U. S. Response to Bangladesh Flood Disasters with Special Reference to the Enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988

Md. Abdul Halim*

1. Introduction

One of the worst floods in her recorded history hit Bangladesh in early September 1988, claiming a great many human lives apart from causing havoc to property. It created a situation which Bangladesh was ill-equipped to handle with her own physical facilities or material resources. But she was somewhat fortunate in that at her fateful hour, the international community extended a helping hand to Bangladesh to overcome this serious natural disaster. In that rescue action no individual nation could claim more credit than the United States, undoubtedly the richest nation in the world.

To facilitate the provision of disaster assistance to Bangladesh, a bill was introduced by the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Rep. Stephen J. Solarz (D-N.Y.), in the House of Representatives on September 26, 1988. It was passed by the House,

*International Relations Department, Dhaka University

under suspension of the rules, on October 6, 1988. It was also passed by the Senate on October 14, 1988. Subsequently, when President Ronald Reagan signed it on October 31, 1988, it came to be known as Public Law 100-576 : Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988.

In addition to making provision for short-term disaster assistance to Bangladesh, the Act also addressed the ways and means for the long-term solution to the recurring problem of flooding faced by Bangladesh. These include "the construction and maintenance of flood control projects," because severe flooding arises out of the existing riverine system of the subcontinent where Bangladesh is located with her two other South Asian neighbors, India and Nepal.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the U. S. response to three different flood disasters which badly affected Bangladesh in 1974, 1987 and 1988, with special reference to the U. S. decision to enact the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 within such a short period of time since this latest severe flood struck her. We have set out to establish that in her response in general as well as in passing the Act, the U. S. was not guided purely by humanitarian concern, but rather a number of other considerations, including political, bearing on her national interest, can explain her over-all response including her latest decision with respect to Bangladesh flood disasters.

The paper has been organized as follows : Section 2 discusses the nature and causes of flood in Bangladesh. The argument is made here that although the scope of the paper seems modest, its importance lies in the fact that Bangladesh can be viewed as a test case of global interde-

pendence.

Section 3 brings out the salient features of the Act. It also includes a critical review of the Act here.

Section 4 develops a framework for analysis of U. S. foreign policy decisions in general. It has been argued that the U. S. cannot be expected to make any foreign policy decision on humanitarian grounds alone – it really springs out of either moral obligation, global compulsion or political consideration, or a combination of all three.

Section 5 describes how the Act was passed, and identifies the persons involved in the decision-making process, and how their commitment and political coalitions, if any, not only facilitated but also expedited its enactment. Here we have also made a comparative evaluation of the driving forces by way of citing other pertinent reasons for passage of the Act. This has been done in the light of the above-mentioned framework for analysis.

In Section 6 we see that the initial prompt response of the U. S. in assisting the Bangladesh flood victims to the extent of passing an Act has so far been sustained with encouraging follow-up actions. However, considerable effort must be made and more political support needs to be given by the particular individuals and institutions involved in the follow-up process if the U. S.'s intention to help Bangladesh solve her dual problems of shortage of water in the dry season and severe flooding in the monsoon is to prove sincere. Again the framework for analysis developed in Section 4 has been found useful in determining the seriousness of their commitment.

Section 7 contains some concluding remarks ; we have also developed a few policy recommendations here.

2. Nature and Causes of Floods in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is not only a low-lying riverine country on the northern tip of the Bay of Bengal, she is also a very low-income country, with a per capita income of only $160, according to the 1986 World Bank estimate. The major cause of poverty is population pressure. In a territory about 143,998 sq. km. live more than 105 million people, making Bangladesh one of the most densely populated areas of the world. Bangladesh's problems do not end there. Because of her geographical location in the tropical monsoon climate, with its heavy rainfall, and lying along approximately 600 km. of coastline on the Bay of Bengal, where an average of twelve tropical depressions occur annually, five of which usually become severe cyclonic storms, the country is virtually helpless in the event of floods and cyclonic storms generally accompanied by tidal bores.[1] As the Bangladesh Governor of the World Bank, A. K. Khandker, has succinctly described, "the country is prone to natural disasters—floods and cyclones visit us almost every year causing widespread damages to humah lives, crops, properties, and infrastructures. Our development efforts are throttled by natural disasters."[2] Thus the major problem faced by Bangladesh has aptly been summed up by the Eastern Waters Study Group in these words : "In few other situations does mankind have to deal directly with the raw power of nature as it does in Bangladesh."[3]

As has already been mentioned, one of the worst

floods hit Bangladesh in early September, 1988. It was soon followed by floods in India and Pakistan, though with less severity. These floods, especially the one which inundated Bangladesh, caused havoc to the lives and property of the people there. Consequently, it is needless to say, a vast majority of unfortunate people had to bear inhuman sufferings. Perhaps a matter of more serious concern is the fact that scientists predict that such floods may be a recurring pattern not only in Bangladesh but also in other low-lying coastal countries of the world.

There are a number of causes, both general and specific, for floods in Bangladesh. As to the specific causes, in addition to heavy rainfall during the monsoon, floods in Bangladesh in recent years have been ex-arcerfated as a result of the Farakka Barrage, constructed by India in her part of an international river which has its origin in the Himalayan mountains and runs through the countries of Nepal, India and Bangladesh before it falls into the Bay of Bengal. A substantial quantity of water from this natural international river is diverted by India during the dry season to one of her internal rivers, *viz.*, the Hooghley-Bhagirathy, at the point of the barrage, to the deprivation of the lower riparian. This has created a serious adverse impact on Bangladesh, especially her environmental system. As the capacity of her internal rivers to hold the available water during the monsoon has diminished due to the deposit of silt—one particular case of the adverse impact of the Farakka Barrage on Bangladesh—the natural result is flooding each year in Bangladesh. Both the country profile for Bangladesh and Situation Report No. 10

(October 4, 1988) on Bangladesh floods have recognized "siltation at the junction of distributaries and main rivers" as one of the major causes of severe flooding in Bangladesh.[4]

The intensity of the 1988 flood in Bangladesh has been the more severe because of the melting of some Himalayan glaciers, the reasons for which are still a matter of debate among experts. Some say that it might be due to the earthquakes of August 6 and August 21, 1988 (Richter 5. 6 and 6.7 respectively) in the Bihar state of India and Nepal, but others do not completely dismiss the possibility of human manipulation.[6] However, the fact is that this increased amount of water overflowed the Indian rivers and had to run down the slope to Bangladesh, inundating her territory.

