

# 1 Book Reviews

## 2 South Asia

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### 4 **The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide**

5 Gary J. Bass. New York: Knopf, 2014. \$30.00. 528 pp.

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7 In April 1971, horrified by the Pakistani authorities' mass killing of Bengalis  
8 calling for an independent Bangladesh and by the strongly pro-Pakistan  
9 policies the Nixon administration adopted in dealing with this conflict, the  
10 staff of the American Consulate General in East Pakistan used the State  
11 Department's 'dissent channel' to send a cable that castigated the  
12 administration's position and called for policies that reflected US support  
13 for self-determination and human rights. Archer K. Blood, a veteran Foreign  
14 Service officer who was in charge of the Consulate General, sent the cable  
15 on to Washington with his own endorsement. To the consternation and  
16 embarrassment of the Nixon administration, the cable – soon to be called by  
17 the double entendre 'The Blood Telegram' – was widely leaked. Blood's  
18 promising diplomatic career was badly damaged.

19 Gary J. Bass, a professor at Princeton University, has adopted 'The Blood  
20 Telegram' as the title of his study of this brutally suppressed Bengali  
21 uprising and the genocidal way it played out before Indian military  
22 intervention brought independence to Bangladesh in December 1971. His  
23 admirable account accurately and sympathetically describes and analyses  
24 chiefly how the United States appraised and tried to shape it.

25 Bass tells a good story that will be especially useful to those interested in  
26 US foreign policy during this time. It complements Srinath Raghavan's  
27 broader history of the same events (see below). It does not, however, break  
28 much new ground in reporting and interpreting policymaking. A good deal  
29 of what he has written, especially about the characters, motives and policies  
30 of President Richard Nixon and his national security adviser, Henry A.  
31 Kissinger, has been told before, if not so vividly and ardently. He is much

1 stronger in providing a worm's-eye view of the terrible scene unfolding on  
2 the ground in East Bengal and how Americans involved there dealt with it.

3 *The Blood Telegram* focuses, as its subtitle suggests, on the way Nixon and  
4 Kissinger misinterpreted developments in East Bengal to avoid impairing  
5 their useful relationship with Pakistan's military ruler, General Yahya Khan.  
6 Yahya facilitated the opening to China that was probably the Nixon  
7 administration's greatest diplomatic achievement. Bass is not the first  
8 analyst to dwell on the pro-Pakistan and anti-Indian prejudices of Nixon  
9 and Kissinger and their unrealistic appraisals of Soviet and Chinese South  
10 Asia policies. He illustrates these by long passages taken from the White  
11 House tapes, an invaluable source for appraising the antics of the president  
12 and his assistant for national security. These tapes also give us some useful  
13 – and often frightening – insights into how the two men interacted: Nixon,  
14 rash, violent, foul-mouthed; Kissinger, always the faithful courtier, saying  
15 what he thought his boss wanted to hear.

16 Bass's account highlights the importance to policy and diplomacy of a  
17 sound understanding of regional dynamics. Nixon and Kissinger knew little  
18 about South Asia and, relying on their highly personal views of the leaders  
19 involved, saw little reason to learn. They sought to construct a grand, new  
20 global order that would accommodate Beijing and discomfit Moscow. Bass  
21 demonstrates that India, Pakistan and, most poignantly, the people of East  
22 Bengal seemed to them little more than pawns in their great game. US  
23 interests in South Asia suffered in consequence both then and later.

### 24 25 **1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh**

26 Srinath Raghavan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.  
27 £22.95/\$29.95. 358 pp.

28  
29 Indian scholar Srinath Raghavan's admirable study of the events  
30 surrounding Bangladesh's bloody birth adds a great deal to our  
31 understanding of that major milestone in post-imperialist South Asian  
32 history. Admirably researched, remarkably dispassionate, and both wide-  
33 and deep-ranging in its coverage, it is diplomatic history at its best.

1 Raghavan is adept both at analysing the big picture and at digging up all  
2 the small but important details that give weight to his arguments. He seems  
3 to enjoy challenging long-accepted historical verities. A good example is his  
4 dismissal of the contention that the break-up of united Pakistan was  
5 inevitable – a state comprising two wings that had nothing in common but  
6 Islam and that were separated by 1,000 miles of hostile territory simply  
7 could not survive. But it did, for 24 years. Raghavan concludes that only  
8 once the politicians of East Bengal finally recognised that they would not be  
9 allowed to enjoy the spoils of national office did they decide to withdraw.  
10 Even then, they could have been lured back had the Pakistan Army and the  
11 West Pakistani politicians been a little more accommodating.

