated Dispute," *The China Quarterly* no. 43 (July 1, 1970): 47–80; Parshotam Mehra, "India-China Border: A Review and Critique," *Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 20 (May 15, 1982): 834–838; Abdul Gafoor Abdul Majeed Noorani, *India-China Boundary Problem, 1846-1947: History and Diplomacy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

48 Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 252–279.

49 Gupta, "Sino-Indian Agreement on Tibetan Trade and Intercourse," 698.



mountains from Burma to Bhutan<sup>50</sup>. However, according to the Anglo-Chinese treaty of 1906 and the Anglo-Russian convention signed in 1907, Tibetans did not have the legal right to revise that convention and to define Tibetan borders without Chinese authorization<sup>51</sup>. The fact that the British later recognised in confidential documents the validity of the Anglo-Tibetan trade regulations of 1914, and of the *McMahon line* on their official maps published in 1935, generated confusion both with British trade rights in Tibet, and with Tibet's borders<sup>52</sup>. When the British left India in 1947 the problems of resolving border issues and trade regulations were therefore inherited by the new government of India.

To return to Sikkim's political situation, from 1908 onwards Sikkim developed a better relationship with India. In fact, in 1908 a new Political Officer, Sir Charles Bell, was appointed. Differently from Whyte, he tried not to impose himself over the Sikkimese king. He largely gave back the control of Sikkim's internal affairs to the Maharajah, and also tried to diminish sociological tensions in Sikkim, promoting the safeguard of the Lepchas and Bhutias rights in land ownership, for example<sup>53</sup>. Therefore the new Maharajah (Tashi Namgyal), who ruled from 1914 until 1963, enjoyed a far better relation with British India<sup>54</sup>.

## ***2.2 Sikkim and Independent India***

Following the British departure, the political status of Sikkim was officially sanctioned on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1948. At that time, an agreement maintaining the precedent relationship between Sikkim and British India was signed with the new government of India. This agreement was reached after the Sikkimese royal family

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50 Michelguglielmo Torri, *Storia dell'India* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), 652–653.

51 Gupta, "Sino-Indian Agreement on Tibetan Trade and Intercourse," 697–8.

52 Ibid., 698–699.

53 Hamlet Bareh, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India: Sikkim* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2001), 58.

54 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 8–9.

accepted India as the British Indian successor, and that New Delhi on its side agreed not to impose the same format on Sikkim it had used with the other princely states for their merger with India (e.g. the *Instrument of Accession*)<sup>55</sup>. The latter was a clear concession made by India, since it was an implicit recognition of Sikkim's special status. It was also the first indication that India would not insist to directly annex Sikkim, but was instead ready to recognise its special status. As a consequence, in 1948 Sikkim and India signed a standstill agreement in which they recognised all the previous agreements signed between Sikkim and British India as valid, and agreed to negotiate a new, more detailed, treaty soon.

However, from 1948 until 1950, when the treaty was finally signed, some other actors tried to modify the existing *status quo*. The Indian freedom movement against the British had indeed also triggered a Sikkimese democratic movement especially among the Nepalese population, who did not feel represented at all by the Maharajah, and wanted to overthrow the Lepchas-Bhutias control, for a more equitable society. Several organizations, like the Praja Sammelan of Temitarku, Praja Mandal of Chakhung, Praja Sudhar of Gangtok, and Swatantra Dal had thus been formed in different parts of Sikkim during 1946<sup>56</sup>. Their representatives met all together for the first time on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1947 at Gangtok, and decided to give birth to the first political party of Sikkim: the Sikkim State Congress (SSC). The political programme of the party was based on three main requests: first, the abolition of landlordism; second, the formation of a representative government; and third, the accession of Sikkim to India<sup>57</sup>. In 1948 the president of the Sikkim State Congress, Tashi Tsering, and the party secretary, C. D. Rai, thus went to New Delhi to meet the Prime

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55 Memorandum of the Government of Sikkim: Claims in respect of Darjeeling, prepared by Sirdar D. K. Sen for the Sikkim Darbar, 1947, in Leo E. Rose, "India and Sikkim: Redefining the Relationship," *Pacific Affairs* 42, no. 1 (1969): 33. The instrument of accession was the legal instrument that was offered to all the Indian Maharajahs to sign for sanctioning their decision to merge their states with India.

56 For more information see: Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984), 52–54.

57 Sikkim State Congress' petition to the Maharajah of Sikkim Gangtok dated December 1947, published by Mankind (New Delhi), February 1960 quoted in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 10–11. It is interesting to note that the President of the party was Tashi Tsering, a clerk who worked at the dependence of the Indian Political Officer in Sikkim, and who had trust in India as a progressive force for Sikkim. Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 52.

Minister of India at the time, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Deputy Minister of External Affairs, B. V. Keskar. On that occasion they restated their requests, and also asked to have Sikkim represented in the Indian Parliament<sup>58</sup>.

In order to face these challenging requests, the Maharajah encouraged and supported the formation of a monarchic political party, the Sikkim National Party (SNP), which gave representation mainly to the minority Lepcha and Bhutia communities<sup>59</sup>. On 30<sup>th</sup> April 1948 the Sikkim National Party passed a resolution that declared its strong opposition to Sikkim's annexation to India, requesting the establishment of equal relations with India, and declaring Sikkim as having more cultural affinities with Bhutan and Tibet, than with India for geographical, ethnic and religious aspects<sup>60</sup>. The SNP resolution ended with a crucial phrase, which reminded New Delhi about Sikkim's strategic importance and the need to keep it satisfied: "From India's point of view, a happy Sikkim as a buffer State would be of great advantage than an unhappy Sikkim in India [...] which would be a disadvantage, indeed a danger to India"<sup>61</sup>.

Nevertheless, the Sikkim State Congress gained popularity in Sikkim thanks to its claim for the abolition of landlordism and democratization. In the first week of February 1949 a *No-rent campaign* was launched in the country, during which several exponents of the party were arrested by the Sikkimese authorities. Despite the protests, the Maharajah refused the formation of a representative government, and called New Delhi for help, who then sent two Indian Army units. Demonstrations, however, continued and culminated on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1949, when around 5.000 agitators besieged the Royal Palace in Gangtok<sup>62</sup>. On that occasion the Indian Army then intervened dispersing the agitators and brought back calm in Sikkim<sup>63</sup>. However, by

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58 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 11.

59 When the British left India in 1947, the Bhutias and Lepchas were around 25% of the Sikkimese population, while the Nepalese constituted 75%. G. S. Bajpai, *China's Shadow Over Sikkim: The Politics of Intimidation* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1999), 200.

60 The full text of the resolution is in Mankind (New Delhi), February 1960, cited by Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 13.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., 12.

63 N. Ram, "Sikkim Story: Protection to Absorption," *Social Scientist* 3, no. 2 (September 1974): 67.

that time the demonstration had obtained the expected result: the Maharajah, following the Indian Political Officer advice, asked the Sikkim State Congress president to form a government. Therefore, on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1949 the government was formed and Tashi Tsering became the Sikkim Chief Minister. However, this democratic experiment did not last: the Maharajah, supported by the Political Officer and thus by New Delhi, dismissed the government on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1949<sup>64</sup>.

As a consequence of this act, the government of India and the Maharajah felt compelled to rapidly conclude the treaty to define the international status of Sikkim. In March 1950 the official public answer from New Delhi to the requests raised by the Sikkim State Congress came to keep: “the demand for accession with India in abeyance”<sup>65</sup>. As a result, in the same month the Ministry of External Affairs announced that a temporary agreement had been reached between the Maharajah and the Indian government<sup>66</sup>: the historical connections between Sikkim and India were confirmed, with the only evolution of establishing an elective body in which all the people of Sikkim would be represented. This would have served the purpose of assisting the Maharajah and the Political Officer in the administrative and political management of Sikkim's internal affairs. On the same occasion it was also announced that a treaty was expected to be signed soon between the government of India and the Maharajah to definitively solve all political and legal issues still open. This Treaty<sup>67</sup> was definitively signed on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1950. Article two, three and four of the treaty reconfirmed Sikkim's status as a protectorate of India: it had autonomy for its domestic affairs, while India was responsible for its external affairs, defence and security. As a consequence Sikkim was not allowed to keep any armed forces, nor to buy weapons<sup>68</sup>. The treaty guaranteed free movement of goods and

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64 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 12.

65 Letter sent by K. R. Pradhan, President of the Sikkim Congress, to Indira Gandhi, President of Indian National Congress dated 26th September 1959, quoted in *ibid.*, 11.

66 Press note of the Ministry of External Affairs dated 20th March 1950, full text available in *ibid.*, 114–5.

67 For the entire text of the agreement see India Parliament House of the People and India Parliament Lok Sabha, *Foreign Policy of India: Texts of Documents, 1947-59* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1959), 37–40.

68 Ram, “Sikkim Story,” 67.

people between the two states. India had exclusive construction and maintenance rights on communications lines. Furthermore, while in article ten guaranteed the Sikkimese Maharajah an annual sum of money from New Delhi as long as the treaty was respected, article eleven gave the Indian government the right to appoint, together with the Maharajah, an Indian administrative service officer for the role of Dewan who basically had Prime Ministerial powers, since he was in charge of the domestic administration of the state.

In order to fully understand the two choices made by New Delhi, to respecting the traditional relationship inherited by the British without imposing the *Instrument of Accession* to Sikkim, and not to exploit the Sikkim State Congress claims for annexing Sikkim, it is crucial to briefly remember the historical situation India was facing at that time. Security and political considerations around the border area suggested caution should be taken. First, the fact that in 1949 Beijing announced its intention to *liberate* Tibet surely convinced India of the necessity to avoid political turmoil in Sikkim, alienating the Maharajah and the Lepcha-Bhutia communities<sup>69</sup>. As a result, it was probably considered better to reinforce the position of the Maharajah, rather than erode it with the recognition of the Sikkim State Congress' claims of annexation, and of an elective governmental body, although the government of India had indicated otherwise in the temporary agreement of March 1950<sup>70</sup>. Consequentially, an annexation of Sikkim would probably have created negative reactions in Bhutan and Nepal, which were both afraid that India could annex them after Sikkim as well. This was another scenario New Delhi preferred to avoid in order not to encourage political instability. Lastly, the 1948 war with Pakistan for Kashmir probably influenced India to adopt a cautious approach toward Sikkim. Similar to Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state that, like all the other princely states recognised by British India<sup>71</sup>, in 1947 had to decide about its future. Its choices were: adhering to India in exchange for the recognition of a *privy*

69 Rose, "India and Sikkim," 34.

70 For the press release text of the temporary agreement of March 1950 see: Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 114–115.

71 These states were numerous, more than 500, and they significantly varied in dimensions and status Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 36.

*pursue*<sup>72</sup>, merging with Pakistan, or remaining independent. If the cases of the Junagadh and Hyderabad princely states – which had respectively decided to join Pakistan and remain independent – were firmly solved by New Delhi without leading to serious problems; the case of Jammu and Kashmir was different<sup>73</sup>. Without entering the age-old problem of Kashmir – which is still considered to be a disputed territory between India and Pakistan<sup>74</sup> – it is sufficient to remember in this context that in October 1947 India and Pakistan fought a war to determine Kashmir's status. The conflict ended only on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1949 after a cease fire imposed by the UN, which had the effect of simply freezing the respective military positions without however completely solving the issue<sup>75</sup>. As a result, it is possible to argue that New Delhi did not intend to risk transforming the Sikkimese question into an international dispute. Like Kashmir, Sikkim was situated on the border frontier and had strict cultural and historical ties with its neighbouring states. Therefore, as aforementioned, it was probable that New Delhi did not contest the maintenance of the Sikkim status as an Indian protectorate, and did not accept the Sikkim State Congress' claims of accession to India in order not to alter what had been sanctioned by the British with China and Tibet.

Although India recognised the People's Republic of China on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1949, and supported its claims for a seat in the UN instead of Taiwan, bilateral tensions had emerged between China and Tibet in reference to the political status of Tibet and of the Indo-Tibetan borders. For reasons of military impotence, in 1949 India decided not to contest China's occupation of Tibet. However, from 1950 the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, began referencing the controversial Simla

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72 In exchange of the signature of the Instrument of Accession, and therefore of the merger of their states as part of India, the princes would have retained their titles and obtained an annual allowance in perpetuity. The privy purses were cancelled only in 1971 with the 26<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment proposed by the Indian government of Indira Gandhi.

73 Torri, *Storia dell'India*, 610–615; Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 49–56.

74 For a detailed analysis of the question of Kashmir see Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010).

75 To solve the Kashmir issue India and Pakistan fought another war in 1965, signed two peace treaties (one in Tashkent in 1966, and the other in Simla in 1972, as already mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis), and came close to fighting other military conflicts during the Nineties, without however solving the question in a decisive and definitive manner.

Convention signed by India and Tibet in 1914 in his speeches to the Indian Parliament, thus implicitly claiming for both the trade rights and border concession conceded by the Tibetans to the British on that occasion<sup>76</sup>. It is interesting to note that India in 1950 was still enjoying the extra-territorial rights in Tibet in force as a result of that contested agreement<sup>77</sup>. In the context of the aggressive march of the Chinese army into Tibet, in 1950 New Delhi mentioned again the special rights inherited by the British in an exchange of letters with Beijing, without however making an open reference to the Simla convention of 1914<sup>78</sup>. On 16<sup>th</sup> November 1950 the Chinese answered with an accommodative and generic stand, *de facto* postponing the issue. As a consequence, India seized the opportunity to invade the area of Tawang, a territory that was included, according to the *McMahon line*, in the Indian territory, but that until that moment had remained under direct Tibetan control, before the Chinese could complete their annexation of Tibet<sup>79</sup>. China neither complained nor commented, though vigorous protests were raised by the Tibetan authorities. However, soon after having officially annexed Tibet on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1951, Beijing declared itself ready to refresh the question of the Tibetan borders and trade regulations with India through peaceful negotiations.

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 1953 a Sino-Indian conference therefore began in Beijing in order to settle at least the question related to the Tibetan trade regulations between India and China. The agreement on *Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India* was thus signed on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1954. It contained in its preamble the famous *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, as a reflection of the common desire for a peaceful co-existence<sup>80</sup>. According to this treaty India gave up all the special trade rights it had assumed after the Simla Conference in 1914, while China recognised the Indian Consulate in Lhasa and the trade agencies in Gyantse, Yatung

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76 Gupta, "Sino-Indian Agreement on Tibetan Trade and Intercourse," 699.

77 China had repeatedly in 1946 and 1947 for the British construction of roads in the tribal territory in the south of the McMahon line. Maxwell, "China and India," 47.

78 Gupta, "Sino-Indian Agreement on Tibetan Trade and Intercourse," 699.

79 Srinath Raghavan, "Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute, 1948-60: A Reappraisal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 36 (September 9, 2006): 3883.