Apart from these specific causes, one of the general causes of flood is said to be the result of tropical deforestation over the past decades. The recent flood in Bangladesh was in part the result of "destruction of vast forest areas of Nepal, Northern India, and Bangladesh."[5] The environmental experts argue that "forests help prevent flooding by holding the soil in place and absorbing much of the rain."[6] They also caution that "continued destruction of the world's forests will trigger an increasing number of similar catastrophic floods."[7]

Another major cause of recurring floods in recent years has been identified by the scientists as the change in world temperature, which is increasing as a result of the gradul aggravation of the "greenhouse effect." If this trend continues, they estimate that by the year 2000, about 20 percent of the world's plant and animal species

could be lost as a result of the "[systematic] warming [of] the earth's climate, melting its polar ice caps, and threatening consequences which range from submerging heavily populated coastlines to turning croplands into deserts."[8]

Thus the recent flood in Bangladesh should be viewed from a broader perspective of global interdependence, because the systematic warming of the earth—a major cause of the flood—is a source of some other dangers for mankind as a whole. Scientists have now substantially documented that this new danger—

> is the effect of release of chlorofluorocarbons that deplete the stratospheric ozone layer, increasing the exposure of animal and plant life to the sun's ultra-violet rays and resulting in increased incidence of skin cancer and interfering with biological processes. The Common thread among these very different problems is that they are global consequences of human activity on a scale that can only be effectively addressed through global cooperation.[9]

Thus it can be seen that inherent in the main cause of flooding in Bangladesh is another grave danger which is threatening to engulf the majority of the world's population, and hence merits more attention from the developed world, because only such efforts and cooperation in an interdependent world can save the whole planet from this grim prospect. Here Bangladesh can be viewed as a test case because if concerted international effort is successful in tackling the problem of this country, mankind as a whole can put new faith in the bright future of the world.

There is also another reason why such an emphasis

should be placed on Bangladesh. It is generally recognized that like other poor Third World countries, Bangladesh needs foreign aid to finance a number of her development programs and projects. But what many development experts cannot understand, perhaps in the absence of sufficient knowledge of the historical geographical realities of the region, or even inadvertently, is that Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country ; because of this, as I have argued elsewhere,[10] if any development activity is to succeed here, necessary measures must be taken to provide disaster assistance in case a flood or cyclon hits Bangladesh, or her crops are damaged by drought, tidal bore or saline water, etc.

3. Description and Review of the Act

According to U. S. calculations, the severe flood which hit Bangladesh in early September, 1988, inundated two-thirds of her territory, rendering one-third of her population (over 30 million) homeless and causing death to over 2000 people. Apart from these, millions of poor Bangladeshis fell victim to epidemics because of lack of safe water and overcrowding. The flood damaged the economic infrastructure to the tune of $500 million, and as a result of the flooding of her agricultural lands, Bangladesh incurred a crop loss of an estimated amount of $1000 million.

At this critical moment for the people of Bangladesh, the U. S. Congress declared its willingness to work with the President "to provide generous levels of emergency humanitarian assistance to the people of Bangladesh' [Sec. 3(5)]. Knowing well that the recent flood in Bang-

ladesh was not an isolated phenomenon, the U. S. Congress also declared its willingness "to work with the international community to seek the means to prevent a recurrence of such natural disasters, and urged the President "to promote a regional solution designed to prevent a recurrence of such natural disasters" [Sec. 3(7)].

To facilitate the provision of emergency assistance to Bangladesh, the following amendment was made to Section 301 of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 (PL 480) by adding at the end the following :

> (c) In the event of a serious natural disaster in a country participating in a Food for Development Program, funds accruing from the sale of commodities made available under this title may be used, with the approval of the United States Government, for disaster relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction assistance in any rural or urban area of that country adversely affected by the disaster. Such assistance may include (but not limited to) food, and medicine medical supplies, shelter, and in-country transportation. [Sec. 4 (a) (1).]

The U. S. Congress expected that in the case of Bangladesh the application of the above amendment would generate an additional amount not less than $ 100 million in local currency under the Food for Development agreement with the Government of Bangladesh which could be utilized for disaster assistance there. It was the understanding that this amount was

> in addition to the regularly programmed assistance for that country for fiscal year 1989 under chapter

1 of part I of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (relating to development assistance) and titles I, II, and III of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 (relating to food assistance) ; and the level of such regularly programmed assistance should not be reduced because of such disaster assistance.

[Sec. 4 (c).]

As far as the solution to the problem of recurrent floods is concerned, the U. S. President was required to submit to the Congress not later than six months after the date of this Act (i. e., by April 30, 1989)

a report on efforts by the international community and the governments of the region to develop regional programs for the Ganges basin, and the Brahmaputra basin that are designed

(1) to ensure an equitable and predictable supply of water in the dry season ; and

(2) to promote better flood control mechanisms to mitigate in the mid-term, and prevent in the longterm, floods as severe as the 1988 floods in Bangladesh.

[Sec. 5 (a).]

The report by the President would describe the efforts made so far by international organizations, bilateral and multilateral assistance donors, and the countries in the region, along with any feasibility studies or actual projects which were under preparation or completed to achieve the above-mentioned dual objectives. The report was further required to "analyze the potential costs, the technology obstacles...and the political problems that stand in the way of effective flood control in the Ganges basin

and the Brahmaputra basin." [Sec. 5(b) (3).] The Office of Technology Assessment was supposed to assist the President in the preparation of the report, and also to provide to the Department of State and the Congress, *inter alia*, "any cost benefit analysis of efforts to improve water availability in the dry season and to mitigate or prevent severe flooding." [Sec. 6 (2) (B).]