12 Raghavan calls his book a 'global history'. This is not just because he  
13 takes into careful account the diplomacy of the main non-South Asian  
14 players (the United States, the Soviet Union and China), as well as the sub-  
15 continental actors. He also tries to place the uprising in East Bengal in the  
16 context of broader movements that roiled the late 1960s and early 1970s:  
17 these include the rise of the Third World, which not only altered world  
18 politics but also put the spotlight on North-South economic disparities, and  
19 the onset of globalisation. This caused a wider diffusion of standards in  
20 various spheres, including language and political action.

21 In discussing the diplomacy of the main local and national players in the  
22 Bangladesh conflict, Raghavan successfully tries to relate them to other  
23 factors in each country's recent political experience, for example, Mao's  
24 foiling of his domestic rivals and the impact of the Cultural Revolution. He  
25 is especially strong on the politics and bureaucratic nature of Indira  
26 Gandhi's India and has made good use of the private papers of senior  
27 officials and other hard-to-obtain documents. He sheds new and useful light  
28 on the relations between the Indian government and the Bangladeshis-in-  
29 exile. The material on China and the Soviet Union has also been well  
30 researched; in writing of these two countries the author shows excellent  
31 understanding of the dilemmas they faced. The material on the United  
32 States covers the waterfront, but American historians and others have  
33 peered so deeply into the strange antics of President Nixon and Henry  
34 Kissinger that Raghavan has little to add to earlier accounts.

1 I agree with Raghavan's contention that his story is relevant to  
2 contemporary history. Bangladesh in 1971 was indeed the harbinger of a  
3 post-Cold War world characterised by tensions between the principles of  
4 sovereignty and human rights, and the virtues of unilateralism vs  
5 multilateralism; and by the rising importance of international media, non-  
6 governmental organisations, ethnic diasporas and transnational public  
7 opinion. As Raghavan rightly puts it, his study is 'not merely a narrative of  
8 the past but a tract for our times' (p. 273).

9  
10 **The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan–**  
11 **Afghanistan Frontier**

12 Hassan Abbas. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014. £18.99/\$30.00.  
13 280 pp.

14  
15 Hassan Abbas is a former Pakistan police officer who teaches at the US  
16 National Defense University, and has also held positions at Columbia and  
17 Harvard universities. His analysis draws on extensive interviews in  
18 Pakistan and Afghanistan, and is informed by his police background. There  
19 are many books on the Taliban, but this one stands out for the way it  
20 weaves together the tribal, governmental and national aspects of this  
21 movement, and its Pakistani and Afghan wings.

22 The heart of the book starts with the return of the Taliban from their  
23 near-death experience after the fall of their government in Afghanistan in  
24 2001. Abbas recounts unsparingly how the ambivalent views of the  
25 Musharraf government and the Pakistan army created the space that  
26 permitted the movement to revive, with a more militant presence in  
27 Pakistan than it had ever had before. He recounts the 2004–07 negotiations  
28 with the Pakistani Taliban, when Islamabad repeatedly sought a kind of  
29 non-aggression pact, only to discover that the Taliban had no intention of  
30 being hemmed in by such agreements. The parties to these negotiations had  
31 no common ground. Pakistan sought to preserve peace and governmental  
32 control, at least outside a recognised geographic area; the Taliban did not  
33 accept the 'idea of Pakistan' outside the framework of their goal of an  
34 Islamic emirate.

1 This problem has plagued efforts to arrive at reconciliation – or even a  
2 truce – for decades. The Pakistan government has repeatedly expressed  
3 confidence in its ability to fine-tune relations with the Taliban and related  
4 insurgents operating in its territory. In fact, as Abbas recounts with skill and  
5 in detail, the Pakistan government – civilians and military alike – have  
6 systematically deluded themselves (as well as their outside friends), hoping  
7 to retain the services of the ‘good Taliban’ to ward off the threat they most  
8 fear, from India.