80 These were: respect for integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in internal affairs; equality; and peaceful co-existence.

and Gartok<sup>81</sup>. The border issue was instead not approached on that occasion, but postponed. As shown later, the inability to solve the question of the borders delimitation in the eastern and the north-western sectors through peaceful negotiations, brought India and China to military confrontation in 1962<sup>82</sup>. However, in the context of the Sikkimese border with Tibet no claims had been raised by China, nor India, to challenge what had been clearly defined by the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of 1890. Moreover, after the Indian recognition of Sikkim as a protectorate in 1950, China welcomed the Indian Prime Minister Nehru at the Nathu Lal pass in 1953 with a ceremony during which a plaque was mounted at the pass to mark the common border<sup>83</sup>.

### ***2.3 Sikkim from the Fifties until 1971***

In the early Fifties the Maharajah was able to accommodate the political requests of the Sikkimese democratic forces creating a special institutional pattern that allowed him (and India) to keep control over the domestic political situation. In the Sixties a gradual erosion of the Indo-Sikkimese relations instead took place, due to the new Maharajah's ambitions gain independence. These two developments will be therefore analysed in this paragraph with the aim of provide the reader with a clear picture to understand the dramatic events of the Seventies.

The solution sanctioned by the 1950 Treaty left the democratic political forces

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81 It was decided that China would have then opened its trade agencies in Calcutta, New Delhi and Kalimpong. India also withdrew the small military detachment which it had been retaining at Gyantse since 1904, accepted to give up the post and telegraph installations it had in Tibet, even if the Chinese had made explicit reference only to some passes in the central sector of the border (between Nepal and the contested territory of Kashmir).

82 For a detailed analysis of the border question and to the failure of the bilateral negotiation consult: Maxwell, *India's China War*; Maxwell, "China and India"; Mehra, "India-China Border"; Raghavan, "Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute, 1948-60"; Noorani, *India-China Boundary Problem, 1846-1947*; Steven A. Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

83 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 27.



disappointed. Their faith in the new Independent India, as progressive and democratic agent, was almost definitively lost in Sikkim in 1949-1950. Therefore, after 1950 the protests and agitations promoted by the Sikkim State Congress for the democratization of the Sikkimese politics began to blame it not only on the Sikkim monarchy, but also on India<sup>84</sup>. The situation was settled in 1953 when the Maharajah finally accepted the resumption of the State Council as a representative legislative body of Sikkim. A Constitutional proclamation was therefore made by the Maharajah, according to which the State Council was entrusted with the power to propose laws for internal state management, which would have been enacted by the king. It was made up of eighteen members: twelve elected by the people (six were reserved to the Nepalese community, and six to Bhutia and Lepcha), and six nominated by the Maharajah, among which also the State Council President<sup>85</sup>. The system inequality was clear: the Nepalese community, which counted around 80% of the Sikkimese people, was given the same representation as to the Lepchas and Bhutias, which together were presented only 20%. There was another element that further increased criticism from the Sikkim Congress against the complexity of the system proposed by the Maharajah: for a candidate to be elected, they not only had to secure a majority in his community, but also a minimum support from other communities<sup>86</sup>. Although the Nepalese community requested a *one man one vote* formula, the Sikkimese elections were held from 1953 until 1973 according on the system chosen by the Maharajah. This system also established an Executive Council: it included the Dewan in charge of finance and domestic affairs, and four Councillors selected by the Maharajah among the Assembly elected members, only charged of less crucial subjects, such as education, forest, health, etc<sup>87</sup>. In reality in 1953 only

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84 EPW, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1970.

85 For the 1958 elections the number was increased to twenty, adding one elected seat for the monks, and one to the number of the appointed ones. For the 1967 elections the number was further increased to twenty-four: eighteen elected, and six nominated. Of the eighteen seats seven were reserved to the Nepalese, seven to the Lepchas and Bhutias, one for the monks, one for the Limbus (another minority of Tibetans origins), and one for the scheduled castes (generally won by the Nepalese community). Barih, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India*, 16–17.

86 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 17.

87 Karan and Jenkins, *The Himalayan Kingdoms*, 74–5.

two elected members were chosen by the Maharajah Tashi Namgyal to form the executive body: Sonam Tsering of the party faithful to the king (SNP), and Kashiraj Pradhan of the Sikkim State Congress.

As a consequence of the new political formula, the power in Sikkim was still retained almost completely by the Maharajah and India's representatives. They kept control of the most important subjects of the Sikkimese government through the nomination of the Dewan. The Maharajah maintained the over-representation in the State and in the Executive Councils of the ethnic groups loyal to him, assuring therefore his authority over the Sikkimese population. However, his personal powers were not so great as might appear at a first glance. The Maharajah had to consult the Political Officer named by the Indian government for all the important decisions he had to take. As a consequence: "if the Council members and the Political Officer agreed on any matter, the Maharajah had to accept that"<sup>88</sup>. As a matter of fact, the Indian government also influenced the nomination of the Dewan. The Sikkimese subjugation to India was then reinforced by the state heavy dependence for economic development, and for the administrative service shaped on the Indian pattern<sup>89</sup>. The entire developmental budget was financed by grants, loans, or subsidies given by India, while the same private sector was largely dominated by Indian merchants and bankers resident in Sikkim<sup>90</sup>. In light of the large power held by New Delhi, it is therefore not surprising if the question of Sikkim's international status remained ambiguous after the 1950 Treaty signature. India tried not to mention the special status of Sikkim in all official documents. Moreover, until 1967 New Delhi refused to recognise the border between India and Sikkim as an international frontier on official Indian maps, despite frequent and strong protests coming from Sikkim<sup>91</sup>.

Domestic political tensions were therefore kept under control by the Maharajah and the Indian Political Officer until the Sixties. As a matter of fact, in July 1961 the *Sikkim Subjects Regulation* was promulgated by the Maharajah in accordance with

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88 Bareh, *Encyclopaedia of North-East India*, 59.

89 Nari Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1987), 36.

90 Rose, "India and Sikkim," 35.

91 *Ibid.*, 36.

the Indian nominated Political Officer to solve the old issue of Sikkimese citizenship<sup>92</sup>. All citizens who could prove they had been living in Sikkim for at least fifteen years would have received Sikkim nationality. This was an important step in recognising the rights of the Nepalese origin community, though it still did not completely satisfy all the Sikkim State Congress' demands<sup>93</sup>. The SSC had never stopped demanding an electoral system based on the *one man one vote* formula, and for a more democratic system and in 1962, on the occasion of the national elections, it even tried to boycott the polls and to launch a non-cooperation movement in case the Maharajah did not accept the reduction of the State Council nominated seats, and to hand the land distribution regulation to the Executive Council<sup>94</sup>. However, the 1962 elections and all domestic issues were then postponed when Chinese troops invaded India in the north-east, through the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh<sup>95</sup>. When on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1962 the Maharajah called the state of a national emergency, all the political parties in Sikkim gave their full support to the Sikkim and Indian governmental efforts to defend the state from the possibility of a Chinese invasion in Sikkim through Tibet<sup>96</sup>.

However, after 1962 relations between Sikkim and New Delhi had gradually eroded: Sikkim's economy significantly suffered due to the closure of the border with Tibet, not only because of the Sino-Indian trade collapse, but also the historical trade that had been carried between Sikkim and Tibet for centuries. The war stopped the traditional practice of the trans-border pasturage of the northern tribes of Bhutias as

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92 Karan and Jenkins, *The Himalayan Kingdoms*, 63.

93 Leo E. Rose, "The Himalayan Border States: 'Buffers' in Transition," *Asian Survey* 3, no. 2 (February 1963): 118.

94 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 21.

95 As already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the 1962 war saw the Chinese victory and the humiliation of the Indian Army, without however solving the historical problem of the border definition. After 1962 only few small skirmishes took place along the Sikkimese borders in 1964, 1965, and 1967. However, trade along the border remained banned until 2006.

96 Rose, "The Himalayan Border States," 119. After the requests formulated by the Maharajah as a consequence of the worsening of Sino-Indian relations in 1959, in 1962 the formation of a small Sikkimese Army had been allowed by the Indian Prime Minister Nehru. A Sikkim Guard of 280 soldiers had thus been organised and trained under the supervision of the Indian Army, and posed under the direct control of the Maharajah. It allowed Sikkim to directly participate in the defence operations carried out in late 1962, when some skirmishes took place along the Nathu-Lal pass. Karan and Jenkins, *The Himalayan Kingdoms*.

well. This situation led Sikkim's authorities to progressively contest the excise duty system India imposed on the goods imported by Sikkim from 1947. It was considered the cause of the economic dependence of Sikkim on India<sup>97</sup>.

Moreover, the new king of Sikkim, Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal<sup>98</sup>, began what appeared to be a political program for reinforcing Sikkim's identity as a separate state from India, thus annoying India's government further<sup>99</sup>. For example, before his official coronation ceremony on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1965, Thondup Namgyal decided to abandon his Indian status of *Maharajah*, and to re-adopt the Tibetan version of the title *Chogyal*. This was only a symbolic gesture, but significantly highlights traditional cultural link with the Bhutia and Tibetan cultures, rather than India. Similarly, Buddhism was declared as the national religion, though only 20% of the Sikkimese population was of that faith and almost the 80% was Hindu. Also this decision was considered to be aimed at underlining the cultural diversity between Sikkim and India<sup>100</sup>. Furthermore in 1967 efforts were made to promote Sikkimese nationality: specific primary school textbooks were printed in which the Sikkimese culture, history and languages of the three main state ethnic groups (Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali) were represented<sup>101</sup>. A national anthem was composed, creating controversies in India<sup>102</sup>, and lead the Political Officer (Vincent Coelho) to refuse to participate in some official ceremonies as a sign of protest. For the same reason he also denied a visa for the American Ambassador, who wanted to visit Sikkim in June 1966<sup>103</sup>. The national flag became omnipresent after the Chogyal coronation, while a new youth organization, the Youth Study Forum, was formed with the support of the

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97 It has been calculated that all the aid India gave to Sikkim from 1953 to 1967 had been balanced by the excise duties. Rose, "India and Sikkim," 43.

98 Palden Thondup succeeded his father when the latter died on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1963.

99 At the same time, however, as reported by Rustomji, the Chogyal marrying an American woman apparently became more interested in trips abroad, in welcoming foreign visitors to Sikkim, rather than keeping close ties with his own people. Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 65–68.

100 Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 36.

101 Jackie Hiltz, "Constructing Sikkimese National Identity in the 1960s and 1970s," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 39, no. 2 (2003): 75–76.

102 "Salutary Honours," *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 29 (July 20, 1968): 1131–1132.

103 "Report on Sikkim, South and South-East Asia Section, joint Foreign Office and Commonwealth Office, Research Department, dated on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1966", in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

royal family and of Chogyal's wife<sup>104</sup>. The Youth Forum gathered together the young nobles of Bhutia and Lepcha origins who were loyal to the Chogyal. They began to act as a coterie of advisers and supporters for the royal family's ambitions to have an independent Sikkim.

Connected to the promotion of a Sikkimese nationality, efforts to increase worldwide awareness of Sikkim's distinct political entity were also attempted. The Youth Study Forum began, for example, to openly call for a revision of the 1950 treaty, and for Sikkim participation in multi-national programs, such as for example the Colombo Plan. The political program of the Chogyal had its supporters. Some editorials of the nationalistic Sikkim newspaper (Gangtok), like those written by Kaiser Bahadur Thapa, began, for example, to openly request the revision of the 1950 Treaty, and for recognition of Sikkim from the United Nations Organization<sup>105</sup>. Bhutan was lobbying to be recognised by the UN as an independent state at that time: this clearly had a significant impact on the Sikkimese political circles that began to consider that option with more attention<sup>106</sup>. As a consequence, the ambitions Sikkim had to develop its own international identity, independent from India, was then shown in some apolitical events by the royal family, like the Maharajah's coronation in 1965 when also foreign dignitaries were invited<sup>107</sup>. Also the establishment of the Sikkim seat in the Asia Society in New York in 1966, the participation to the selection of a Buddhist delegation in Soviet Union in 1967, and the sending of a

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104In 1963 the Chogyal married a young ordinary and shy American woman, Mrs. Hope Cooke, who he met during one of his trips to India. This international marriage, the first of the royal family of Sikkim, which usually married women of Tibetan origins, put a lot of focus on Sikkim from all the world. This irritated New Delhi which would have preferred a lower international profile for Sikkim. Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 76.

105Sikkim, 6th August 1968, quoted in Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 137.

106However, the situation in Bhutan was different: the British always avoided interfering in Bhutanese domestic politics. Moreover, the 1949 Treaty signed by Bhutan and India only put Bhutan under the protection of India, without giving New Delhi the power to influence the domestic politics of the small state. Its less crucial strategic position clearly explains these political differences. To gain a better idea of the differences between the two states see: Rose, "The Himalayan Border States"; Leo E. Rose, "Bhutan's External Relations," *Pacific Affairs* 47, no. 2 (July 1, 1974): 192–208.

107Suresh Kant Sharma, *Discovery of North-East India: Geography, History, Culture, Religion, Politics, Sociology, Science, Education and Economy. Sikkim* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005), 255–258.

representative at Lima to the World Craft Council in 1968 are events that can be related to the royal family's attempt to gain an international status for Sikkim as an independent state.

Claims for a revision of the 1950 treaty and for a more independent position of Sikkim were also directly formulated by the same royal family of Sikkim. Mrs. Cooke, the young American wife of the Sikkimese king, also had an important influence on him, enhancing and supporting his ambitions to have an independent Sikkim. According to a friend of the royal family, Nari Rustomji: "Hope was also sowing seeds of discontent in the Prince's mind as regards his treatment at the hands of the Government of India"<sup>108</sup>. Mrs. Cooke went even further when she published an article in the *Bulletin of Tibetology* in 1966 in which she examined the issue of the Darjeeling grant to the East India Company, questioning the validity of the transaction in reference to the traditional Sikkimese land-holding system<sup>109</sup>. The publication of an article casting doubts on the validity of British India's annexation of Darjeeling clearly triggered controversies in New Delhi, and irritated the Indian government. In the spring of 1967 also the Chogyal personally made an open reference for the need to review the 1950 treaty signed with India. In an interview released to Indian journalists the Chogyal expressed his personal opinion that, in view of the changes that had occurred in the meantime, the Treaty had to be reformulated<sup>110</sup>. Again in 1968, during the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Sikkim, the Chogyal made another reference to such a claim in his welcome speech, when he called for Sikkim's "rightful place in the comity of nations"<sup>111</sup>.

In 1967 claims for the 1950 treaty review also came from the new Executive Council of Sikkim, which on 15<sup>th</sup> June released a joint statement arguing: "[...] It needs no emphasis for any one to feel the absolute need of a thorough change in the existing provisions of the Treaty [...] Since Sikkim signed the Treaty with India surely it is within her sovereign right to demand the revision of the Treaty as one of

108Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 79.

109Hope Namgyal, "The Sikkimese Theory of Land-hording and the Darjeeling Grant," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 3, no. 2 (1966): 47–59.

110Rose, "India and Sikkim," 36.