If we make a critical review of the Act, we can find a number of omissions in it. First, there is no specific mention of acute food shortages during flood and the consequent disaster period during which many poor Bangladeshis had to starve. As the Situation Report No. 10 of October 4, 1988, on the Bangladesh flood has mentioned, the Bangladesh Government had in stock about 1.3 million metric tons of food which is equivalent to two and a half months' supply. The actual stock could be less than that because flood water may have damaged a portion of the existing stocks in a number of public food warehouses. It is no wonder that both President Ershad's appeal on September 1, 1988, particularly stressed the need for food, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs identified the procurement of three million metric tons of foodgrains as one of the priority needs of Bangladesh. The same Situation Report has attributed some of the illnesses and deaths to "malnutrition" and "consumption of rotten food" as it had founds of "hundreds of thousands of people are still without adequate shelter and means to acquire food."[11]

Second, though the Act plainly identified the Farakka Barrage, constructed by India, as a cause of floods in Bangladesh, and called for feasibility studies and also

actual projects on flood control measures, it made no reference to the melting of some Himalayan glaciers—either as a result of the earthquakes earlier in Bihar and Nepal or some human manipulation—which, as we have argued earlier, contributed to the severity of this particular flood.

Third, while identifying the environmental causes of the flood, the Act stressed only "deforestation and soil erosion" [Sec. 5(b) (4)], but it failed to recognize the fact of global warming by ozone-depleting CFCs, halons and other substances producing the "greenhouse effect," which, as has already been mentioned, is considered by scientists to be one of the major causes of floods in low lying coastal countries like Bangladesh.

Last, the U.S. Congress is to receive a report from the President on the efforts made so far by the international community, bilateral and multilateral assistance donors, and the countries of the region, along with feasibility studies, planning studies, or actual projects that are to be undertaken to tackle the dual problem of ensuring an adequate supply of water during the dry season and preventing severe floods in the monsoon faced by Bangladesh. Nowhere in the Act, however, is there any explicit willingness, not to mention U.S. commitment, to assist Bangladesh by providing necessary funds to solve her recurrent problems, especially of flooding. We do not yet know whether, in the absence of any favorable response from either the international community or the regional states, the U.S. will take the lead and assist Bangladesh on a bilateral basis, if necessary, to

implement flood control measures by providing a generous amount of financial resources and technical knowhow.

4. U. S. Foreign Policy Decisions : An Analytical Framework

Now, in an effort to analyze the U. S. decision to provide disaster assistance to the Bangladesh flood victims, it is necessary to understand the interest of the U, S., because it is an established fact that any foreign policy measure taken by a country is designed to further her national interest.[12] In the case of the U. S., her national interest is perhaps broader than that of many other countries, because it is clear from history that the continued well-being of the nation is dependent to a great, extent on the stability of the international system, and the U. S. has to be vigilant lest and human activity or natural phenomenon should pose a major threat to it. It can thus be argued that the U. S. has an interest in providing disaster assistance to any part of the world when a man-made or natural calamity causes so much human misery that it creates instability in that particular region.

Ever since the United States emerged as one of the two superpowers in the post-world war II period, the U. S. Congress has passed a number of laws based on "democratic and humanitarian instincts."[13] She has provided "financial and technical assistance to friends and former enemies ; and (also) unselfish emergency assistance in times of flood, famine, pestilence, and natural disaster."[14] The humanitarianism of the U. S. in contributing to the alleviation of human suffering would not be questioned if it were genuine, but in a world characterized by conflicting interests among nations, it is vain to

expect any nation to act purely on humanitarian grounds. As has been seen in the past, even though the U. S. had no visible interest other than humanitarian concern in providing food assistance during famines like the one in the Sahel, she could not conceal the fact that her political objectives and undertakings took precedence over the stated humanitarian cause. This explains why her "scarce domestic transport facilities were used to carry grain for the Soviet Union and were relatively unavailable for transport of grain destined for famine relief in the Sahel.[15] Another example can be cited from the very country on which the present paper focuses, i. e., Bangladesh. In 1971, when the Bengali nation was fighting for liberation against the Pakistani army of occupation, the U. S. provided food assistance to Bengali refugees who took shelter in India, but the U. S. government refused to take an unequivocal stand to support the cause of democracy for which the Bangalis were sacrificing their lives. This raises doubt whether her assistance in this particular case at least was purely and genuinely humanitarian in nature. Our doubt increases further when we see that one of the most renowned scholars on American foreign policy, Lincoln Bloomfield, was critical of the view that 'we ought to assist others for humanitarian reasons but the recipient of our aid should be grateful and pro-U. S. and specific U. S, interest (not humanitarian or ethical) should be served."[16] So it can hardly be doubted that other considerations must be present in the process of U. S. foreign policymaking even when a policy itself seems to have only altruistic motives.

In the circumstances just mentioned, the framework which has been developed here to analyze the provision of disaster assistance to Bangladesh takes the view that U. S. policy in general, having its national interest as the primary driving force, may be guided by any or all of the following :

i) moral obligation ;
ii) global compulsion ; and
iii) political consideration.

If we elaborate these points, we find that, first, the U. S. has some moral obligation to assist suffering humanity, like the victims of flood in Bangladesh, in any part of the globe, because her own actions are responsible to some extent for this disaster. In fact, not the U. S. alone but the whole industrial society has contributed to the warming of the globe, which is, as we have seen, one of the major causes of the recent floods in the subcontinent.

