

The Wringing of Hands

By ANTHONY LEWIS

AT HOME ABROAD

LONDON, Dec. 5—Suppose that Britain, in the 1930's, had responded to Hitler's savagery by the early threat or use of military force instead of appeasement. If the Nixon Administration had been in power in Washington at the time, it would presumably have sent some official out to wring his hands in public and charge Britain with "major responsibility for the broader hostilities which have ensued."

So one must think after the American statement over the weekend blaming India for the hostilities with Pakistan. Few things said in the name of the United States lately have been quite so indecent. The anonymous state department official who made the comment matched Uriah Heep in sheer oleaginous cynicism about the facts of the situation and about our own moral position.

Consider first the immediate origins of this dispute. They are exceptionally clear as international relations go.

The military junta that rules Pakistan under President Yahya Khan held an election. The largest number of seats was won, democratically, by a Bengali party that favored effective self-government for East Pakistan. Yahya thereupon decided to wipe out the result of the election by force.

Last March West Pakistan troops flew into the East in large numbers and began a policy of slaughter. They murdered selected politicians, intellectuals and professionals, then indiscriminate masses. They burned villages. They held public castrations.

To compare Yahya Khan with Hitler is of course inexact. Yahya is not a man with a racist mission but a

spokesman for xenophobic forces in West Pakistan. But in terms of results—in terms of human beings killed, brutalized or made refugees—Yahya's record compares quite favorably with Hitler's early years.

The West Pakistanis have killed several hundred thousand civilians in the East, and an estimated ten million have fled to India. The oppression has been specifically on lines of race or religion. The victims are Bengalis or Hindus, not Czechs or Poles or Jews, and perhaps therefore less meaningful to us in the West. But to the victims the crime is the same.

This record has been no secret to the world. First-hand accounts of the horror inside East Pakistan were published months ago. The refugees were there in India to be photographed in all their pitiful misery.

But President Nixon and his foreign policy aides seemed to close their eyes to what everyone else could see. Month after month the President said not a word about the most appalling refugee situation of modern times. Private diplomacy was doubtless going on, but there was no visible sign of American pressure on Yahya Khan for the only step that could conceivably bring the refugees back—a political accommodation with the Bengalis.

Pakistan's argument was that it was all an internal affair. Yes, like the Nazi's treatment of German Jews. But even if one accepts as one must that Pakistan was bound to defend its territorial integrity, this issue had spilled beyond its borders. The refugee

impact on India very soon made it clear that the peace of the whole subcontinent was threatened.

It was as if the entire population of New York City had suddenly been dumped on New Jersey to feed and clothe—only infinitely worse in terms of resources available. Yet when Indira Gandhi went to the capitals of the West for help in arranging a political solution in East Pakistan, she got nothing.

The Indians can be sanctimonious. Mrs. Gandhi acts for political reasons, not out of purity of heart. India has helped the Bangla Desh guerrillas and, in recent weeks, put provocative pressure on East Pakistan. All true. But given the extent of her interest and the intolerable pressure upon her, India has shown great restraint.

After all, India has not intervened in a civil conflict thousands of miles from her own border. She has not destroyed one-third of a distant country's forests, or bombed that land to such a point of saturation that it is marked by ten million craters. The United States has done those things and is still doing them; it is in a poor position to read moral lectures to India.

American policy toward the Indian subcontinent is as much of a disaster by standards of hard-nosed common sense as of compassion. India may be annoying and difficult, but she does happen to be the largest nation in the world following our notions of political freedom. In position and population she is by far the most important country of Asia apart from China. To alienate India—worse yet, to act so as to undermine her political stability—is a policy that defies rational explanation.

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