111Sikkim, 9th May 1968, p. 3, cited in *ibid*.

the signatories. In fact Sikkim gained her sovereign status on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 when India achieved her independence from the British Rule. This is evident from the fact that Sikkim does not figure in the list of the Indian union Territories as defined in the Constitution of India. Every country has its inherent right to exist and maintain its separate identity and, therefore, to review and revise its obligations in the wake of changing circumstances”<sup>112</sup>. To better understand the value of this joint statement, and not to overrate it, it is crucial to consider that among the three members of the Executive Council signing it there were no exponents of the Sikkim National Congress (SNC)<sup>113</sup>. The SNC was the new multi-ethnic party formed in 1960 by the defection of some factions from the SSC and the SNP. Struggling for a reduction of the Chogyal's powers, a democratization of Sikkim's political life, and of the maintenance of good relations with India<sup>114</sup>, the SNC had won more votes than all the parties in the 1967 elections<sup>115</sup>. As a result, only the minority parties of the SNP and of the SSC thus openly supported the statement of the Executive Council of Sikkim. In fact, the SNP had always been pro-Chogyal, whereas, the SSC had lost its faith in the progressive role India could have had in bringing democracy to Sikkim after 1949, and had begun to support Chogyal's claims for independence, even if continuing to press for the democratization of Sikkim's political system. Although the joint communicate had the support of only the two minority parties, the SNP and the SSC, it was a sign that the feeling of the necessity to revise the 1950 Treaty in favour of greater independence of Sikkim was diffused in some sections of the

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112Sikkim Herald, 16 June 1967, quoted in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 25.

113The three politicians that signed the joint statement were: Netuk Tsering (Sikkim National Party), Nahakul Pradhan (Sikkim State Congress), and B. B. Gurang (originally from the SNC but expelled from the party for his pro-Chogyal inclinations). “Last Chance for Democracy?,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 5, no. 1 (January 3, 1970): 10–11.

114The memorandum sent by the SNC to the Indian Prime Minister on 5th May 1968 demanding democratization, clearly demonstrates this stand. “Salutary Honours,” 1131.

115The SNC secured eight seats at the Sikkim State Council (five from the Nepalese constituency, two from Lepcha and Bhutia ones, and one from the general seat). The party loyal to the Maharajah, the SNP, won instead only five seats among the Lepchas-Bhutias constituency, and the two reserved to the Limbus and the scheduled castes. The seat reserved to the monks went to a Lama who was supported by the Sikkim National Party. As a result, the Sikkim State Congress emerged as the defeated one: it won only two Nepalese seats. However, thanks to the fact that the Chogyal nominated six members in the State Council, the latter remained dominated by the pro-Chogyal forces. Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 23–25.

Sikkimese political society.

In 1968 the first anti-Indian demonstration took place in Sikkim during the Independence Day celebrations<sup>116</sup>. When Indian guests began to arrive at the Indian Residency, some 30 school-children carried out a small anti-Indian parade bringing notices with slogans like “Down with Indian traitors”, “Down with Indian Imperialists”, and “Indian Army go home”<sup>117</sup>. As reported by the *Economic and Political Weekly* correspondent from Gangtok, the Chogyal could not conceal his personal sympathy to the demonstration, which seemed to be organized by his loyal Sikkim Youth Forum<sup>118</sup>. Pressures for punishment were immediately expressed by the Indian Political Officer, N. B. Menon, who within a few hours following the event had promptly informed New Delhi. Alarmed also by the Sikkim National Congress leader, Lendhup Dorji<sup>119</sup>, India reacted immediately. The Ministry of External Affairs Secretary, T. N. Kaul, was sent to investigate the situation in Gangtok. He decided that the Chogyal had to publicly take a stance against the event and to punish the its authors<sup>120</sup>. Punitive measures were then taken by the Chogyal against some teachers and pupils. This act apparently calmed down New Delhi and maintained relations at a good level, although soon after suspicions emerged about the fact that organizers of the manifestation (e. g. Sikkim Youth Forum exponents) had not been punished<sup>121</sup>.

In 1969 another anti-Indian demonstration was organised by the two parties closer to the royal family (the SNP, and the SSC) for the visit of the Indian President V. V. Giri, planned on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1969<sup>122</sup>. Since the visit was cancelled due to the floods that had tragically hit Sikkim, further tensions between India and Sikkim were averted. However, on the day of the expected visit an article was published in *Sikkim*, the supposedly independent newspaper behind which there was the Chogyal's influence. The piece was calling for full independence of the state, and for the

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116“No Longer Welcome,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 5, no. 23 (June 6, 1970): 902.

117“On the Wrong Side,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 36 (September 7, 1968): 1358.

118“No Longer Welcome,” 902.

119“End of the Affair?,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 3, no. 41 (October 12, 1968): 1571.

120Ibid., 1570–1571.

121“No Election for Chogyal ?,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 4, no. 43 (October 25, 1969): 1695.

122“No Longer Welcome,” 902–903.



revision of the 1950 treaty and of the system of Indian excise<sup>123</sup>. Chogyal's ambitions to see Sikkim become independent were also hindered on the occasion of the Nepali crowned prince's wedding in February 1970. Sikkim was only offered the inferior status of *government head*, instead of the expected *head of state*, due to the pressures exercised by New Delhi over Kathmandu<sup>124</sup>. As a consequence, the visibly irritated Sikkim royal family decided to decline the invitation and to send some representatives of the Sikkim government instead<sup>125</sup>.

All these efforts for supporting an independent Sikkim clearly alarmed New Delhi. Nevertheless, the Chogyal did not show the intelligence to promote a democratization of Sikkim, which would also have granted it the support of the SNC. Supporting, for example, a constitutional democracy, the Chogyal could have had a united and compacted Sikkim under his guidance to face New Delhi regarding the question of gaining more independence. However, still in the Seventies, the Sikkimese king did not show any intentions to promote a democratization of Sikkim's politics. Therefore, he continued to fight a war on two fronts: domestically against the party based on the Nepalese community (SNC), which demanded democratization; and internationally against India, which did not want to lose its political control over Sikkim<sup>126</sup>. Therefore, although in the 1970 elections the Chogyal again managed to obtain an absolute majority in the State Council<sup>127</sup>, thanks

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123“Letter sent by R. A. Burns, British High Commission in New Delhi, to Miss. T. A. H. Solesby, South Asian Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1970”, in FCO 37/532, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1970, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

124“*In the Doldrums*,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 5, no. 16 (April 18, 1970): 659.

125The representative group was formed by two Nepali, and two Lepcha-Bhutia, for that occasion nominated “Ministers”. Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 36.

126Indian intentions were clearly resumed in: “Letter from I. J. N. Sutherland, South Asian Department, to Sir. Stanley Tomlison, dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1970”, in in FCO 37/532, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1970, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

127The majority of the State Council again remained firmly in the hands of the Chogyal who could count on the 7 seats won by the SNC, the four won by the SSC, and on the six seat he directly and freely nominated. “Letter from R. A. Burns, British High Commission in New Delhi, to Miss. T. A. H. Solesby, South Asian Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, dated on 3<sup>th</sup> July 1970”, in FCO 37/532, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1970, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

to the unequal election system he had devised in 1953, and some irregular practices<sup>128</sup>, resentment grew in the Sikkim National Congress that could only secure five seats, and place its leader, Kazi Lhendup Dorji, in the Executive Council<sup>129</sup>. The decision to not concede a democratization was a big error made by the Chogyal who was indeed crucially weakened by the domestic dissent diffused among the Nepalese community, as the following paragraph will show.

### ***3. Sikkim from protectorate to 22<sup>nd</sup> Indian state (1973-1975): a literature review***

A consideration of the events leading Sikkim to become the 22<sup>nd</sup> Indian state will be done in the following paragraph. It will be shown how the literature has been deeply divided in commenting on the turbulent years from 1973-1975. Following years of relative calm, from 1973-1975 the political situation in Sikkim abruptly changed,

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128The Chogyal rejected several SNC candidates for the Sikkim State Council without that any clear explanations being provided. Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 36. He curiously decided to reduce the electoral roll used in 1967 when 87.000 people had the right to vote, to only 50.000, thus reducing the number of Nepali voters. "Letter from Fowler, British Deputy High Commission in Calcutta, to W. K. Slatcher, British High Commissioner, New Delhi, dated on 6th May 1970", in FCO 37/532, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1970, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

129"A Party for Every Season," *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 3, 1970, 1634 The confusing and tense situation of Sikkim was well summed up by the High Commissioner in India from New Zealand, after his first trip in the state in November 1970. From the report he sent to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in Wellington, and in copy to London, the erosion of Indo-Sikkimese relations emerges clearly, together with the domestic tensions between the royal family, sided with the Lepcha-Bhutia communities, and the Nepalese community. It is interesting to note that the New Zealander bureaucrat left Sikkim with the feeling that something would have occurred soon and that it was: "likely that rather concede major autonomy India will seek first to assimilate Sikkim". See: "Letter sent by the High Commissioner of New Zeland in New Delhi to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of New Zeland in Wellington, copied to South Asian Department in London, dated on 1st November 1970", in FCO 37/532, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1970, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

taking a serious and sudden turn in India's favour, and against the Chogyal. In order to understand what actually happened, this paragraph will be devoted to the analysis of the 1973-1975 events as reported by literature. This paragraph will highlight how the rival accounts provided are biased. Commentators and analysts are split into two completely opposite interpretations of the facts. On one hand, the dominant pro-India version<sup>130</sup> refers to a spontaneous merger of Sikkim with the Indian Union, triggered by the violent upsurge of the Sikkimese against its despot. On the other, the anti-Indian version<sup>131</sup> reports of a mere Indian annexation of Sikkim, carried out through the fomentation, before, and the exploitation, later, of the conflicts which existed in Sikkim between the Sikkimese monarchy, who did not want to quit power, and the people, who instead wanted a political democratization.

### ***3.1 The events of April 1973 and India's intervention***

Before analysing the event, it is important to briefly consider the fact that only a few significant events took place in Sikkim from 1971 until spring of 1973. All these confirmed the Chogyal's intentions to reduce India's control over Sikkim. In 1972 the Chogyal directly assumed all executive power following the Dewan (I. S. Chopra) mandate termination<sup>132</sup>. According to a note sent by the British High Commissioner in New Delhi, T. Garvey, to the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alec Douglas-Home, the Chogyal had begun to rely "less on the inchoate departments of state than upon his Private Secretaries, two black-

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130The Indian press, Awadhesh Coomar Sinha, *Politics of Sikkim: a Sociological Study* (Delhi: Thomson Press, 1975); Ranjan Gupta, "Sikkim: The Merger with India," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 9 (September 1975): 786–798; Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*; the account provided by the Indian ex-Chief Executive of Sikkim: Brajbir Saran Das, *The Sikkim Saga* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983); Bajpai, *China's Shadow Over Sikkim*.

131Ram, "Sikkim Story"; the account provided by the Chogyal's wife: Hope Cooke, *Time Change: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*; the account provided by the ex-Dewan and Chogyal's friend: Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*; Jigme N. Kazi, *Inside Sikkim, Against the Tide* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Hill Media Publications, 1993).

132Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 165.

gowned, white-cuffed characters called Desapa and Topden, who might have been taken straight from 16<sup>th</sup> century Florence”<sup>133</sup>, thus openly challenging New Delhi. In addition, it had been reported by political opponents of the Chogyal, like the leader of the NSC Lendhup Dorij, that the king was actively working on his plans to create a Himalayan Grand Federation among the monarchies of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan<sup>134</sup>. He reported for example about the Chogyal proposal (not successful) of marrying his daughter Yangchen to the Bhutan Queen's son in late 1972, with the aim of strengthening political ties between Bhutan and Sikkim. Clearly New Delhi could only have received both pieces of news with irritation at that time.

During the 1973 elections three parties presented their candidature: the Sikkim Janata Congress<sup>135</sup>, the SNP and the SNC. Judged by British observers as an “opportunistic attempt to mix together policies stolen from the other parties”, the new Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) rallied for the creation of a constitutional monarchy, for the elimination of the parity formula among communities, and for the revision of the 1950 Treaty in order to make Sikkim independent<sup>136</sup>. The Sikkim National Party (SNP) maintained its pro-Chogyal approach, rallying for the revision of the 1950 treaty to have an independent Sikkim at the United Nations Organization, and for maintaining the parity formula among communities, which over-represented Lepcha and Bhutia minorities<sup>137</sup>. The Sikkim National Congress led by Kazi Lhendup Dorji instead had a clear position against the monarchy and was in favour of closer relations between Sikkim and India: it campaigned in the name of the abolition of

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133“Note DS NO 04/72 sent by High Commissioner in New Delhi, T. Garvey, to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alec Douglas-Home, dated 1972”, 5/7, in FCO 37/982, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1972, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

134“Letter from T. J. O'Brien, British Embassy in Kathmandu, Nepal, to T. Garvey, High Commissioner in New Delhi, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

135This party was formed in August 1972 by the merger among the Janata Party (founded in late 1969), the SSC, the Rajya Praja Sammelan of C. K. Pradhan, and a faction of the National Congress led by D. B. Tiwari. Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 38.

136“Letter from Philippa Drew, British High Commission in New Delhi, to J. A. Birch, South Asian Department, FCO, London, dated on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1973, 1/2, FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

137Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 38.

communal pattern for voting, for a written constitution, and for strengthening relations with India.

Although, the 9<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> March 1973 elections saw an enlargement of the vote rolls and 107,000 people had the right to go to the polls, the outcome was a meagre 40%<sup>138</sup>. The reason for this was probable due to the irrelevancy of the elections to the Sikkimese political life, since the real power was still held by the Chogyal and by the government of India. The Sikkim National Party (SNP) emerged as the first national party, winning nine seats, while the Sikkim National Congress (SNC) won five seats, and the Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) two<sup>139</sup>. As a consequence, once again the majority in the State Council was controlled by forces loyal to the Chogyal, as well as the Executive Council. In this context the Chogyal took another step to try diminishing India's power in Sikkim further: rather than proceeding with the nomination of a new Indian Dewan in accordance with New Delhi, who since 1953 had also been the President of the Sikkim State Council, on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1973 the Chogyal appointed Dorji Dahdul, a bureaucrat of the Sikkim government, to assume such a position<sup>140</sup>.

This latter move of the Chogyal passed almost unnoticed and did not provoke any specific dissent reaction from India. The probable cause was that when the results were announced the Sikkim National Congress party and the Sikkim Janata Congress immediately began to denounce presumed malpractices and irregularities in the poll counting, creating a mounting clamour in Sikkim and catching attention<sup>141</sup>. Their criticism was then further fuelled by the Chogyal's decision to not open investigations, and by the unlucky decision to arrest on 27<sup>th</sup> March the Janata Congress leader, K. C. Pradhan, with allegations of having made a speech that was likely to trigger communal tensions<sup>142</sup>. This latter event flamed reactions among the

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138“Letter from Philippa Drew, British High Commission in New Delhi, to J. A. Birch, South Asian Department, FCO, London, dated on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1973, 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

139Ibid.

140Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 38.

141Ibid., 39.