The World Bank environmental experts recognize that "carbon dioxide emissions in industrial countries" are one of the main reasons for "global warming."[17] They maintain that "wealthier countries directly damage the global environment by transmitting pollutants and by using developing countries as 'pollution havens' for industry.[18] For this reason, they are of the opinion that "industrial countries should share the burden of mitigating global pollution and preserving ecosystems."[19] The World Commission on Environment and Development, known as the Brundtland Commission, in its report entitled *Our Common Future*,[20] shares the same view when it suggested the need for creating some financing

mechanisms by the developed world for the damage done to the developing countries. These should be in the form of additional assistance, preferably concessionary, so that the latter can build up institutional capacity, and thus be in a position to strike the necessary balance between the preservation of environment and management of economic development that has been the concern of development experts, especially in the World Bank, in recent years.[21] In his report to the Board of Governors of the World Bank Group on September 26, 1988, the Chairman of the development Committee, B. T. G. Chidzero of Zimbabwe, by taking into account elements of the Brundtland Commission report, has also mentioned "the close link between environmental degradation and poverty" in making a case that "substantial resources were required to assist countries in dealing with these interrelated problems."[22] This is because, as has aptly been maintained by the President of the World Bank, Barber B. Conable, the poor are the least able to escape the consequences of environmental damage caused by others."[23]

In the recently held Saving the Ozone Layer Conference at the Queen Elizabeth II Center, Westminster, England, March 5-7, 1989, the delegates agreed to "the total elimination of production and consumption of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) and halons" because that would protect the ozone layer necessary for reducing the process "of global warming, which poses serious threats to certain low-lying developing countries."[24] These gases "trap the sun's radition on its return journey from earth" like a greenhouse, causing the atmospheric temperature to rise.[25] The scientists "predict, with varying degrees

of confidence," that this warming-up process creates such meteorologicial horrors as "a rise in sea level ... fiercer hurricanes and drought-stricken crops."[26]

The obligation of the industrialized countries stems from the fact that they are mainly responsible for aggravating the situation by throwing these harmful gases, particularly carbon dioxide, through using as well as wasting fossil fuels and releasing aerosols and other sprays into the atmosphere. As the evironmental experts agree, carbon dioxide, which accounts for roughly half of the warming of the earth, "is given off mainly by the energy-guzzling industrial countries. North America and Eastern Europe each spews out roughly a quarter of the total : a further 15% or so comes from Western Europe. Most is a by-product of burning coal ; some comes from oil and natural gas."[27]

In such circumstances, the delegates of the Saving Ozone Layer Conference visualized the need for "technical solutions ... to help solve Third World human problems."[28] It should now be recognized that the poor Third World countries are becoming the victims of the luxury of the rich countries to such an extent that the former must be provided financial aid by the latter, preferably in the form of grants, to mitigate their suffering.

At the present moment, when the members of the family of nations are most interdependent, especially "in regard to the preservation of our Common environment, the biosphere of our planet,"[29] every effort must be made by at least those who are capable or contributing to the sustenance of life on earth to do so. This naturally includes the fulfilment of some sort of moral obligation

on the part of the "highly industrialized countries" to care for the needs of the poor in the Third World, "because we control most of the world's productive equipment."[30]

But even if the U.S. is moved by suffering humanity and also feels morally obliged to assist the Bangladesh flood victims, she may still not respond fovorably unless she is compelled to do so. It is here that the second question, i.e., the question of her global compulsion, arises.

Karl Deutsch has made a strong argument why the U.S. should assists the victims of famine in any part of the world. He has done so by drawing a gloomy picture of the possible consequences of famines. He argued that if rational governments in, say, the India of Nehru, Indira, Desai and Rajiv, all Western educated and liberal-minded. are replaced as a result of a famine by a fundamentalist Hindu regime "with a profound belief in kali, the goddess of death, or Shiva, who Hindu tradition says will destroy the world in a fiery dance, so that new life will rise from the ruins of the incinerated globe"[31] – the stage will be set for large-scale destruction. In such a situation.

> [i] f we sit back and let it happen, we will be numbered among the victims. If, on the other hand, we find ways to prevent great famines, we will have done more for world stability than we could in any other way.[32]

Thus it would be in the interest of the U. S. to provide assistance in any country suffering from natural or other disasters.

Moreover, the same argument holds true today that was put forward to provide war-ravaged Western European economies with the Marshall Plan aid to prevent

the growth of communism in a desperate situation arising out of poverty and chaos. Tremendous responsibility rests with the U. S. as the leader of the free world to prevent any rise of fundamentalism from the ruins of destruction which may be the outcome of any famine following flood, cyclone, drought, etc., in any Third World country.

As the twenty-first century draws closer, the U. S. is facing new challenges of global magnitude which are to be faced boldly in the changed circumstances. After more than a century of isolationism, the U. S. policy in the immediate post-World War II period was guided by realism, which gave way to pluralism when she felt the necessity of committing herself worldwide through economic (Marshall Plan) and military (NATO, CENTO, SEATO, etc.) power. Now that pluralism needs to be replaced by globalism[33] as the U. S. faces new challenges not only from the Soviet Union in the field of nuclear armaments but also from Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany in the economic field.

At a time when the U. S. has "shifted from being the world's largest creditor country to being the world's largest debtor."[34] it is imperative that she contribute to the "economic and social progress in the developing countries" because this has a positive "relationship" with "the prospects of the United States for increasing exports, creating jobs, and servicing its foreign debt in the decade ahead."[35] As John W. Sewell maintains, "The economic welfare of the United States is now inextricably linked to developments in the global economy and in the developing countries"[36] because it is only

through increasing world production and developing the poor economi es, enabling them to enhance their import capabilities, which would facilitate the export expansion to these countries, that the U. S. can find a viable alternative to offset her existing unfavorable balance of payment in international trade.[37] Thus there are more compelling reasons why the U. S. should assist the poor countries to achieve a state of normal economic health. The U. S. bears a great responsibility. on the fulfillment of which depends not only her own prosperity but also the well-being of the family of nations as a whole.

Last, it is hardly possible to discount U. S. political motives in providing disaster assistance to Bangladesh. In spite of the high-sounding drum beat of her political ideals, it has been seen in the past that almost any foreign policy decision taken by the U. S. was driven by political considerations. One example would perhaps suffice.