9 The most valuable part of Abbas’s account deals with contemporary  
10 Pakistan. As he notes, the Pakistani Taliban directed the bulk of their 2013  
11 election violence against the more secular parties, going relatively easy on  
12 Nawaz Sharif’s Muslim League and Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf.  
13 Once in power, Sharif pushed for negotiations with the Taliban, and  
14 eventually discovered that they were not interested in returning the favour.  
15 Once again, the Pakistani authorities failed to recognise that the Taliban  
16 were not interested in a modus vivendi: they were fundamentally  
17 challenging the state of Pakistan. The same kind of blind spot, Abbas  
18 argues, affects Pakistan’s analysis of Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban are  
19 not only divided: they are also, like other Afghans, deeply suspicious of  
20 Pakistan, and their approach to dealing with more powerful forces is to play  
21 them off against one another.

22 This last point should not surprise anyone with even a cursory  
23 knowledge of Afghan history, and yet the newspapers are filled with  
24 example after example of outsiders – Americans, Pakistanis and others –  
25 expecting linear logic to govern their dealings with Afghans. What makes  
26 Abbas’s message so powerful is the spotlight he shines on the illusions that,  
27 tragically, keep Pakistan’s leaders engaged in a conspiracy game that  
28 threatens the country itself.

29  
30 **Vying for Allah’s Vote: Understanding Islamic Parties, Political Violence,**  
31 **and Extremism in Pakistan**

32 Haroon K. Ullah. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014.  
33 £21.00/\$26.95. 272 pp.

1 Haroon Ullah sets out to situate Pakistan's Islamic political parties in a new  
2 theoretical context and to demolish the most prevalent assumptions about  
3 what makes them tick. The author, who works in the US State Department's  
4 Policy Planning Council (the book carries the obligatory disclaimer that it  
5 does not represent the US government's views), comes from a Pakistani  
6 family, was reared in a farming community in the United States, and has  
7 written extensively on the dynamics of Pakistani politics.

8 The author divides Pakistan's Islamic political parties into two broad  
9 groups. The first are Muslim democratic parties, represented chiefly by the  
10 Muslim League, which provided the political base for Pakistan's founder,  
11 Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who famously envisaged Pakistan as a secular state.  
12 Most observers would not put this party in the 'Islamic party' pigeonhole. It  
13 started out, as the author recounts, as the party of powerful elites in the  
14 parts of India that did not become Pakistan, but who wanted to create a  
15 separate state; its descendants and namesakes dominated Pakistan's politics  
16 for several decades. The author's decision to put the party into the 'Islamic'  
17 framework makes sense when considering the last three or four decades, by  
18 which time its core constituency also shifted: it is now primarily a party of  
19 Punjabi feudals and their rural 'vote banks'.

20 The author's other two categories consist of Islamist parties: 'Hierarchical  
21 Islamist parties', illustrated by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), built on a small core  
22 of intellectual elites, with a significant urban presence, a highly structured  
23 leadership and the most systematic ideology of the group; and 'Network  
24 Islamist parties', illustrated by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), led by local  
25 religious leaders with a network of madrassas, far more, rural, diffuse and  
26 decentralised than the JI, and seeking a broad popular following.

27 The author successfully discredits facile assumptions about how  
28 economic deprivation fosters Islamic extremism and modernisation leads to  
29 'moderation'. Perhaps the most thought-provoking observation in his  
30 analysis of what drives party behaviour is that participation in the political  
31 process does indeed encourage pragmatism – but not in the way many of  
32 his readers expect. Both the Muslim League and the two Islamist parties  
33 have been driven to positions far more doctrinaire and tolerant of violence  
34 than their stated beliefs would support, because they believed that this

1 position would gain them votes. In other words, they have displayed  
2 pragmatism that tilted toward extremism.

3 The author also describes in fascinating detail the different motivations  
4 and economic benefits that encourage some parties to focus chiefly on  
5 national politics (where the Muslim League is powerful), and others to focus  
6 almost entirely on local politics (the prime arena for JUI).