142Ibid., 40.

leaders of the Sikkim Janata Congress party and the National Congress party: they thus formed a joint committee, the Joint Action Committee (JAC), and organised on 28<sup>th</sup> March a protest against the alleged electoral irregularities and Pradhan's arrest, and in favour of democratic reforms. In the following days a sixteen-point programme was then formulated by the JAC calling for the abolition of the communal voting system, the introduction of political reforms, the Chogyal's abdication, and closer relations with India<sup>143</sup>. Several agitations were thus launched by the JAC, while the Indian Political Officer, K. S. Bajpai, tried to bring the parts together to negotiate. Nevertheless, in the first days of April it became evident that the negotiation attempt had failed.

On the morning of 4<sup>th</sup> April people gathered outside Gangtok to try to reach the royal palace. According to the version reported by Indian newspapers, eighty-six people went on an indefinite fast in front of the Tsuklakhang, the palace monastery; while the Sikkimese police began to fire tear-gas shells against the agitators trying to surround the royal palace in Gangtok<sup>144</sup>. The homes of Chogyal supporters in some districts were also looted and burnt by the Nepali crowd<sup>145</sup>. The impulsive son of the Chogyal, Tengzing Namgyal, became involved in the strongest shooting episode on 4<sup>th</sup> April when he was assaulted by the crowd while in his jeep in the Gangtok marketplace, and began to shoot randomly at people to escape, thus fuelling even more anger among demonstrators<sup>146</sup>. Therefore, the Chogyal's birthday celebration, planned for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of April, were partially cancelled. Then, on 5<sup>th</sup> April Sikkim administration almost collapsed. According to Indian sources: police outposts and administrative offices were indeed abandoned and occupied by the demonstrators<sup>147</sup>.

In this chaotic situation it is interesting to note that both parts decided to appeal

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143Ibid.

144"Troubled Protectorate," *Economic and Political Weekly* 8, no. 15 (April 14, 1973): 706–707.

145Gupta, "Sikkim," 790.

146Ram, "Sikkim Story," 68. This version was confirmed by the same crown prince in a phone call he made to one of his friends in Cambridge, reported later by *The Times* and *The Washington Post*, in which he however assured that none was killed. *The Times*, 9th April 1973; and Bernard D., Nossiter "Sikkim king hints of Indian pressure", *The Washington Post*, 10th April 1973.

147Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 40.

to India to bring back order in Sikkim. On one hand, the JAC leaders went to the Indian Political Officer to directly demand for the Indian Prime Minister to intervene and rescue: “the innocent people of Sikkim from a ruthless repression unleashed by the Darbar [Sikkim's government, alias the Chogyal] to perpetuate the feudal privileges against the demands for democratic rights”<sup>148</sup>. On the other hand, the Chogyal called New Delhi asking for help to restore order in the state, and to reorganize the whole Sikkim administration <sup>149</sup>. The Sikkimese king indeed could only count on the small Sikkim Guard (280 soldiers), and the small Sikkimese police force.

India seized the opportunity and promptly accepted to take control of Sikkim on 6<sup>th</sup> April. The Commissioner of Delhi Municipal Corporation, B. S. Das, was therefore appointed as the Chief Administrator of Sikkim on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1973. At the same time Avtar Singh was promptly sent to Gangtok: he was a senior secretary of the Indian External Affairs Ministry who had already served as Political Officer in Bhutan and Nepal, known for his inclinations towards the popular political leaders of Sikkim<sup>150</sup>. When the Indian Army and the Central Reserve Police became active in Gangtok, the JAC called off its agitations, urging India at the same time to take a clear stand against the Chogyal. According to Indian sources, the order was easily restored by the Indian Army<sup>151</sup>. The Indian Deputy Foreign Minister, Surendra Pal Singh, summed up the events in Sikkim in the Lok Sabha on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1973 phrasing what happened after the 27<sup>th</sup> March arrest of the Janata Congress leader Pradhan as follows: “[...] the excess of the police which resulted in a large number of casualties and mass upsurge against the Sikkim Darbar [government of Sikkim led by the Chogyal]. Thereafter there were large-scale demonstrations all over Sikkim. Twenty thousand demonstrators collected in Gangtok demanding democratic rights and

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148The Hindu, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1973.

149Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 41.

150Rao stated that Avatar Singh was sent to Sikkim on 8th April as a consequence of the troubles.

Ibid.; The Economic and Political Weekly made out that he went after the 4th April. “Troubled Protectorate,” 707. However, declassified British documents, as will later shown, put Singh’s arrival in Sikkim before, on 3rd April 1973.

151*The Hindu*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973.

demonstrating against the Chogyal regime. Police stations of several important towns such as Rangpo, Rhenock, Melli, Namchi, Geyzing, and Singtam were also taken over by the popular leaders and the population under their guidance. As the situation in Sikkim went out of Chogyal's control despite strong measures adopted by the Sikkim Darbar, the Chogyal first made a formal request to the government of India for its police stations in Rangpo, Rhanock and Melli to be manned by the Indian Army and then to entrust the responsibility for law and order in Gangtok itself to the Indian Army. Our acceptance of these requests was widely acclaimed by the masses of Sikkim. Finally, with the complete breakdown of law and order all over Sikkim, the Chogyal wrote us on the 8<sup>th</sup> April requesting us to take over the administration of the whole Sikkim. He also asked us for the services of a senior officer of the Government of India to be appointed as head of Sikkim's administration. Simultaneously, there were repeated demands from the popular leaders and the large masses of Sikkim for the Government of India to take over the administration of the state. As a response, [...], the Government of India had taken over the administration of the state and have also deputed a senior officer to function as head of Sikkim's administration"<sup>152</sup>.

Although it had been reported, the speech attracted some unfavourable comments from the Indian press for its exaggeration in defining the event as a *masses upsurge*, the majority of Indian newspapers took this version as valid and supported the Indian government's position<sup>153</sup>. No space was given to the version of facts provided by the royal family. Therefore, when *The Times* and *The Washington Post* published the Chogyal's son telephone call to a friend in United Kingdom respectively on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> April, Indian newspapers, such as for example *The Patriot* and *The Hindustan Times* on 11<sup>th</sup> April, firmly criticised. The British and American newspapers were reporting the crown princes' allegations that the takeover

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152“Telegram 780 from T. Garvey, British High Commissioner in New Delhi, to South Asian Department in London, dated on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

153To read a critical article see: “Delhi Faces Test in Sikkim”, *The Holiday*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1973, which warned that the Indian intervention: “will create doubts in the minds of its smaller neighbours and serve as a provocation to China”.



in Sikkim had been deliberately arranged by the Government of India, through the infiltration in Sikkim of outsider elements from Darjeeling”<sup>154</sup>. Thus, for example, on 17<sup>th</sup> April *The Statesman* dismissed such accuses stating: “The promotion of an agitation is the last thing a protecting power like India would think of sponsoring”<sup>155</sup>, while *The Times of India* wrote: “There is no practical alternative at present to the use of New Delhi's influence and authority to persuade the disparate elements to accept a compromise that takes Sikkim towards responsible government”<sup>156</sup>.

At that time, like in the years that followed, only few voices were publicly raised against the version provided by the Indian government and newspapers explaining the April 1973 events in Sikkim. The first clear reasons for this is that the entrance in Sikkim at that time was restricted by Indian authorities only to Indians. Therefore, only Indian journalists could enter Sikkim and therefore provide accounts of the events there<sup>157</sup>. Nevertheless, international criticism came from regional rival states of India: China and Pakistan for clear political rivalry reasons firmly and strongly protested against India's actions. On 11<sup>th</sup> April 1973 the *New China News Agency* published the first official Chinese comments on Sikkim's events stating: “The Government of India sent troops to forcibly take over the administration of Sikkim under the pretext of disturbances there”<sup>158</sup>. Also Radio Pakistan clearly blamed India's actions arguing: “India has now and then created some internal disturbances to strengthen its hold over the protectorate”, comparing (even if quite incorrectly) what happened in Sikkim to the events of 1971 East Pakistan<sup>159</sup>.

The second more interesting kind of criticism came from the members of the

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154The Times, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1973; and Bernard D. Nossiter, “Sikkim king hints of Indian pressure”, *The Washington Post*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973.

155N. J. Nariporia, “One Point of View: No Time or Need for Pussyfooting”, *The Statesman*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1973.

156Dilip Mukerjee, “Hard Choice in Sikkim: Difficult Task for New Delhi”, *The Times of India*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1973.

157For example, the article of Michael Hornsby “A break in Sikkim's idyllic oblivion”, published by *The Times*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1973, clearly recognised that: “It is difficult to be absolutely certain of what is happening in Sikkim as it is out of bonds to foreign journalists”. *The Washington Post* in the article of Bernard D. Nossiter “Sikkim king hints of Indian pressure”, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973, also confirms that: “India has refused to permit any foreign correspondents to enter in the Kingdom since the disturbances began last week”.

158Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 42–43.

Sikkimese royal family. The version provided by the Chogyal's son therefore was boldly reaffirmed by the Chogyal's sister, Pema Tsendeum Yapshi Pheunkane, in a press conference in Hong Kong. On that occasion she alleged India had used unconstitutional means to promote political reforms in Sikkim, such as bribing peasants from Darjeeling to go to Sikkim to create unrest<sup>160</sup>. Similar accusations were later raised also by the Chogyal's half sister, Lanzingla Tashi, who claimed a consistent part of the women who demonstrated in Gangtok were not Sikkimese<sup>161</sup>.

However, after India took up the political and administrative control of Sikkim on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973, the royal family official statements no more openly challenged the Indian version of events. From late April onwards the Chogyal released speeches in which India was described as only having exclusively intervened in his help, while infiltrations from Darjeeling identified India as being responsible for the unexpected violence of the protesters. For example, the crown prince in a press conference in New Delhi on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973 dismissed the interpretations made by *The Times* and *The Washington Post* during his telephone conversation, arguing it had instead been manipulated<sup>162</sup>. Similar declarations were also released by his father in Gangtok on two occasions: at the press conference following the first negotiation with Indian authorities on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1973 (after India's takeover)<sup>163</sup>; and in September 1973 when he went to meet Indian authorities in New Delhi<sup>164</sup>. Clearly the royal family did this

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159The English translation of the Urdu broadcasting of Radio Pakistan (Ahmjad Hussa, on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1973) was done by Ashok Chib, Joint Secretary of Pakistan Division at the Indian Minister of External Affairs, and attached to "Letter from Philippa Drew, British High Commission in New Delhi, to J. A. Birch, South Asian Department in London, dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1973", in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

160Far Eastern Economic Review, 23rd April 1973, 26 cited in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 42.

161Far Eastern Economic Review, 21st May 1973, 14-15, cited in *ibid*.

162"Telegram 807 from T. Garvey, British High Commissioner in New Delhi, to South Asian Department, London, dated on 14 April 1973", in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

163"Telegram 809 from T. Garvey, British high Commissioner in New Delhi, to South Asian Department, London, dated on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973", 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

164"Letter sent by Philippa Drew, British High Commission in New Delhi, to C. H. Seaward, South Asian Department, FCO, London, dated 17 October 1973", in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

with the aim of not worsening the already precarious situation and of preserving its power.

Criticism against the version provided by the Indian governments and newspapers were only raised later after Sikkim was definitively absorbed by India in 1975 and the royal family was dethroned. For example in 1984 an Indian journalist friend of the Chogyal, Sunanda Datta-Ray, published a book titled *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim*, based on the Sikkimese royal family sources<sup>165</sup>. According to Datta-Ray, an agreement was almost reached on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1973 between the Chogyal and the JAC politicians on the *one man one vote* formula, thus clearly introducing a democratization of the 1953 electoral system chosen by the Chogyal. However, Datta-Ray claimed that it was Lendhup Dorji, the leader of the SNC, who suddenly (and suspiciously) withdrew the support of his party for the agreement without credible explanations, and who therefore made negotiations collapsing<sup>166</sup>. Moreover, Datta-Ray argued that people who gathered around Gangtok in early April: “came out of fear because households in the south and the west had been threatened with reprisals if they did not each send at least one male [to demonstrate against the Chogyal]. Simple villagers had been told that the royal birthday was being celebrated on a grand scale and there would be food [...]”; and that they were in total no more than 2.000 people, thus far less than the 20.000 claimed by India<sup>167</sup>. Further considerations made by Datta-Ray claim the Indian Army did not immediately restore order after the Chogyal's call. Instead, under the guidance of the Political Officer, K. S. Bajpai, feed demonstrators confined and dis-uniformed Sikkimese police and encouraged protests until the government of the Sikkim administration definitively collapsed<sup>168</sup>. Only after 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973, the Chief Administration of Sikkim, newly appointed by India, B. S. Das, finally ordered the 1.500 Central Reserve Policemen, who had arrived from India, and the Indian Army to restore law and order. Finally, Datta-Ray quoted in another book *Inside RAW: the Story of*

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165Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*.

166Ibid., 178–179.

167Ibid., 173 and 191.

168Ibid., 188–197.

*India's Secret Service*, written by Ashoka Raina and published in 1981<sup>169</sup>. This text suggests that India might have directly arranged the events through its intelligence service. Raina's book relied on secret interviews done with people who had served, or were still serving, in the Indian intelligence of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), which was the section in charge of the intelligence related to India's external relations. Interestingly, *Inside RAW* argued that the RAW had been closely involved in the Sikkim merger with India probably from the beginning of 1972<sup>170</sup>, and that: "RAW agents were dispatched to Gangtok, Mangan, Namchi and Gyalshing, the four district headquarters in Sikkim. They slowly gathered operational data required for planning the operations in case India was forced to take action. Eighteen months later [...], RAW was all set to proceed further if required"<sup>171</sup>. Raina wrote that: "It was not difficult for RAW to reinforce the idea, which was already widely prevalent, of getting rid of the Chogyal. Select individuals, who were popular amongst their respective communities, were asked to further propagate the idea. Funds were made available for this purpose [...]"<sup>172</sup>. However, no clear evidence were provided by Datta-Ray, or by Raina to support their argumentations. Raina recognised this openly: "The extent of their involvement and of the others in bringing it about will remain a secret till the archives release documents for public scrutiny"<sup>173</sup>. These two sources of criticism therefore raised the hypothesis that India not only intervened when directly called, but had directly arranged and supported (probably through its intelligence services) the anti-Chogyal demonstrations of April 1973.

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169Asoka Raina, *Inside RAW: The Story of India's Secret Service* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1981). To contextualise this book it is important to note that it was written after the disputed Emergency period (1975-1977), during which RAW forces had been used by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to domestically impose an authoritarian regime. After 1977, when another government again took democratic power, the RAW, as an institution, came under strong criticism. As a consequence, it is likely that Raina's book was tough with the aim of informing Indians also of the other important missions RAW had done.

170Ibid., 64.

171Ibid., 68.

172Ibid., 70.

173Ibid., 74.