In the case of the Peace Corps Act of 1961, which was designed to "assist in meeting the middle-level manpower needs of nations who requested such aid, contribute to a fuller understanding of the United States by those nations, and increase the understanding of foreign nations among Americans,"[38] it is doubtful whether the volunteers could maintain a "benign and benevolent" image of America abroad.[39] As has been argued by Charles S. Lenth, the Peace Corps "was unavoidably political, despite disclaimers by the agency ... The agency cultivated a style of crusading idealism ... [though it had to face the] accusations of imperialistic and surreptitious operations abroad."[40]

The political motives of the U. S. in sending the Peace Corps volunteers abroad together with her food grain shipments, even though the host country might not have "requested" them, can be well understood in the case of India during the late Indira Gandhi's visit to the U. S. in March, 1966, at a time when India needed U. S. food grains during those mid-decade droughts.[41]

One more point should be made clear here. It has been the basic assumption in the framework of analysis to treat the U. S. government as a unified rational actor as far as economic policymaking is concerned. The rationale for this assumption is that although there is much difference of opinion between the executive branch and the Congress regarding the total amount to be allocated in the foreign aid sector, including bureaucratic bargaining about how much should go to military assistance and how much is to be used for economic development, there is hardly any disagreement within the government as to the objectives that are to be achieved by the U. S. foreign assistance program. Also, as is evident from the above discussion, the framework which has been developed to analyze U. S. policymaking expects the government to behave logically from a theoretical point of view. However, the actual practice the government follows will be examined in the light of the present framework in the following section, dealing with the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988, by focusing on the concrete motives and interests of individuals, groups, and government agencies that play separate roles in shaping U. S. policy.

5. Enactment of the Act

In this section, we will first focus on the actual process of enacting the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 and then make a critical analysis of the Act in the light of the above framework to show that its enactment was guided more by other, including political, considerations than purely humanitarian concern.

As far as the enactment of the Act is concerned, it may be mentioned here that the situation was propitious for Bangladesh. The disaster that struck her in the form of the severe flood of September 1988 was seen in the U. S. as one of the most formidable challenges posed by nature to human existence on earth. The people as well the U. S. government, especially members of Congress, were moved by the horrid scenes shown on the TV screen, especially on ABC's news and entertainment program "Good Morning America" and Ted Koppel's "Nightline" (also broadcast by the ABC network). They were also touched by reading in such influential daily newspapers as *The Washington Post, The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor*, etc., the tale of the sufferings of the flood victims in Bangladesh, which aroused the wellknown humanitarian instinct of the American people to do something to ameliorate the conditions of these unfortunates. There was a most favorable response from the public, the U. S. administration and the Congress.

The U, S, citizens responded by providing assistance to the tune of $4,570,000 through such private voluntary organizations (PVOs) as the American Red Cross, CARE, WVRD, YMCA, etc.[42]

On the part of the U. S. administration, President Ronald Reagan himself was concerned by "the terrible conditions brought on by the unprecedented floods in Bangladesh." In his letter to President H. M. Ershad on September 9, 1988, he expressed his "deepest sympathy" for the people of Bangladesh, and reassured the Bangladesh President that the U. S. would "stand ready to do what we can to help." President Reagan also took personal interest in sending a Disaster Assessment Team under the leadership of Jay F. Morris, Deputy Administrator of the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID), to "oversee our initial emergency assistance effort."

Mr. Morris and his team reached Dhaka on September 12, 1988, aboard a USAF C-5, which also carried the first installment of relief material for the flood victims. That same day he met President Ershad and presented him the letter of encouragement from the U. S. President He told the Bangladesh President that the purpose of his visit was "to assess the extent of flood damage, "and also discussed with him "the possibilities and limitations of U. S. disaster assistance." In his memorandum on the "Bangladesh Flood Report" submitted to President Reagan on September 19, 1988, Mr. Morris rightly mentioned that "the people of Bangladesh face a *gigantic* task of reconstruction and rehabilitation."[43] He also visualized that "not only will much assistance be required from the donor community, but an international effort of unprecedented cooperation will be required to formulate and implement measures to ensure that a catastrophe of this magnitude is not visited again upon Bangladesh.[44]

The initial Congressional response was the visit of Congressman Tony p. Hall (D-Ohio), a member of the House Select Committee on Hunger and Chairman of its international task force, to Bangladesh from September 20-23, 1988, "to assess the flood situation and to report his findings to Congress."[45] His meetings with President Ershad, other government officials and representatives of the international donor community, and his helicopter tours of several disaster areas, provided the Congress with a first-hand account of the magnitude of the problem faced by Bangladesh, and prompted it to do something concrete to assist the flood victims.

Even though there was a meeting of minds among the U. S. public, administration and Congress to contribute to the alleviation of the sufferings of the Bangladesh flood victims, a limitation on the contribution on the part of Congress was set by the usual budget deficit and, more important, the relative non-availability of necessary funds at a time when foreign aid does not figure prominently in the U. S. budget. This created the necessity for the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988, because those who were involved in this process developed the idea that a minor technical correction, essentially an amendment, of Section 301 of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 could generate an amount to be provided to the Bangladesh flood victims without exerting any pressure on the existing budget.

It is necessary to mention here that Bangladesh could take advantage of the goodwill of both the U. S. administration and the Congress in approving that legislation.

As is known to all, the U. S. government is different from other cabinet forms of democratic government in the sense that, unlike the latter, where the majority party in the legislature forms the government and can count on the ready support of the national legislative body for any policy measure, the U. S. system is more complex because the executive head of the government—the President—may be from one party and the Congress may be dominated by the other party. Bipartisan support in both the Houses of the Congrees is usually necessary for any policy measure, either domestic or foreign, to be successfully adopted. If the initiative is taken by the President for any policy measure, it also needs bipartisan support unless his party has an absolute majority in the Congress on whose support he can usaally count.