7 The author's focus on articulating a theoretical framework for  
8 understanding Islamic politics may have led him to ignore the regional  
9 identification of the parties. The Muslim League has little presence outside  
10 Punjab, and this profoundly colours its approach to politics. The JI too is  
11 chiefly Punjabi, but the JUI has a stronger presence in the northwestern  
12 province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In a country as regionally fragmented as  
13 Pakistan, this is a fundamental aspect of the parties' identities. Thinking  
14 about them strictly in terms of their position on the secular-to-sharia  
15 continuum is woefully incomplete.

16 Still, this is an important book because so little serious analysis of Islamic  
17 politics is available to Western students of Pakistan. The author's closing  
18 plea is right on target: that US diplomats, and presumably others as well,  
19 spend more time listening to this constituency and seeking common ground  
20 on such key issues as education and reducing poverty. In practice this may  
21 turn out to be more difficult than he suggests.

22

23 **Forged in Crisis: India and the United States Since 1947**

24 Rudra Chaudhuri. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2014. £30.00/\$29.95. 368 pp.

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26 Rudra Chaudhuri sets out to explain US–India relations through eight brief  
27 case studies of US–India negotiations, starting with the implicit negotiation  
28 over India's decision to base its foreign policy on Jawaharlal Nehru's  
29 signature concept of non-alignment, and ending with the epic, multi-  
30 layered negotiations over the 2008 India–US agreement enabling civil  
31 nuclear trade. Chaudhuri's research on written sources is prodigious, his list  
32 of interviews impressive, and his command of Indian foreign policy  
33 masterful.

1 Chaudhuri argues that non-alignment was not simply an expression of  
2 Nehru's idealistic view of the world and India's place in it. Non-alignment  
3 was also intended to serve India's needs in a more tangible way, by  
4 preserving India's 'non-dependence' as it set about obtaining the material  
5 benefits it needed, whether armaments or economic aid. '[Non-alignment]  
6 made allowances for ensuring non-dependence while carving a distinct  
7 persona for a nation unimpressed by the somewhat dogmatic ideological  
8 policies underpinning containment during the Cold War' (p. 257).

9 This theme has remained central to Indian foreign policy, despite  
10 changes in the meaning of non-alignment over time. The issues India  
11 negotiated with the United States, explicitly or implicitly, changed too.  
12 Indian diplomacy, as Chaudhuri reminds us, made a real contribution  
13 toward solving the vexing problem of Korean War prisoners – and made the  
14 United States uncomfortable from beginning to end. After the mid-1960s,  
15 India became less willing to invest the same level of diplomatic resources in  
16 global peacemaking, and the United States less interested in India's input.  
17 Chaudhuri's discussion of India's appeal for US arms when China invaded  
18 in 1962, one of the very few times that India actually requested assistance,  
19 accurately reflects President John Kennedy's sensitivity to Indian fears of  
20 being sucked into a deeper relationship with Washington than it wanted.  
21 (By then, the US was also cautious about drawing India into anything like  
22 an alliance.) Americans recall this as the one time the US responded quickly  
23 and effectively to Indian security needs, and were puzzled that their  
24 response had so little hold on Indian memories.

25 The book's only case that deals with India's South Asian regional  
26 relationships was the ill-fated US effort to encourage India-Pakistan talks  
27 over Kashmir after India's war with China. Chaudhuri is rather kinder to  
28 US diplomacy than other Indian (and Pakistani) accounts have been. John  
29 Kenneth Galbraith, US Ambassador in Delhi at the time, commented that  
30 the only thing India and Pakistan agreed on was their dislike for US  
31 proposals.

32 Chaudhuri's chapter on the American effort to persuade India to  
33 contribute a division to the occupation of post-Gulf War Iraq is probably his  
34 most original contribution, and it captures the remarkable hopes on both



1 sides from that time. His account of the nuclear negotiations is strong,  
2 though I would have put more stress on the way this negotiation exposed  
3 both sides to the inner workings of the other country's political institutions,  
4 a lesson both of them found uncomfortable.

5 This is an important book about India's foreign policy. I believe that the  
6 hold of non-alignment on India's view of its global role is both stronger and  
7 more isolationist than Chaudhuri suggests. The one element I find  
8 somewhat lacking is India's consistent commitment to maintaining primacy  
9 in the immediate Indian Ocean/South Asia region, and with it, the neuralgia  
10 that US-Pakistan relations regularly inserted into ties between Washington  
11 and Delhi.

12