### ***3.2 Sikkim from 1973 until its merger with India in 1975***

Law and order was restored by the Indian Army on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973, but demonstrations in favour of the Chogyal were organized by the Sikkim Youth Forum with hundreds of people filling the streets crying pro-royal slogans, and supporting the preservation of the monarchy<sup>174</sup>. During the negotiations promoted by the government of India the JAC abandoned the request for the Chogyal's abdication, but remained firm on a fourteen-point programme that, among other issues, included requests for: a written constitution; an electoral system based on *one man one vote* formula with safeguards for minorities; an independent judiciary; the revision of the 1950 treaty so that “a perpetual and steady friendship could be ensured between India and Sikkim”<sup>175</sup>. On the other hand, the Chogyal accepted to convene a round table with the representatives of all Sikkimese parties to pave the way for constitutional reforms and for a democratization of the country, in order to save the position of its royal family. However, in Sikkim political conflicts did not diminish: according to the JAC in May 1973 some Tibetan refugees allegedly began guerrilla actions<sup>176</sup>; while the JAC young sections started to urge the abolition of the monarchy again<sup>177</sup>. In this context, an agreement was finally signed between the Chogyal, the Foreign Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs Kewal Singh, and the leaders of the Sikkim parties on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1973.

The agreement provided Sikkim with a legislative body, an Assembly, elected every four years on the basis of an adult franchise and of a *one man one vote* formula with safeguards for minorities<sup>178</sup>. The Assembly was empowered to legislate on economic, home and establishment, finance, land revenue, education, transport, etc. As before, the Executive Council was composed of some elected members of the Assembly, and led by a Chief Executive appointed by the Chogyal after India

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174“1949, with a Difference,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 21, 1973, 732.

175The Hindu, 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1973.

176Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 45.

177Ibid.

178For the entire text of the agreement see *ibid.*, 116–120.

expressed its preference, as had happened with the Dewan before. However, the new Chief Executive had greater powers than the Dewan since he could act independently in case of an emergency situation. Moreover, any difference of opinion between the Chief Executive and the Chogyal had to be referred to the Indian Political Officer whose opinion was binding for everyone in Sikkim<sup>179</sup>. The 8<sup>th</sup> May agreement also enlarged the powers of the Government of India which indeed received direct control over: the Judiciary; matters related to the status of the Chogyal and the royal family; Indo-Sikkimese relations; and communal harmony, good government, and economic and social matters in Sikkim<sup>180</sup>. Therefore, although Chogyal's power was drastically limited by the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1973 Agreement – since only the control over the palace establishment and the Sikkim Guards was maintained – Sikkim's political forces did not gain political freedom. They were even more clearly subjugated to India. Not surprisingly, British functionaries at the High Commission of New Delhi defined Sikkim's new status as being similar to that of an old nineteenth century *colony*<sup>181</sup>. The agreement also sanctioned that successive elections would have been organised according to a formula that gave fifteen seats to the Nepali candidates, fifteen to the Bhutias and Lepchas, one to the monks, and one to the scheduled castes on the basis of *one man one vote*, thus finally ending the parity formula among communities<sup>182</sup>.

On the basis of the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1973 agreement, new elections were held from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> April 1974. Under the management of the Electoral Commission of India, and although sources based on Indian accounts described elections as *fairly* conducted<sup>183</sup>, doubts about their real *fairness* were raised by some actors. For example, on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1974 Mathew Kurian of the Indian CPI(M) in his speech at the Rajya Sabha of the Indian Parliament, highlighted that since four battalions of the Indian

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179Gupta, "Sikkim," 793.

180Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 118.

181See "Telegram 984 from T. Garvey, British High Commissioner in New Delhi, to South Asian Department in London, dated on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1973", and "Letter from A. H. Morgan, Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, to Philippa Drew, High Commission in New Delhi, dated on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1973", in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

182Gupta, "Sikkim," 791–792.

183Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 48.

Central Reserve Police (CRP) were patrolling Sikkim during the elections, forcing people from the villages to go to vote, those elections could not be considered as unbiased<sup>184</sup>. Similarly, also Datta-Ray in his book *Smash and Grab* casts doubts about CRP's intimidations on the Lepcha and Bhutia community, and malpractices<sup>185</sup>. The 1974 elections saw the victory of the Sikkim Congress, which was the new party formed by the merger of the Sikkim National Congress (SNC) and Sikkim Janata Congress (SJC) in the second half of 1973. The Sikkim Congress won the majority of seats (thirty-one out of thirty-two seats) campaigning for a land reform, safeguards for minorities, and better relations with India. Its only rival, the old Sikkim National Party (SNP), which openly campaigned against India, secured only one seat<sup>186</sup>.

On 10<sup>th</sup> May the new Sikkim Assembly was addressed by the Chogyal, and on the following day it unanimously adopted a resolution that openly called for further strengthening of Indo-Sikkimese relations. The resolution stated: “[...] the Assembly resolved and hereby requests the government of India to examine the modalities of further strengthening India-Sikkim relationship as already agreed to in the Agreement of 8 May 1973, signed between the three parties and to take the immediate steps for Sikkim's participation in the political and economic institutions of India”<sup>187</sup>. The Government of India thus named a constitutional advisor (G. R. Rajagopal) to write the new constitution for Sikkim, which was drafted by 20<sup>th</sup> June 1974.

This new Constitution, called the *Government of Sikkim Bill*, largely included all the Agreement provisions from the 8<sup>th</sup> May, although it also introduced some crucial innovation. As a matter of fact, the Bill further deprived the Sikkim Assembly of the power to legislate over Home, and Finance issues. These were instead given to the Indian nominated Chief Executive<sup>188</sup>. Moreover, the Bill sanctioned the inclusion of Sikkim in the political institutions of India, such as the Indian Planning Commission,

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184Ram, “Sikkim Story,” 68.

185Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 209.

186Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 48.

187India and Foreign Review, 15th July 1974, 8, cited in *ibid.*, 49.

188Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 225.

and the Indian programmes for students<sup>189</sup>. These were significant changes that would have further increased the already large Indian power over the state, and reduced Sikkim's sovereignty. They sanctioned far closer relations than ratified in the 8<sup>th</sup> May Agreement of 1973, in which it only was called for: “[...] the strengthening of Indo-Sikkimese co-operation and inter-relationship”<sup>190</sup>.

Although it had been reported that the Sikkimese king had agreed to the constitution draft some days earlier, he finally refused the Bill considering it dangerous for Sikkim's sovereignty. Pro-Indian sources reported that the Chogyal ordered the Sikkim Guards to impede Assembly members from entering in the Assembly to vote<sup>191</sup>. However, other sources reported instead that on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1974 large strikes were organised by civil servants in Gangtok against the Bill<sup>192</sup>, and that on 20<sup>th</sup> June the situation was so chaotic that politicians could only access the Assembly at 10 p.m. and escorted by the Indian Army and the CRP. Furthermore, Datta-Ray contested the fairness of the vote that took place, in light of several issues: the fact that the draft Bill was new for the majority of the Assembly members, who did not have the opportunity to read it beforehand; and the fact that it was in English, thus in a language unknown to the majority of the Assembly members<sup>193</sup>. However, on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1974 the Sikkim Assembly approved the Bill.

Nevertheless, in order for it to become effective the constitution needed to be approved by the Chogyal, who refused to do so. He therefore asked the Political Officer, Bajpai, to postpone the Assembly until tensions were eased. On 25<sup>th</sup> June he went to New Delhi to consult India's government, while reportedly disorder and violence continued in Gangtok among anti-Bill, and pro-Bill demonstrators<sup>194</sup>.

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189Gupta, “Sikkim,” 795.

190Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 116.

191Ibid., 50.

192Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 223. Also an article “Time for Moderation” in *The Hindustan Times*, 3 July 1974, reported the civil servants protests, highlighting the strong pressure made by the Chief Executive to get them back to work.

193Ibid., 220–228. Also *The Statesman* published a letter to the editor sent by Khara Nanda Uprety, 5th September 1974.

194Datta-Ray reported that the Indian and Sikkimese police, which were both led by the Chief Executive, did not intervene to protect violence against the palace and the National Party leaders. Ibid., 228–229.



However, according to Rustomji, the Government of India had: “[...] already irrevocably made up its mind to implement the resolution and that if there were any changes to be sought by the Prince in the draft bill, the changes that the Government of India would agree to would be merely marginal and not affect the main substance”<sup>195</sup>. Therefore, the visit to New Delhi resulted in a mere waste of time for the Chogyal. Moreover, according to pro-India sources 20.000 people again filled the Sikkim streets to protest against the Chogyal's behaviour<sup>196</sup>. These numbers are not completely credible because, like in 1973, no foreign journalists were allowed to enter Sikkim and thus to check it<sup>197</sup>. On 28<sup>th</sup> June 1974 the Constitutional Bill was again reconsidered in the Sikkim Assembly under the guidance of the new Indian Chief Executive, B. B. Lal, who had taken office in early 1974<sup>198</sup>. Although the Assembly approved it once again, this time criticism emerged on the competencies transferred from the Assembly to the Chief Executive of the Home, and Finance areas<sup>199</sup>. To press the Chogyal to accept the Constitution, on the 28<sup>th</sup> June the Sikkim Congress leader, Kazi Lhendup Dorji, and the Chief Executive, also sent a telegram to New Delhi requesting the power to pass the Bill in case the Chogyal did not do it in 48 hours. A similar telegram was sent also to the Chogyal who was urged to enact the Bill, and threatened him with the intervention of the Indian government<sup>200</sup>. Quickly returning to Gangtok the Chogyal was left with no other choice but to finally accept the Bill. On 4<sup>th</sup> July 1974 he finally approved it, thus making it effective.

China expressed its criticism about the Sikkim's political developments of the summer of 1974 through an article on People's Daily of Beijing entitled “Intolerable bullying” where it was stated: “By subjugating others to intolerable bullying, the Indian expansionists will have to pay for their rabid evil doings...”, and that the constitution bill: “... is in essence designed to deprive Sikkim of its every right of

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195Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 101.

196Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 53. The Indian Express, 27th June 1974.

197Cheng Huang, “The Himalayan Knife-edge”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 27 September 1974.

198Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 55.

199Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 232.

200The Hindu, 30th June 1974.

independence and reduce it to a colony of India”<sup>201</sup>.

In August the new Sikkimese executive was then formed, and the leader of the Sikkim Congress, Lendhup Dorji, was sworn as Prime Minister of Sikkim. In the meantime, New Delhi proceeded with seeking the “participation and representation for the people of Sikkim in the political institutions of India”, as written in section 30 (c) of the *Government of Sikkim Act*. Having received few letters from the Sikkim Prime Minister, on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1974 the India Cabinet felt therefore authorised to change the Sikkim status from *Protectorate* to *Associate state* of India<sup>202</sup>. As a result, on 3<sup>rd</sup> September the 35<sup>th</sup> Amendment<sup>203</sup> to the Indian Constitution was then introduced to the Indian Parliament. According to that Bill, India would have thus assumed the control not only over the external affairs, defence and communication of Sikkim, but also social and economic development; while Sikkim would have had the right to elect one member at both chambers of the Indian Parliament. On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1974 the Lok Sabha passed the 35<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment with an overwhelming majority of 310 against 7, while on 8<sup>th</sup> September the Raja Sabha passed the bill with 168 votes against 8<sup>204</sup>.

In Parliament criticism was raised only by the CPM and the Congress (O). The Communists denounced that it would: “cause serious international complications and spoil the existing friendly relations between the people of India and Sikkim”, since it was “making a farce of the elected [Sikkimese] Assembly”. Members of the Congress (O) underlined that it was not correct to create a new category for the Sikkim status, since it could have triggered secessionist claims from other states of India, and that it was a: “constitutional monstrosity” since the Indian Parliament only had the right to legislate those territories which were under its control<sup>205</sup>. Instead, exponents of the Jan Sangh urged India not to waste anymore time and to directly annex Sikkim to the Indian Union<sup>206</sup>. Some criticism against the Bill on the lines of

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201Asian Recorder, 1974, 12145, cited in Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 58.

202Ibid., 61.

203The entire text is reported in *ibid.*, 121–126.

204Ibid., 63.

205Interventions quoted in Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 247.

206Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 62–63.

the Marxist and Congress (O) interventions also emerged in Indian newspapers<sup>207</sup>. Even more authoritative were the doubts expressed by the retired Chief Justice and later Vice-President of India, the jurist M. Hidayatullah, about the regularity of the management of Sikkim's merger into India sanctioned by the 35<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution. Hidayatullah argued that: “The Indian Constitution binds India, not Sikkim. What binds Sikkim is the Government of Sikkim Act alone and the deliberations and resolutions of the assembly [...]”<sup>208</sup>. The Sikkim Assembly had indeed not been involved in the formulation of the 35<sup>th</sup> Amendment: New Delhi had acted autonomously only after having apparently received some written letters from the new Prime Minister of Sikkim, Lendhup Dorji. Based on that observation, the Indian judge continued stating that: “Sikkim international distinct personality is unaffected, and it is a protectorate as before. [...] This still continues in spite of the events of 1974 and the amendment of the Indian Constitution”<sup>209</sup>. However, the events went in another direction, as will be now shown.

Protests erupted in some neighbour states of India. In Nepal demonstrations took place in front of the Indian Embassy, though the Nepalese political authorities maintained a neutral approach to the question. They indeed underlined that Nepal had nothing to do with the Sikkimese events and therefore could only accept the new reality, though they timidly added: “As Sikkim is Nepal's closest neighbour, we would naturally like it to retain its traditional entity”<sup>210</sup>. Pakistan instead raised its vehement criticism against India's growing hegemonic power in South Asia, trying to use this event to reinforce its claims for resuming the American arms sales to Islamabad. Lastly, on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1974 China announced that it did not recognize the change in status of Sikkim. *Hsinhua*, the news agency, compared it with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and described it as an: “illegal

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207Kachenjunga, “Here We Come”, *The Hindustan Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> August 1974. The newspaper also published a drawing, called “Autumn Collection”, in which Mrs. Gandhi was represented in a traditional Sikkimese dress.

208Quoted in: Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 254.

209Ibid., 255.

210Quoted in: Ibid., 252.

annexation of Sikkim”<sup>211</sup>, while *People's Daily* denounced the action as a “flagrant act of colonial expansion”<sup>212</sup>.

The gravity of the new developments for his position and for Sikkim's status made the Chogyal to not reconcile with the new reality. In the fall of 1974 he indeed directly supported the *International League for the Right of the Man's* appellation to the UN Secretary General for investigating the presumed aggression of India against Sikkim<sup>213</sup>. This action enjoyed support from Chinese at the UN<sup>214</sup>. On 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1974 the Indian representative, Rikhi Jaipaul, argued at the same forum that Sikkim had been a princely state under the British as all the other princely states that had been incorporated in India in 1947. This statement triggered further controversies, and indeed the Chogyal, in a message sent to the Government of India, highlighted the fact that Sikkim had never been a part of India and had always had a special status, since it had never signed the *Instrument of Accession* like all the other princely states had<sup>215</sup>.

During the autumn some Sikkimese anti-Indian protests also erupted in Sikkim and Darjeeling, but they were generally harshly repressed by the Indian Central Reserve Police (CRP)<sup>216</sup>. In the spring of 1975, political dissatisfaction emerged even more clearly among the politicians of Sikkim. According to Datta-Ray, eighteen members of the Sikkim Assembly gathered on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1975 and passed a resolution that called for: the return of the Home and establishment, and Finance subjects to the Assembly's control, the reduction of the Chief Executive's role to a mere advisor, and the withdrawal from Sikkim of those Indian Special Duty Officers in who had arrived after 1973<sup>217</sup>. However, on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1975 this resolution was declared illegal and unauthorized by Lendhup Dorji, the Prime Minister of Sikkim, while K. C. Pradhan, identified as the leader of the movement, was dismissed by the

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211Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 66.