In the case of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistanct Act of 1988, the President made his position clear, although he did not take the initiative in seekingr Congress's authorization to provide disaster assistance to Bangladesh. That initiative came from the Congress itself. As is mentioned in the *Eastern Waters Study*, "the 1988 floods (in Bangladesh) prompted the request by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U. S. House of Representatives for hearings."[46] It is gratifying to mention here that in both Houses of Congres there was over-all sympathy for Bangladesh and, more important, active groups were involved. For example, in the House of Representatives, where the bill concerning disaster assistance for Bangladesh was originally introduced, the architect of the Act, Rep. Stephen J. Solarz (D-N.Y.), Chairman of the

House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, could count on the ready support of the ranking minority member in the same Subcommittee, Rep. Jim Leach (R-Iowa). In the Senate, such influential Senators as Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R. I.), the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Jesse A. Helms (R-N. C.), the ranking minority member of the Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minn.), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, were among the members who played a prominent role in the enactment. Thus it is seen that the bill introduced in the Congress for providing disaster assistance to Bangladesh was well-received by both the Houses and, more important, received bipartisan support from both the Democratic and Rebulican parties. In fact, the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 was facilitated by the cooperation of people who were touched by the sufferings of the flood victims in Bangladesh ; the administration was active ; and above all, dozens of Congressmen were readily available to initiate the process. However, the enactment was possible as a result of the active involvement of Congressman Solarz, who had a personal interest in the issue, and the advocacy of Mr. Graeme Bannerman, President of Bannerman and Associates, a lobbying group in the U. S. Congress, USAID and also the World Bank.

As to the interest of Congressman Solarz, the Economic Minister of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, D. C., Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, has maintained that for several years Rep. Solarz has had to depend on a large number of votes from constituents of Bangla -

desh origin, who are relatively numerous in his district in Brooklyn, a New York borough.[47] As he is influential in shaping U. S. policy in South Asia, a number of people of Bangladeshi origin, especially the members of the Bangladesh Association in Boston, approached him and made him understand the nature and magnitude of the problem ; this ultimately persuaded him to take the lead in the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988. In doing so, he was perhaps motivated by two factors ; he calculated that he could count on their votes ; and, as Chairman of the U. S. Congress Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, he wished to make his position more creditable on Capitol Hill.

In the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988, a private lobby group, *viz.* Bannerman and Associates, especially its President, Mr. Graeme Bannerman, also played an important role. As he has admitted in an interview over the telephone,[48] in his eight years' association with the Congress he has established a good rapport with both the Administration and the Congress. As an advocate for Bangladesh, he could understand from his experience that if he could guide Bangladesh to seek out the right persons at the right time, something positive could be achieved for the country. He not only worked as an intermediary in contacting influential policy-makers but also introduced the idea of the Act at a time when, on the one hand, Bangladesh was badly in need of U. S. assistance but, on the other, U. S. foreign assistance was in decline as a result of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Budget Reduction Act, passed in 1985 to combat

the U. S. budget deficit. Mr. Bannerman's specific contribution was to make sure that foreign aid decision-makers did not overlook the case of Bangladesh in spite of budgetary constraints.

With the above discussion of the actual enactment process of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988, we now proceed to make a critical analysis of the Act within the framework developed in the previous section, in order to show that it was guided more by political and other considerations than by purely humanitarian concern.

Ms. Siria Lopez, the State Desk Officer for Bangladesh, has maintained that Bangladesh is a low priority area where no visible U. S. political or security interest is present[49]. Still Bangladesh has been one of the few countries where U. S. aid has continued without any cutback, as has been the case for most other countries in recent years as a result of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act of 1985.

Officials in the State Department do not believe that the U. S. has any special moral obligation to assist the Bangladesh flood victims. In their view, no empirical evidence has yet been established to show that the Western industrialized countries, especially the U. S., may be held responsible for the warming of the earth by the production and consumption of CFCs and halons and burning of fossil fuels, which has direct bearing in the rise of the sea level and the melting of polar ice. These effects may exacerbate the problem of flood in low-lying countries, as in the case of the 1988 Bangldesh flood. They reiterate that such thinking was com-

pletely out of the question at the time of the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988.

There is also no apparent thinking as yet in the minds of U. S. policymakers regarding any global compulsion on the part of the U. S., because she does not perceive that the sufferings of the flood victims in Bangladesh can give rise to the fundamentalism that would create such instability in the world as will run counter to her global interest. Thus in the absence of any strategic interest of the U. S. in Bangladesh, not to mention the absence of either any moral obligation or global compulsion on her part, policymakers assert that it was purely humanitarian concern and no political consideration at all which prompted the U. S. to enact the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988.

Mr, Bannerman has also maintained that unlike in Israel, Egypt, Pakistan and the Philippines, etc, where U. S. policy is guided by her political and security interests, as a result of which these countries are not affected by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act, the case of Bangladesh is unique because she is always treated favorably from the humanitarian point of view. Whereas Ms. Lopez has expressed the view that the government of Bangladesh should put more stress on solving her huge population problem in her effort to achieve self-reliance, because she cannot expect to depend on humanitarian assistance from the U. S. and other sources forever, Mr. Bannerman is of the opinion that U. S. humanitarian assistance is directed at supplementing the effort of the hardworking Bangladeshis who have to fight against the complex problems of poverty and disasters.

But the credibility of such an explanation for the readiness of the U. S. to assist the Bangladeshis from a purely humanitarian point of view is lost at least on three counts.

First, Mr. Bannerman's argument that the U. S. sees the Bangladeshis as hardworking people fighting relentlessly for their survival runs contrary to the image of the same people espoused earlier by the U. S. According to former Secretary of State Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Bangladesh was a bottomless basket. The only plausible explanation for this change in perception may be faith in the Ershad regime, which happens to be on good terms with the U. S. government.

Second, in spite of the reiteration of Ms. Siria Lopez and others that the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 was based purely on humanitarian concerns and no political considerations whatsoever at the time of its enactment, how can one possibly forget that in a similar situation about a decade and a half ago, in 1974, the U. S. response was not very encouraging, to say the least. In fact, a comparative picture of the responses of the U. S. government in two separate periods (1974 and 1987-88, especially 1988), on the eve of similar disasters, would reveal how the U. S. has used highly publicized humanitarian assistance as an instrument of her national policy.

