

Not to Be Forgotten

By ANTHONY LEWIS

The war could have ended a week earlier, but President Yahya Khan convinced General Niazi (Pakistani commander in Dacca) that China and the United States would intervene.

—Gavin Young in The Observer, London.

LONDON, Dec. 19—It would be pleasant to turn to some other subject, but this one will not go away. We shall be living indefinitely with the consequences, human and political, of all that has happened in India and Pakistan over the last nine months.

Least of all should Americans forget. Every day makes clearer their Government's share of responsibility for the tragedy, and every day raises more disturbing questions about the way American policy is made.

That is the really worrying point about the recent White House briefings that led to a newspaper quarrel over identifying sources. The purpose of the briefings was to justify the American position in the Indo-Pakistan dispute. Their effect was to suggest that the two principal authors of American foreign policy, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, live in a world of self-indulgent fantasy.

Thus, according to the authorized version, the United States was able to exercise a moderating influence over Yahya Khan by saying nothing publicly when he arrested the elected leader of East Pakistan, Sheik Mujibur Rahman, and had his troops murder thousands of Bengalis and turn millions into refugees. This influence over Yahya was maintained by having the United States totally endorse the Pakistan view of the war, denouncing the Indians as aggressors.

The fact, as opposed to fantasy, is that unconditional American support prolonged Yahya Khan's intransigence. That is dramatically demonstrated in an account by Gavin Young, a British reporter of measured temperament who spent the fourteen days of the war in Dacca and in close touch with A. A. K. Niazi and other Pakistani generals.

Young writes in The Observer that the generals in the East were ready to ask for a cease-fire on Dec. 10, and for a "peaceful transfer of power" to the elected Bengali leaders. They messaged Yahya, but he replied with the story that China and America were about to intervene militarily on Pakistan's side. Niazi, says Young, threw up his hands and said happily, "We are off the hook." That ended the hope of an early cease-fire.

The position of Sheik Mujib is another revealing matter. The United States never criticized his arrest, apparently believing that Yahya Khan had no political alternative. But now the former Commander in Chief of the

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Pakistan Air Force, Asghar Khan, a politician who is hardly an Indian stooge, has said that Yahya should never have arrested Sheik Mujib and could have made a political settlement with him.

With the war over, the Nixon Administration came up with an ingenious new ex post facto justification. It had prevented an all-out Indian assault in the West and a widening of the war, it said, by sternly warning the Indians and their Soviet supporters of possible retribution. That was said to be the import of the talk about canceling Mr. Nixon's trip to Moscow and of the movement of the aircraft carrier Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal.

Such boasting is inappropriate in the diplomacy of a great power even if the claims are convincing, and they are not. The Russians in this case have hardly been hotheads who needed to be cooled down by the United States. The best evidence is that, far from urging their Indian allies to war, they urged restraint; certainly that is believed by British officials, who have no inordinate admiration for the Soviets.

As for the Indians, it is doubtless true that there are hawks among them. But the correspondents who have dealt with the leading Indian generals have found them a sober group, with an understanding and even sympathy for the Pakistanis and no desire to crush their country. Very few armies have fought a war under such difficult emotional circumstances with so much control.

The uncontrolled brutality has in fact been on the other side. Can anyone doubt that? Outside Dacca the Bengalis have found the bodies of 200 of their leading intellectuals, bayoneted, choked or shot before the Indian troops arrived. That discovery has an immediacy that arouses horror, but Pakistan forces had slaughtered many others starting last March. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger have taken no public note of those horrors since they began. Will they face that reality now, or will they go on with their private fantasy of righteous American influence that no one else can see?