212Reported in: Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 252–253.

213The Times, 1 May 1975, the article reported the letter of Chogyal's son Wangchuk Namgyal is reprinted also in: Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 105–106.

214Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 69.

215Ibid.

216Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 264–265.

217Ibid., 291–292.

Sikkim Assembly under the Chief Executive's request<sup>218</sup>. At the judiciary level on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1975 another challenge was raised to the new situation sanctioned by the Constitutional Amendment of September 1974: as a result of a petition filed by the Chogyal, a judge of the central court of Gangtok, Tarachand Hariomal, granted an injunction that restrained the Sikkim Assembly from electing representatives for the Indian Parliament, questioning the validity of the 35<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution. However, the final decision on the issue was postponed to 28<sup>th</sup> April 1975<sup>219</sup>. A similar case was also pending in the high court in Delhi, where a petition had been deposited on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1974.

These political and judiciary events clearly highlighted the fact that the special status granted by Indian to Sikkim in 1974 could not have been a permanent solution: something had to change to stabilize the situation. The question was: in which direction? Continuing towards a complete merge of Sikkim with India, or towards an independent democratic Sikkim? Rapidly the situation evolved in a way that did not give the judiciary course its time, and thus left behind its highly biased versions again.

On 7<sup>th</sup> April 1975 one high officer, Yonga, of the Sikkim Guards, which were still under the direct control of the Chogyal, was arrested under the accusation of having conspired to kill the Sikkim Congress leader Lendhup Dorji. The day after, he apparently admitted to the police to have led the conspiracy ordered by the Chogyal<sup>220</sup>. Here again Indian sources reported that protests took place against the Chogyal in the wake of the news, and that the Palace Guards opened fire on demonstrators. This apparently led to the Chief Executive ordering the disarmament of the Guards on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1975 through a massive intervention by the Indian Army. However, again the royal family provided a different version: the government of India created the farce of the conspiracy against Lendhup Dorji, in order to justify the

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218Ibid., 294–296.

219Ibid., 279.

220Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 72 ; This version however has been challenged by Ray-Datta who reports that Yongda had never signed such a document. Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 8.

disarmament of the Chogyal, and put him under house arrest<sup>221</sup>.

The course of events then precipitated: on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1975 the Sikkim Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution abolishing the institution of the Chogyal and declaring Sikkim as part of India. Again Datta-Ray reports of violence and pressure exercised by the Chief Executive to obtain that enactment, even if no Indian press article reported it<sup>222</sup>. As a consequence of the 10<sup>th</sup> Sikkim Assembly resolution, a referendum was then organized for the 14<sup>th</sup> April (only three days later) to consult the people of Sikkim on the question of the merger with India. The results of the poll showed that the majority of the Sikkimese voters (59.637) were in favour of the Resolution, compared to only 1.496 contrary<sup>223</sup>. However, doubts spontaneously arise: why such a rush (72 hours) to organise the referendum? Was it not because of the fear that the judiciary could declare the 35<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution illegal caused the Indian Chief Executive of Sikkim to opt for such a rapid consultation? Of course, Datta-Ray embraces this thesis. He also highlights the fact that the referendum asked the people to vote *For* or *Against* the abdication of the Chogyal and the merger with India as a unified issue, and that it would instead have been much fairer having it separated into two different issues<sup>224</sup>. Similar criticism was also raised by *The Hindustan Times*<sup>225</sup>. Yet again, the fact that no foreign observers were present, and that the Indian Central Reserve Police and the Indian soldiers were supervising the voting, cast even more doubts on the fairness of the vote. Lastly, only around 55% of the population who had been accounted as having the right to vote for the 1974 elections went to the polls.

Nevertheless, with the results in hand the Sikkim Prime Minister Lendhup Dorji went to New Delhi to meet the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in order to legally organise Sikkim's merger into the Indian Union. On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1975 the Lok Sabha passed another Amendment to the Indian Constitution (the 38<sup>th</sup>) and on 26<sup>th</sup> April the same was also done by the Rajya Sabha. On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1975 the Indian

221Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 8–11.

222Ibid., 301.

223Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 73.

224Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 308.

225“A Merger is Arranged”, *The Hindustan Times*, 15th April 1975.

president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed gave his assent and enacted the 38<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, thus finally transforming Sikkim into the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Republic of India. As a consequence B. B. Lal, the Chief Executive of Sikkim became the Sikkim Governor from 1974, and all the court cases and injunctions presented to the Delhi high court, or to the Sikkim Central Court were dropped. Indeed, clause 3(m) of the Amendment states: “Neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall have jurisdiction in respect of any dispute or other matter arising out of any treaty, agreement, engagement or other similar instrument relating to Sikkim which was entered into or executed before the appointed day...”<sup>226</sup>.

Again nothing could stop the criticism caused by the Chogyal's son Wangchuk Namgyal. He sent a letter to *The Times*, published on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1975, to protest against the events claiming that: “The recent referendum in the country was in effect conducted by the Indian Government, and objective commentators have described it as a 'farce’”<sup>227</sup>. On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1975, in a second letter sent by the prince, India was further blamed for not having allowed independent observers into Sikkim, and to have handled the referendum issue in too much of a hurry not to arise suspicion<sup>228</sup>. Also the judge Hariomal, after being informed of his dismissal by the Central Court of Sikkim, could only comment: “Can society accept foul means for even fair ends and allow such an all-important edifice being pulled down in a way so immoral, illegal and unethical?”<sup>229</sup>.

Criticism resurfaced later, when, after many years, Indian and Sikkimese politicians returned to the issue challenging the version provided by the Indian government: for example, the new Indian Prime Minister who took power after the fall of Indira Gandhi in the 1977 elections, Moraji Desai, made a comment denouncing the take over of Sikkim by Indira Gandhi's government as a “wrong” fact<sup>230</sup>. Mr. Pradhan, the Sikkimese politician whose arrest had precipitated events in 1973 and who, by that time, was in the Sikkimese opposition party Prajatandra

<sup>226</sup>Rao, *Sikkim, the Story of Its Integration with India*, 130 The entire text of the 38th Amendment is reported in *Ibid.*, 127-131.

<sup>227</sup>The Times article of 1st May 1975 as reported in: Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 106.

<sup>228</sup>The Times, 12th May 1975, article reported in: *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>229</sup>Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 320.

Congress, after the funeral of the Chogyal's eldest son, Tenzing Namgyal, also contested the fairness of the referendum of 1975 stating that: “the merger was a clear instance of annexation”<sup>231</sup>. At last, the same party that emerged as winning in Sikkim in the 1979 elections began to challenge the validity of the merger of Sikkim in India made in 1975<sup>232</sup>.

From the analysis developed so far it is now clear how controversial the events that led to the merger of Sikkim with India had been. Until today no official documentation had been declassified by the Indian government that could allow for the establishment of what really happened. As already mentioned during this paragraph, the fact that foreign journalists were not allowed to enter Sikkim from 1973 until 1975 had clearly contributed to the formation of two highly rival (and biased) interpretations of the events. The first is the one provided by the Indian government, and supported by the Indian press. It declared India acted only under the invocation of the Sikkimese population to save them from the abuses of the Chogyal with the sole aim of bringing a democratic political system to Sikkim. The second is the one provided by the royal family and by observers who worked in strict contact with it, which instead talks about a forced annexation of Sikkim with India.

Therefore, some remarks should be made at this point. First, the fact that the Chogyal resisted the democratization of Sikkim did not help the Sikkimese democratic forces to promote democratic political reforms without resorting to India for help. They probably realised that only by calling on India they could have had some chances for a successful promotion of democracy in Sikkim. On the other side, India, already alarmed by the Chogyal's will for an independent Sikkim, was ready to intervene in the domestic affairs of Sikkim to reimpose a new more stable and secure political solution to the crucial area of Sikkim, which had always been of strategical importance for India. The monarchy's refusal of democratic reforms directly facilitated New Delhi's job. The latter could indeed depict itself as the *liberator* of

230The Nepali Times, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2001, available at:

<http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/35/Nation/9621#.UMH1TlaGfmI>, retrieved on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1012.

231Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 125.

232“Sikkimese vote for autonomy”, Daily Telegraph, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1979.



Sikkim when it firmly acted to absorb the state under its political control, and to depose the Chogyal. As a result, it seems credible that New Delhi did not act as the *pro-India literature* asserts (e.g. as a passive actor who only reacted to the political requests raised by the democratic forces of Sikkim). It is instead more credible that New Delhi had an active role in the events, even if behind the scenes<sup>233</sup>. These observations, which derived from a careful analysis of the secondary literature considered until this point, will be also confirmed by the next paragraph where the recently declassified archival documents collected in the British and Indian archives are considered.

#### ***4. Indian and British archival revelations about India's role***

In this paragraph recently declassified Indian and British archival documents will be considered. The goal is to produce a historical analysis of the 1973-1975 events more objective and impartial than the one provided by the literature considered in the previous paragraph. In this context, the research conducted at the Indian *National Archives*, and in the Archives of the *Nehru Museum and Memorial Library* (NMML) in New Delhi have provided important, even if partial, results. In fact, although a large quantity of documents concerning the merger of Sikkim with India should exist, it was only possible to access one document. Nevertheless, this one document is of crucial importance: it directly proves the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her Principal Secretary seriously considered to intervene in Sikkim in early 1972, even if in the shadows, in order to alter the Sikkimese political situation in favour of

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<sup>233</sup>This is also the conclusion formulated by Ramachandra Guha who in his authoritative book argues: "In 1973 some citizens of the kingdom had begun asking for a representative assembly. The Chogyal asked the government of India for help in taming the rebellion. Instead, New Delhi stoked it further". Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 483.

India. It is significant that this document was found among the private collection of P. N. Haksar, the Principal Secretary to the Indian Prime Minister, at the Archives of the NMML. None of the official documents concerning Sikkim were indeed declassified by the Indian government until the fall of 2011, and therefore sent to the Indian *National Archives*. British documents concerning the merger of Sikkim with India were instead all declassified and available at the British National Archives in Kew Gardens, London. As will be shown, the analysis of all these documents reinforces the doubts already expressed earlier, concerning the dominant version of a passive India only acting to *liberate* Sikkim, and only merging it upon the spontaneous invitation of the Sikkimese democratic forces. The primary sources collected thus reinforce the thesis that New Delhi was one of the major actors behind the scene that directly arranged the merger.

#### ***4.1 The official Indian note concerning Sikkim, early 1972***

The analysis proposed in this paragraph shall begin with the only document concerning Sikkim collected at the Archives of the *Nehru Museum and Memorial Library* in New Delhi, India. The document in question is a note sent by P. N. Haksar, the Principal Secretary of the Prime Minister, to the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1972 considering the political situation in Sikkim. Due to the importance of the note's contents, its full text is quoted hereafter: "I try to keep track of the goings on in the Ministry of External Affairs. The Foreign Secretary had spoken to me about his visit to Sikkim. But I have long felt that we really have no policy in regard to Sikkim except to wait upon Chogyal's varying moods. The Foreign Secretary says that he found the Chogyal 'ready and willing' and that he found him 'in a chastened mood'. With great respect, this makes no sense to me. There was a time in 1947 when the people of Sikkim were with India. Thereafter, we developed great fondness for the Sikkim Darbar and now we wait on his frowns and

on his smiles. I tried at one to organise some serious thinking about our policy towards Sikkim. Nothing came out of it. The basis question is: what are the sanctions behind 'Permanent association' or 'Protectorate' or anything else? In this later half of the twentieth century, a sanction behind any political framework has to be people if that framework is to prove durable. And we have totally alienated the people of Sikkim. [...] We must not delude ourselves. The Chogyal wants independence, a membership of the United Nations and he is gradually eroding our will. We have placed in the Darbar of Sikkim a most unscrupulous adventurer I have ever come across in the shade and form of Shri I. S. Chopra. He has no loyalties to anything and least of all to his own country. But he was a friend of the Foreign Secretary and has always been a smooth operator. Having become the Dewan of Sikkim, he could not care less what happened to Indo-Sikkimese relations. My own view is that until such time as P.M. has made up her mind, she should not see the Chogyal in order to put a seal to the so-called 'Permanent association'. In my view, we are not so utterly helpless. We can make a new beginning. We can establish contact with the people of Sikkim, develop relationships and earn their goodwill and use that as a real lever against the vagaries of the Chogyal. If we decide on such a policy, I have no doubts that in a space of two years we shall get Chogyal running to us for protection against his own people. Otherwise, he will be taking us out for a ride all the time"<sup>234</sup>.

After the analysis developed in the previous paragraph this note, written by the one of the most powerful men during the second government of Indira Gandhi, is revealing<sup>235</sup>. As a matter of fact, it first proves that in 1972 the Indian government was highly concerned with the Chogyal's growing ambitions of transforming Sikkim

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<sup>234</sup>Letter from P. N. Haksar, Principal Secretary of the Prime Minister, to Prime Minister, dated 14<sup>th</sup> March 1972", in P. N. Haksar private papers, III inst., f. n. 179, in Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, New Delhi, India.

<sup>235</sup>As already diffusely explained in the second chapter of this thesis, Haksar was the most powerful man after Indira Gandhi in the early Seventies. He was her principal secretary, and he had her personal confidence and trust. In order to briefly recall here his role it is crucial to remind that Haksar has been considered the "main centre of power and authority" in the Indian government by Panhandiker and Merha, and that "his guidance was behind most of the initiatives that Indira took to prevail over the Syndicate" in the late Sixties. V. A. Pai Panandiker and Ajay K. Mehra, *The Indian Cabinet: a Study in Governance* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), 227; Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947-2004: The Gradual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 635.

into an independent state. It then discloses that Haksar suggested Indira Gandhi should change the policy followed by India towards Sikkim until that moment, and to adopt a much more active political strategy in order to get rid of the challenging presence of the Chogyal in a short lapse of time. Interestingly, Haksar proposed to fuel the Sikkimese people against the Chogyal in order to weaken the king. Considering how events developed in 1973-1975 this letter can not be more revealing: the hypothesis of the Chogyal calling India for help materialised much earlier than the two years guessed by Haksar as the necessary time to organize the popular revolt. In the light of this note what Ashoka Raina wrote in 1981 about the role of RAW in Sikkim becomes more credible. Moreover, if a decision like the one suggested by Haksar in his note to the Prime Minister had effectively been taken in early 1972, some events otherwise difficult to explain become clear. For example, the reason why in the summer of 1972 India did not vigorously react when the Chogyal personally assumed power over the Dewan, which until that time had been nominated on the basis of India's suggestions, now becomes evident. Contributing to worsening the political unbalances in Sikkim, the Chogyal's decision was welcomed by India because useful to trigger popular protests against the monarch, and to precipitate Sikkim into chaos. The latter indeed was the perfect situation to justify New Delhi's intervention for re-establishing political order. Similarly the fact that New Delhi did not react when the Chogyal did not nominate a Dewan in consultation with India after the 1973 elections, but instead named a Sikkimese functionary to preside the new State Council, could be explained with the same logic: the worsening of the domestic tensions in Sikkim was welcome by New Delhi because useful to justify the following India's intervention as an *external peacemaker*. Therefore, this document directly reinforces the interpretation of New Delhi as not being a mere observer of events in 1973-1975, but instead the principal actor.