In the 1987 flood in Bangladesh, U. S. government assistance totalled $ 16, 558, 421, with another $ 126, 630 provided by U. S. PVOs, at a time when the total assistance provided by the international community amounted to $ 22, 110, 799.[50] In the 1988 flood, according to an AID Report circulated on October 4,

1988, total U. S. government emergency assistance amounted to $ 151, 487, 301, apart from $ 134, 400,000 provided as bilateral assistance in FY 1988. The U. S. PVOs also provided assistance to the tune of $ 4,570,000. The total assistance provided by the international community, including international organizations like UNDP, UNDRO, WFP, EEC, etc., and such governments as Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Japan, Norway, Sweden, the U. K., Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, etc., and also NGOs from France, the U. K. and Norway, totalled $ 87, 974, 706.[51] Thus the U.S. Share in the total disaster assistance received by Bangladesh from the world community has been highly commendable. But in the 1974 flood, although the international community provided an encouraging ammunt of $ 128.6 million, U.S. government assistance had been to the tune of only $ 14 million, and U. S. PVOs provided assistance worth $ 2.3 million.[52] It is easily understandable that in 1974, the U.S. had done something without much conviction, and that not in time. As the proverb goes, "a stitch in time saves nine" has never been more appropriate than the in 1974 flood in Bangladesh, because timely U. S. assistance could, perhaps, have saved a great many human lives from the clutches of death by starvation. If the prevention of death by starvation is seen as the most glaring test of humanity, the U. S. possibly failed that test at that time.

The Bangladesh government's appeal to the UN, other International organisations and potential donor countries for emergency disaster assistance was made on July 29, 1974, but the bulk of the 4,867 tons of Civil De-

fense survival biscuits (which accounted for $ 10,000,000 out of the total U. S. disaster assistance of $ 13,954,000) arrived at the port of Chittagong late in November or early December, by which time the acute crisis period was almost over, although it had left its cruel mark all over the country. The U.S. airlift of three 32-man hospital tents and 200 cots in response to a heavy outbreak of cholera in early September arrived only on October 3, 1974. The first agreement under the FY 1975 program of concessional sales under PL 480, Title I for 100,000 metric tons of wheat and 50,000 metric tons of rice was concluded on October 4 1974. The foodgrain shipment under this agreement at a leter date reached Bangladesh at a time before which many people had already died from starvation. Although the U.S. government had earlier made food grants of 3,000 metric tons of wheat and 200 metric tons of vegetable oil under PL 480, Title II, the total U. S. response in 1974 was considered highly inadequate both in terms of Bangladesh's need and the U. S. humanitarian assistance standard.

In retrospect, it seems that additional foodgrain supplies under PL 480, Titles II and III, shipped immediately, could have not only alleviated the suffering of the flood victims in Bangladesh in 1974, but also saved numerous human lives at that time.[53] But that was not to be the case, because even though "food aid was of critical concern [in Bangladesh] in the Summer of 1974, USDA policy statements report (ed) Secretary Butz' calculatedly pessimistic estimates . . . about the U. S.'s capacity to give aid."[54] Secretary Butz' pessimistic calculation was perhaps a pretext for not giving food aid to Bangladesh

when the U.S. could make a huge wheat deal with Russia, presumbly because of the Bangladesh government's export of jute to Cuba during that time. The question of U. S. political interest is quite obvious here. James A. Nathan and James K. Oliver have shown an instance where the U. S.

> executive foreign and defense establishment manipulated programs ostensibly designed to provide economic and humanitarian assistance. ...Thus, more than 450 million dollars (generated through the sale of the Food for Peace Program) was channeled into Vietnam and Cambodia (as military assistance) during fiscal year 1974—over half of the aid dispersed under the program worldwide—even as simultaneously famine was striking major areas in Africa and South Asia.[55]

In light of the above comparison, there can be two possible explanations if we are to take at face value the U. S. assertion that her response to the flood in Bangladesh in 1988 was based purely on humanitarian concern : first, that the American people, especially the policymakers, were not fully aware of the gravity of the situatian in Bangladesh in 1974, whereas in 1988, they would come to know the severity of the flood in pictures shown on national television ; and second, compared to their predecessors in 1974, the policymakers in 1988 were more humanitarian-minded. This explains why the U. S. response to the call for emergency disaster assistance in 1974 was far from satisfactory, whereas in an almost similar situation in 1988, they responded so much more favorably that they enacted a specific Act for the

purpose. Any reasonable person will dismiss either of the above two explanations. In such circumstances, the only plausible explanation why the decision-makers in 1988 responded more favorably than did their predecessors in 1974 may be that in the early 1970s the ruling elite in Bangladesh did not enjoy their favor, but the different leadership there in the late 1980s is more in harmony with the interest of the U. S. Thus in spite of U. S. refusal to admit it, we cannot completely dispel the sense that the interest of the U.S. other than humanitarian concerns was present in the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988.

Third, before the Bangladesh Government could complete the task of rehabilitating the flood victims and embark upon reconstruction activities, a severe cyclone accompanied by tidal waves devastated the south and south-western parts of Bangladesh on November 29, 1988, killing more than 1500 people and resulting in 15,000 more missing. A total of 8,568,860 people, of whom 2,000,000 were rendered homeless, were directly affected. At that fateful time, the government of Bangladesh was seeking international aid, particularly from Japan and Canada.[56] The U. S. was aware of that catastrophe in the lives of the affected Bangladeshis in many years, but, as Mr. Frederick M. Cole, Assistant Director, Asia/Pacific of the Office of U. S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), has maintained that, in the absence of any specific appeal to the U. S., she did not provide any disaster assistance in this case.[57] The humanitarian instinct of the U. S. could have been animated favorably this time also, as the U. S. is not outside

the international community. This point is stressed here because, as Mr. Cole has agreed, not only floods but also cyclones and tidal bores are equally, if not more, serious problems for Bangladesh.

Apart from the above, the involvement, or rather employment, of a lobbyist to advocate the case of Bangladesh in the enactment of the Act raises our doubt as to the true motives of the U. S. in this matter. If the U. S. response to assist the flood victims of Bangladesh were purely humanitarian, it should have been spontaneous and automatic. When a lobbyist had to be active in the process, it means that there had been some bargaining, which naturally gives also to suspision that other unperdgiating were also present. Now the question arises as to whose interest the lobbyist was serving—Bangladesh's or the U. S.'s. Even without an answer to that question, it may be argued that in the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988, the U. S. was guided by some other considerations, including political, than her humanitarian concern.