#### ***4.2 British archival documents on Sikkim events, 1973-1975***

British documents concerning Sikkim and its merger with India have now been declassified<sup>236</sup>. Although these documents are primary sources that can be used to understand what really happened in Sikkim, one has to note that no British functionary was residing in the small Himalayan state from 1973 to 1975, nor had access to it because of the restrictions imposed by India. The analysis of what was happening in Sikkim was thus mainly made by the functionaries of the British High Commission in New Delhi, and in Calcutta, based on the information that came to them through: the Indian government and press, the contacts with the Sikkimese royal family, and with some important and influential political or military people who had been personally involved in the events. Nevertheless, these documents are of crucial importance since they prove that the British functionaries in India, together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, nourished strong doubts about the version provided by New Delhi. As a matter of fact, on several occasions they questioned whether the hand of New Delhi was behind the merger. Nevertheless, this suspicion had never been officially expressed by the British government, which clearly had no political interest in risking an erosion of its relationship with New Delhi. Sikkim for London indeed was only a small state lost in the Himalayas and sandwiched by China and India.

Already before the events that brought about the merger of Sikkim with India took place, the British evaluation of the political situation in Sikkim – in light of Chogyal's ambitions to make Sikkim an independent state – were that India would never have allowed such a scenario, but rather it would have evaluated the idea of a forced annexation of the small Himalayan state<sup>237</sup>. The first doubt about the validity of the version of the 1973 facts provided by the Indian government and by the Indian newspapers is instead raised by M. K. M. Wilford, FCO in London. On 11<sup>th</sup> April 1973 he added a hand written comment to a letter sent by I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, the day before, which was reporting Philippa Drew's account of

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<sup>236</sup>Some of them have already been used in the analysis developed so far to clarify details and facts.

5<sup>th</sup> April about the situation in Sikkim based on the news circulating in New Delhi<sup>238</sup>. Wilford's pen added: "What a complicated electoral system. I'm not sure from this letter which of the various parties might be said to be Indian oriented thus possibly to have provoked disturbances in order to appeal to India"<sup>239</sup>. This first part of the comment is explainable by the fact that Drew had given knowledge of Sikkim's political system as granted, and had only provided specific information about the new party that had entered the political scene that year, the Janata Congress. However, the fact that Wilford could suspect that protests had been organised with the clear intent of paving the way for an Indian intervention proves London had doubts on the version of events provided by India.

That these suspicions were diffuse among the other British functionaries working in India is clearly confirmed by the letter of A. H. Morgan, British Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, who wrote to Philippa Drew, High Commission, in New Delhi, on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973: "The question on everyone's mind here is of course the extent to which the Indians have orchestrated the SNC [Sikkim National Congress] and SJC [Sikkim Janata Congress] campaign. Sikkim, as the last

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237As a matter of fact, in 1972 in New Delhi the British High Commissioner Terence Garvey in a letter he sent to the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, in the shadow of Bhutan's acquisition of a seat at the UN in 1971, evaluated that India could not allow Sikkim's independence for security reasons: "For the Indians, the abiding requirement is the maintenance of their military position and any eventual political arrangements will have to conform to this [...] It would be tidier if Sikkim became part of India, but this might be hard to fix at this late stage and it may be that India will eventually be drive to grant a form of pseudo-independence on the Bhutanese model". See: "Note DS NO 04/72 sent by High Commissioner in New Delhi, T. Garvey, to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Alec Douglas-Home, dated 1972", 1 and 7, in FCO 37/982, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1972, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom. Similarly in late 1972 Philippa Drew, a British functionary at the British High Commission in New Delhi in charge of analysing Sikkim's political situation, in a letter sent to her superiors stated: "The Chogyal has shown no signs of leaning towards democracy. It would probably mean the end of his rule and position as well as a Hindu Sikkim with closer relations to India, and probably eventual assimilation". On this see: "Letter from Philippa Drew, British High Commission in New Delhi, to T. Garvey, High Commissioner in New Delhi, dated on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1972, 1/2, in FCO 37/982, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1972, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

238"Letter from I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, to M. K. M. Wilford, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, dated on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973", in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

239Ibid., 1/1.

remaining princely state, is an anomaly which the Indians must be tempted to try to bring to an end. [...] Some people think the Indians must be behind it all but can point little concrete evidence to support their thesis”<sup>240</sup>. Again on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973 cables came from the British High Commissioner in New Delhi, Terence Garvey, to London reporting the speech pronounced the day before at the lower house of the Indian Parliament by Surendra Pal Singh, the Indian Deputy Foreign Minister, regarding the events in Sikkim. On that occasion Garvey's suggested: “Surendra Pal's statement contains a certain amount of guff, put in for Lok Sabha's benefit, about the masses, etc [...]”<sup>241</sup>.

Moreover, the same Philippa Drew endorsed such doubts in a letter sent to J. A. Birch, South Asian Department in London, on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1973. On that occasion, however, she also added other interesting details about how the Government of India directly controlled the Indian press, and therefore the news that was coming from Sikkim. In fact, Drew first underlined that: “[...] the GOI [Government of India] has told all Indian journalists to leave Sikkim on the grounds that since foreign journalists are not allowed in, (Sikkim is a restricted area) Indian journalists had an unfair advantage. I have also heard that Kewal Singh called the editors of the main dailies together on Tuesday and asked them to keep Sikkim off the front pages. Yesterday's and today's press reveal that his efforts have been successful. All they carry is a PTI [the largest news agency of India] backgrounder on Sikkim's history that Kewal Singh apparently gave them yesterday”<sup>242</sup>. She then continued: “As Tony Morgan rightly points out the crucial question concerns the extent of Indian involvement in the riots and demonstrations which brought about the present situation. To the best of our knowledge there is no evidence that the Government of

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240“Letter from A. H. Morgan, Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, to Philippa Drew, High Commission in New Delhi, dated on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

241“Telegram 780 from T. Garvey, High Commissioner in New Delhi, to SAD, London, dated on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

242“Letter from Philippa Drew, High Commission in New Delhi, to J. A. Birch, South Asian Department, London, dated on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

India encouraged or stimulated the demonstrations [...] However, the border between India and Sikkim is not closed. Kazi Lendhup Dorji himself lives in Darjeeling. There is bound to be contact and involvement between the Nepalis in the Darjeeling area and their confrères in Sikkim. The former may well have provided both moral and material assistance to the latter. At the government level [between India and Sikkim] there may well have been personal incompatibility”, making thus reference to the Chogyal's ambitions of seeing Sikkim independent<sup>243</sup>.

In order to clear doubts about the role played by the Government of India in Sikkim's events, a British diplomatic functionary of the British Embassy in Washington, J. D. I. Boyd, had a meeting with Dennis Kux, American State Department, on 12<sup>th</sup> April. He reported that Kux appeared to be recalcitrant to say too much, took a neutral position on the issue, and informed that the American State Department had been lying low and saying nothing<sup>244</sup>, in order to avoid further agitating public opinion, which was already exceptionally focussed on Sikkim's events because of the Chogyal's wife being an American citizen<sup>245</sup>.

In addition, British documents revealed that the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London was contacted soon after the 1973 protests in Sikkim by the solicitors of the Sikkimese royal family who also openly blamed India for having arranged the protest. On 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973 I. J. M. Sutherland indeed reported to Eric Norris, FCO, about the fact that he had been in touch in the previous two days with Deny Rhodes, guardian of the children of the Chogyal of Sikkim, and that a meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> April had been arranged by him to talk with John Dilger, and John Balfour, the solicitors of the Sikkim royal family. Sutherland reported that in the telephone conversations he had with Mr. Balfour, the latter “had said that, in light of his knowledge of India-Sikkim relations, he is suspicious of the Indian government's intentions and of their role in the events leading up to the Chogyal's reported request

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243Ibid.

244“Letter from J. D. I. Boyd, British Embassy in Washington, to J. A. Birch, South Asian Department, London, dated on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

245Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), 317.



that the Indian government assume responsibility of the administration”<sup>246</sup>. Sutherland also reported that Mr. Balfour underlined that all the press reports coming from Sikkim derived from Indian sources, and that a degree of censorship applied. Moreover, Sutherland informed him that the solicitors were considering addressing a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations on the matter; and that he tried to convince them that there was no room for such a call, unless it was not a state, or the Chogyal in person to rise it<sup>247</sup>. Norris confirmed these latter observations writing that he was sure that Sutherland's comments on the UN's possible recourse were absolutely right. However, the possibility the solicitors could raise such a demand led the (worried) South Asian Department to consult T. A. Solesby, of the British United Nations Department, who added: “I fully agree that we should try to head Mr. Balfour off the UN-Secretary General”, and that another argument used to dissuade the solicitor was that Sikkim's issue in the Security Council could only “[...] degenerate into a confrontation between the USSR (for India) and China (for Sikkim) [...]”, thus risking to damage Chogyal's position<sup>248</sup>. In addition, the South Asian Department commissioned a study about the legality of India's actions with respect to the 1950 Indo-Sikkimese Treaty: the study confirmed that India had not violated international norms, and therefore there were no grounds to challenge the validity of New Delhi's action<sup>249</sup>. On 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973 in a letter, Sutherland then informed F. Mills in New Delhi that he had talked by phone with the Chogyal's solicitors in London who: “expressed their conviction that the Indians, in taking over the administration of Sikkim, were deliberately seeking to undermine the Chogyal and establish permanent control over Sikkim's internal affairs.”<sup>250</sup>. However, Sutherland underlined the fact that, although they had no evidence to support their thesis, they:

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246“Letter from I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Office, to Eric Norris, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

247Ibid., 2.

248“Letter from T. A. Solesby, United Nations Department, to I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, dated on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

249“Hand-written letter to Sutherland, South Asian Department, dated on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

“remained convinced that the post-elections disturbances were probably engineered by the Government of India and that Indians had for long been looking for an excuse to intervene”<sup>251</sup>.

The head of the South Asian Department in a letter from 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973 to Mills also reported that he clearly informed the solicitors that the British government had no intentions of becoming associated with their possible call to the UN to consider Sikkim's question. Clearly there was no legal basis to raise such a call, and clearly the United Kingdom had no interests in damaging its relations with India like that. Similar was also the position taken by London over the question of the publication of articles reporting the voice of the Sikkimese royal family. In fact, following the British newspapers *The Times* had published extracts of the call made by Sikkim's crown prince in the United Kingdom to blame India of incorrect behaviour, tensions grew both in London, and in the British High Commission in New Delhi. Therefore, on 11<sup>th</sup> April the Commissioner Garvey wrote to London first reporting India's reactions to the article published by *The Times*, and later urging a stop to the publishing of: “false trail that recent events are an Indian imperialist putsch against the poor Chogyal, whose neck they saved”<sup>252</sup>. As a result, the South Asian Department, in London, convened with the British News Department to avoid further polemics on the topic and not to erode bilateral relations with New Delhi<sup>253</sup>.

The British reaction to the proposal made by the Chogyal's solicitors to bring the issue to the UN, and to the possibility of other annoying reports being published by the British press regarding Sikkim, directly reveal the fact that London wanted to remain as neutral as possible on the issue. It is therefore not surprising that when the Foreign Office in London received a copy of a public telegram sent by the Chogyal

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250“Letter from I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, to F. Mills, New Delhi, dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, 1/3, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

251Ibid., 2/3.

252“Telegram 784 and telegram 785 from T. Garvey, High Commissioner in New Delhi, to SAD, London, dated on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

253“Letter from I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, to Miss. Booker, News Department, London, dated on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

on 9<sup>th</sup> April to the Indian Prime Minister, in which he accused the Indian Army of directly supporting demonstrators in their protests against the palace, he decided to keep it secret and to deny its publication. The copy of this telegram arrived to Sutherland on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1973 attached to a letter written by John Balfour: it was breaking news since it had not previously receive space in Indian newspapers, though it had been publicly sent<sup>254</sup>. Although telling a different version of the facts with respect to the one reported by the government of India and by the Indian press, the interesting aspect is that it (today) confirms the accuracy of the version provided by Datta-Ray in his book, in which he also quoted some sections of the same telegram<sup>255</sup>. Because of its important content, the telegram in question is reported here in its full length: “We are deeply concerned and grieved with the situation in Sikkim. I have been repeatedly warning the government of India of impending violence led particularly by outside elements which has now become a fact. Our police stations in South West and East Sikkim were attacked and ransacked firearms and wireless equipment stolen police personnel and other government beaten confined or taken into custody. House of our elder statesman Athing Densapa and several other government and private building have been burnt. Government petrol depots have been damaged or forcibly taken over. Many Sikkimese and Indian shops have been looted supply of food grains fuel and other essentials to Gangtok from India has been forcibly stopped by setting up road blocks manned by violent groups of agitators at several places. Sikkim police who acquitted themselves admirably in Gangtok were disarmed disuniformed and confined to barracks by Indian Army. The handing over of the administration to government of India and the induction of Indian Army have not resulted in any improvement in the law and order situation so far as seen from instances of murder assault and forcible seizure of government vehicles and personnel reported from Gangtok itself thereafter. National party having won elections under the system mutually agreed upon between us (sic) we are

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254“Letter from J. Balfour, solicitor of the Sikkim royal family, to Sutherland, South Asian Department, dated on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

255Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab*, 193.

perturbed by the news All India Radio is putting up to the world giving the impression that democratic forces have been suppressed and peaceful demonstrators fired upon. The news item that Army is feeding Gangtok is entirely incorrect. In fact the Army is feeding the demonstrators only. Such distorted broadcasts are likely to mislead the people of India and rest of the world. Earnestly request favour of personal intervention in the interest of abiding friendship and closest relations between India and Sikkim. With highest consideration and with my warm and personal regards, Chogyal of Sikkim<sup>256</sup>.

This version of the facts clearly challenges the one provided by the Indian government, and by the Indian press. The telegram sent by the Chogyal reported indeed that the Indian Army was giving support to the demonstrators instead of to his government, and that it arrested the Sikkimese police, thus contributing to throwing the country into chaos. Interestingly, no doubts about the truthfulness of the telegram was raised by the South Asian Department, while the obvious conclusions were drawn by the head of the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, Alec Douglas-Home, in a telegram he sent to the High Commission in New Delhi, to the British Cabinet Office and to the South Asian, News, and Research Departments in London where he wrote: "The cable's general implication is that the Indians had taken advantage of the situation"<sup>257</sup>. Nevertheless, no official actions were taken by the British government: again London had no interest in ruining British-Indian relations for Sikkim; since it was so irrelevant at the economic and political level in the international system.

Further details that reinforce doubts about the version provided by the Indian authorities were given in a letter sent by T. Garvey, British High Commissioner in New Delhi, to Philippa Drew, High Commission, on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1973. Garvey informed Drew about a meeting he had had that morning with Avtar Singh, Secretary

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256 Attached telegram to "Letter from J. Balfour, solicitor of Sikkim royal family, to I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, London, dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 1973", 1-2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

257 "Telegram 435 from Alec Douglas-Home, Head of Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, to New Delhi, to South Asian, News and Research Department, and Cabinet Office staff in London, dated 19<sup>th</sup> April 1973", 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

(West) of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, during which the bureaucrat told him that the Minister of External Affairs, Swaran Singh, had ordered him to go to Sikkim on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1973 (before the demonstrations already ongoing reached their peak on 4<sup>th</sup> April). The directive was to sort out the situation, though Sikkim was not part of Singh's actual duties<sup>258</sup>. Garvey reported that Singh said to have reached Gangtok the day after by helicopter, finding ongoing riots in the market area. However, Singh reported to Garvey that the reported 20,000 people was highly exaggerated, and that according to his observation: "he very much doubted whether more than 4,000 were ever at any time present and making trouble in Gangtok; and he and the GOC had spent some time examining the approach roads to the capital without discovering any serious concentration of insurgents"<sup>259</sup>. When questioned about the possibility India had supported the organization of the insurgents, he declined describing the possibility as fairly odd, and suggested instead that the Naxalites were behind it. Reading the letter, Philippa Drew added written comments: "Mr. Rodhes also told me that he could not credit the figure of 20,000. His conclusion, however, was that the Indians had exaggerated the extent of the revolt to justify their action". Moreover, she felt the necessity to comment on the concluding phrase written by Garvey in the letter where he reported the fact that he had declared to Singh to be, as the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, "fairly sure" about the fact that India did not play a part in the events. Philippa Drew, however, contested him adding: "The High Commissioner may have some doubts on his 'fairly sure'"<sup>260</sup>.

These doubts were also confirmed in the letter sent from Kathmandu by the British Embassy on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1973. Although Nepal had released no official declarations until that moment, the British Ambassador reported that the *Kathmandu District Committee* of the *All Nepal National Independent Students' Union* had openly condemned India's intervention comparing it to the 1971 events in East

258 "Letter from T. Garvey, High Commissioner New Delhi, to Philippa Drew, High Commission in New Delhi, dated on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1973", 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

259 Ibid., 2.

260 Ibid., 2.

Pakistan, and added: “I very much suspect that this reflects what most Nepalese actually think” (e.g. Indian intention to annex Sikkim and later maybe also Nepal)<sup>261</sup>. Moreover, on 30<sup>th</sup> April another letter was sent by A. H. Morgan, British High Commissioner in Calcutta, to inform the British High Commissioner in New Delhi that he had met Major General Vohra, the Indian Chief of Staff of the Eastern Command, on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1973. Morgan reported that the General had commented that since the Sikkimese Police only had 300 officials, the Chogyal was practically obliged to call India for help when protests began on 4<sup>th</sup> April, and had no other real choice<sup>262</sup>. In the same letter the Deputy High Commissioner also reported some reflections he had made with his Japanese counterpart, Mr. Mutoh, in Calcutta during the previous days: “On the question of Indian involvement [in the 1973 protests in Sikkim] it was clear that the consensus was now in line with the view reported by you and us [likely that there were suspicions but no evidence]. But in his [Mutoh's] view, two questions needed to be explained before the Indians could be given a completely clean slate. The first was why the troubles had built up to a crisis so quickly and the second was why the Indians had not done anything to dissuade the Nepalese living in the areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong from crossing over into Sikkim to join the march on Gangtok”<sup>263</sup>. The first observation of Mutoh directly confirms the observations made by Rustomji in his book published in 1987. The ex-Dewan indeed writes that: “Only few months previously [from April 1973 events], during my visit in Gangtok, the Prince seemed confident that all was well, and it seemed incredible to find a repetition so soon of the distressing events of 1949 anti-Chogyal demonstrations, a breakdown of the administration throughout the State and a request by the Prince to the Government of India to intervene and restore order”, without however raising doubts over India's role in the events<sup>264</sup>.

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261“Letter from British Embassy in Nepal to I. J. M. Sutherland, South Asian Department, London, on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, second page missing, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

262“Letter from A. H. Morgan, British Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, to Philippa Drew, High Commission in New Delhi, dated on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1973”, 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

263Ibid.

264Rustomji, *Sikkim, a Himalayan Tragedy*, 91.

Finally, renewed doubts were again raised by British bureaucrat officials with regards to the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1973 Agreement. In a letter sent by Philippa Drew from the High Commission in New Delhi to London she indeed directly posed the following questions to London: “Do we still believe that the GOI had no hand in the [1973 April] disturbances?”, and answering by herself stating: “[...] we still have no evidence of Indian complicity, although there is much cocktail party gossip about some kind of low level and unofficial involvement”<sup>265</sup>.

## ***5. Conclusion***

From the analysis developed so far it is now possible to argue that the account provided by the government of India on the events that led Sikkim to become the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Indian Union is not sufficiently convincing. The only Indian archival document on the Sikkimese issue, which was found in the Indian archives in 2011, leads to a different conclusion: already in 1972 India had developed a clear strategy to destabilize Sikkim, to weaken the Chogyal, and to pave the way for its military and political intervention. Moreover, the materials found in the British archives further reinforce this thesis. It is therein showed how British functionaries have never been convinced by the version of the facts provided by the Indian authorities. Although much remains to be done in order to provide an exhaustive impartial historical account of the events that took place in Sikkim in 1973-1975, the archival documentations available today allow a far better picture of what really happened in the small Himalyan state at that time. Only the declassification of the Indian documents by the government of India would allow for a complete assessment of the

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<sup>265</sup>“Letter sent by Philippa Drew, British High Commission in New Delhi, to C. H. Seaward, South Asian Department, in London, dated on 21<sup>st</sup> June 1973”, 1/2, in FCO 37/1181, Political Affairs of Sikkim, 1973, South Asian Department, National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

events. However, since this is not likely to happen in the near future, the account provided in the current chapter is of crucial importance from a historical point of view.

Acting behind the scenes, New Delhi successfully handled what could have become a dangerous situation in Sikkim for India. The Indian strategy of playing off the monarchy against the political democratic forces of Sikkim succeeded. The complicated issue of Sikkim's political future was therefore transformed into black or white, where the people of Sikkim had to choose between either independence with the monarchy, or democracy with India. Nuances were artfully and carefully excluded, like for example the option for having democracy and at the same time also being independent from India. Of course, the persisting opposition of the Chogyal to democratic reforms surely helped India in achieving its goal. The strategic state of Sikkim was thus brought under the definite control of India without awaking criticism from the international community, through an operation that nowadays might recall some more recent and largely controversial *humanitarian interventions*.





## CONCLUSION

During Indira Gandhi's second government India emerged as a regional power in South Asia. The victory against Pakistan, India's main historical rival in the region, was the first demonstration of the new military and political power acquired by New Delhi. Result of a strategy adopted by India since March 1971, when the civil war erupted in East Pakistan, the third Indo-Pakistani war revealed that India was prepared to exploit its neighbours' weaknesses in its favour. The explosion of a nuclear device in 1974 also launched a clear sign of India's technological, political and military power in South Asia, and elsewhere. New Delhi was the sixth state in the world to demonstrate the capability of exploding an atom bomb and this clearly enhanced its leadership. Finally, the annexation of Sikkim was the third demonstration of power India made during Indira Gandhi's second government. After the ambitions of independence surfaced within the royal court of the small Himalayan state as of the second half of the Sixties, Sikkim in a short lapse of time (1973-1975) lost its status as Indian protectorate and became the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Indian Union, definitively renouncing its political autonomy. This was a clear message sent by India to the small states of South Asia: "mind not to adopt policies adverse to New Delhi: India will not remain passive and the international community will not impede it to act".

India's rise as a regional power had its fallouts both in South Asia, and at the global level. In the Indian subcontinent it triggered Pakistan's plans to rearm and to obtain an atom bomb, and diffuse fear among smaller states. If in Asia China registered the phenomenon without feeling threatened, the Soviet Union was ready to welcome, and support India against China. The contemporary Sino-American rapprochement and the United States' tilt towards Pakistan instead further estranged Indo-American relations. However, India's new position of power in Asia could not

be ignored by the United States that indeed actively worked to maintain a cordial relationship in spite of everything. In addition, India's explosion of an atom bomb in 1974 did not pass unnoticed: the United States, the United Kingdom and several other states condemned the event and supported strengthening the international non-proliferation regime, which later significantly delayed the development of India's civil nuclear programme.

The analysis developed in this doctoral work about India's rise as regional power allows the formulation of three conclusive considerations.

The first is that India became a regional power not by coincidence, but because it pursued the assertion of its power with determination. In fact, New Delhi had already adopted a strategy of rearming since the Sixties in response to the Chinese perceived threat. As result, the Indian Army was strengthened, and India equipped with the nuclear technology necessary to explode an atom device, though ten years after Beijing. Moreover, India demonstrated to be prepared to exploit the opportunities offered by external events, such as, for example, the civil war that erupted in East Pakistan. On that occasion, New Delhi opted to sustain the Bengali secessionist movement from the initial phases of the civil war, with the clear intent to weaken Pakistan. When the situation worsened and millions of people migrated to India to escape the violence, New Delhi did not modify its stance. It opted to resort to armed conflict in order to solve the situation in its favour, and thus to see an independent Bangladesh. Therefore, India was then ready to modify its historical foreign policy of non-alignment, and to ally with the Soviet Union in order to balance the American support of Pakistan. Finally, also Sikkim's merger with India was not a coincidence. Thanks to the Indian and British archival documents it is now possible to argue that India had formulated a clear strategy to destabilize Sikkim's domestic political situation already in 1972, one year before domestic problems effectively erupted in the small Himalayan state. India's intent was to create a situation of chaos that justified New Delhi's intervention as the peacemaker. From that position New Delhi would indeed have an easy job in favouring the annexation of the state to India with the promise of democratizing Sikkim's political system. This strategy was well-

conceived: Sikkim collapsed into chaos in 1973, India then intervened as mediator between the monarchy and democratic political forces, and Sikkim was annexed to India in 1975.

The second possible consideration is that the role played by China in influencing India's foreign policy was of crucial importance. The actions and policies adopted by Beijing had the power to significantly alter India's foreign policy due to the antagonist relationship that tied the two Asian giants. The analysis of China's foreign policy can allow the access to important information as to how India will develop its own foreign policy in future. In fact, India decided to embark on a process of re-arming after losing the 1962 war against China, and to equip itself with the necessary technology for exploding a nuclear device after the first Chinese atom explosion in 1964. This consideration brings along another important remark: even if literature generally overrates the United States' role in influencing India's foreign policy<sup>1</sup>, their role was only secondary. Two examples can support this statement. First, the Indian archives revealed that New Delhi decided to accept the Soviet proposal of alliance before Nixon's announcement of the success of Kissinger's trip to Beijing, which in July 1971 disclosed the Sino-American-Pakistani axe to the Indians. In fact, New Delhi accepted to reconsider the Soviet proposal of alliance already in June 1971. The main reason was to ensure Moscow's support in the UN Security Council in order not to risk the UN's involvement in the war New Delhi was preparing to fight against Pakistan. The announcement of the normalisation of Sino-American relations through Pakistan's mediation only confirmed, for India, the correctness of the decision already taken in the previous weeks. Second, also in the case of India's nuclear programme, literature is inclined to overrate the American role in influencing

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1 See for example: Marta R. Nicholas and Philip Oldenburg, *Bangladesh: The Birth of a Nation; a Handbook of Background Information and Documentary Sources* (Madras: M. Seshachalam, 1972); Christopher Van Hollen, "The Tilt Policy Revisited: Nixon-Kissinger Geopolitics and South Asia," *Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (April 1980): 339–361; Mariele Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan: gli anni della presidenza Carter* (Roma: Carocci, 2009); Kalyani Shankar, *Nixon, Indira and India: Politics and Beyond* (New Delhi: MacMillan, 2010); Geoffrey Warner, "Nixon, Kissinger and the Breakup of Pakistan, 1971," *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2005): 1097–1118; Itty Abraham, "South Asian Events of 1971: New Revelations," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 28 (July 9, 2005): 2994–2995.

New Delhi to explode a nuclear device in 1974<sup>2</sup>. According to this interpretation, Nixon's tilt towards Pakistan and the decision to send the nuclear aircraft *Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war were determinant in leading India to the decision from exploding the bomb. However, as demonstrated during the third chapter of this thesis this was not the case. India had taken such a decision in 1964 after the first Chinese atomic explosion. Only technical delays prevented India to explode the bomb before 1974. Therefore, when in 1974 the scientists declared themselves prepared to conduct the first nuclear experiment, New Delhi authorised it without hesitation. Nixon's leaning towards Pakistan and the *Enterprise* event only invigorated New Delhi's political awareness about the potential benefits of demonstrating to the world its ability to detonate a nuclear device, but were not the main determinant factors.

The last conclusive remark that is possible to formulate is that India's ascent was also influenced by the Cold War dynamics, and by the personal role played by the Indian political leadership. The normalisation of Sino-American relationship and the Cold War phase of *détente* indeed in some way facilitated India in emerging as the dominant power of South Asia. They offered New Delhi the possibility to balance the American tilt towards Pakistan, and China with an alliance with the Soviet Union, and thus to freely pursue its interests in South Asia without being influenced too much by global considerations. Lastly, the Indian political leadership (formed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the small circle of her advisers) directly contributed to India becoming the dominant power of South Asia. The research developed so far by this thesis indeed permits to argue that Indira Gandhi, P. N. Haksar, and the other members of the Prime Minister Office indeed formulated India's foreign policy personally and with great autonomy during the period analysed. First, they decided to pursue with determination some policies and strategies already adopted by previous governments, such as in the case of the nuclear programme. Second, they also formulated new strategies and plans in order to affirm and enlarge India's power in South Asia, such as in the case of the secession

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2 See for example: Merlati, *Gli Stati Uniti tra India e Pakistan*.

of Bangladesh, and of the destabilization and consecutive annexation of Sikkim to India. This confirms the analysis already developed by literature on this subject<sup>3</sup>, enriches it with other interesting details, and integrates it with the historical analysis of the three specific events posed at the centre of this thesis (e.g. the 1971 war, India's nuclear programme, and Sikkim's annexation).

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3 Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India's Foreign Policy Under Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1982); Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966-1982* (London: Sage Publications, 1984); James Manor, "Innovative Leadership in Modern India: M. K. Gandhi, J. Nehru and I. Gandhi," in *Innovative Leaders*, by Gabriel Sheffer (New York: SUNY Press, 1993); Sumit Ganguly, "The Prime Minister and Foreign and Defence Policies," in *Nehru to the Nineties: The Changing Office of Prime Minister in India*, by James Manor and B. D. Dua (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1994), 138–160; Jyotindra Nath Dixit, *Makers of India's Foreign Policy: Raja Ram Mohun Roy to Yashwant Sinha* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2004); Harish Kapur, *Foreign Policies Of India's Prime Ministers* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2009).



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