6. Follow-up to the Act

On September 1, 1988, President H. M. Ershad, on the basis of what he saw for himself during a helicopter tour the previous day to verify the reports of "widespread human suffering and economic disruption" as a result of the beginning of one of the worst floods in the history of Bangladesh, appealed to the international community "for assistance, particularly food, helicopters, and other transportation for the distribution of relief items to victims isolated from usual commodity sources."[58]

The U. S. response to the disaster caused by severe flooding in Bangladesh in September 1988 was highly encouraging. Initially, the U. S. Ambassador to Bangladesh, H. E. Willard A. DePree, by exercising his disaster assistance authority in a situation of "calamity" produced by the flood, donated $ 25,000 to President Ershad's Emergency Relief and Welfare Fund on September 1, 1988. Thereafter followed a series of emergency disaster assistance provided by the U. S. government and PVOs, including five grants made by the AID Office of U. S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the usual channel for such aid. The various types of activities undertaken by the U. S. disaster assistance teams, such as supplying food, water purification, temporary shelter, and communications proved beneficial in mitigating the sufferings of the flood victims to a great extent. However, as the U. S. had to administer 15 other disaster assistance operations with limited resources in other parts of the world in October and November 1988, in response to a wide variety of natural and man-made calamities, including the Armenian earthquake in the Soviet Union, the U. S. Congress enacted the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 not only to authorize additional short-term disaster assistance but also to address the long-term solution to the dual problems faced by Bangladesh : shortage of water in the dry season, and recurrent severe flooding in the monsoon. In the previous section we discussed the process of enacating about the Act. Merely having the Act in effect, however, would not solve the problems of Bangladesh unless it is supported by necessary follow-up procedures. In the present section we will examine

the extent to which the follow-up of the Act has been encouraging as well as beneficial for Bangladesh.

As could is evident in the various provisions of the Act, the follow-up essentially involves two aspects : first, the fate of $ 100 million in "local currencies generated under Food for Development agreements with the Government of Bangladesh," already in Bangladesh but in the U. S. account, which was to be given to the Bangladesh government for use in disaster relief, rehabilitation and reconstructions and second, the preparation of a report for the U. S. President to be submitted by him to the Congress by April 30 , 1989, "on efforts by the international community and the governments of the region to develop regional programs for the Ganges basin and the Brahmaputra basin that are designed (1) to ensure an equitable and predictable supply of water in the dry season, and (2) to promote better flood control mechanisms to mitigate in the mid-term, and prevent in the long-term, floods as severe as the 1988 floods in Bangladesh."

As far as the fate of the $ 100 million is concerned, Mr. Alexander Shapleigh, Bangladesh Desk Officer, Office of the South Asian Affairs, AID, has maintained that the Act made no flat-out instructions as to what should be done with the funds. He believes that this was done with a view to keeping some flexibility. The idea behind this was that if the Congress would ask, AID, the implementing agency, could act. He has also confirmed that out of the total $ 100 million scheduled for reprogramming of already planned assistance to Bangladesh, $ 50 million has already been reprogrammed so

far (April 26, 1989), with the possibility that the rest (another $50 million) would be reprogrammed in the near future.[59] Thus the follow-up to the Act in this particular aspect has been encouraging.

However, the major thrust of the Act, at least from the point of view of long-term benefit for Bangladesh, is the provision for a durable solution to her dual problems of water shortage in the dry season and severe flood during the monsoon. As has already been mentioned, the report of the President to be submitted to the Congress did not commit the U. S. to undertake the solution to the problems faced by Bangladesh, it only required that the U. S. "analyze the potential costs, the technology obstacles...and the political problems that stand in the way of effective flood control in the Ganges basin and the Brahmaputra basin." Thus there is not much reason for Bangladesh to be optimistic. Nevertheless, by referring to "political problems', which might hinder any effective flood control measures in the Gandes basin and the Brahmaputra basin, the Congress perhaps gave the President some leeway so that he could exercise his own influence in order to promote a regional approach for helping Bangladesh achieve her dual objectives, *viz.*, "to ensure an equitable and predictable supply of water in the dry season" and "to promote better flood control mechanisms to mitigate in the mid-term, and prevent in the long-term, floods as severe as the 1988 floods in Bangladesh."

There is no doubt that the U. S. could well identify the problems faced by Bangladesh. Apart from being situated in an area highly vulnerable to disaster from both geographical and environmental factors, as has been

mentioned earlier, her problem is to a large extent political. Obviously any solution to such a problem requires, *inter alia*, political commitment on the part of those governments and international organizations that are genuinely concerned with making one.

The Bangladesh Disaster Aasistance Act of 1988 specifically mentions that the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) would prepare the report for the President. But as, owing to a shortage of funds the OTA could not undertake the task, AID commissioned the Eastern Waters Study Group to prepare the President's report to the Congress. The study was completed in time by a team of three noted experts: Peter Rogers, Peter Lydon and David Seckler, who were hired by the Irrigation Support Project for Asia and the Near East (ISPAN). These consultants have done a marvellous job in preparing the report, which includes, as expected, all the technical and cost-benefit aspects of both short-term and long-term water management and flood control measures in the "Eastern Waters basin, where about a tenth of the world's population lives,"[60] and of which Bangladesh is an integral part.

In the Eastern Waters basin, where "the watershed of three great rivers of South Asia, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna...join in Bangladesh before entering the Bay of Bengal,"[61] the harsh reality of Bangladesh's situation as a lower riparian state has thrown her into a perpetually disadvantageous position. The Indian advantage of being an upper riparian works both ways: in the monsoon, the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal can worsen the flood situation in Bangladesh,

as has been seen in the 1988 flooding, when "about 90 percent of the floodwater was reportedly carried into Bangladesh from across the national boundary (mainly) by the Brahmaputra,"[62] and owing to the withdrawal of waters from the Ganges by the Farakka Barrage, constructed just upstream of where the Ganges enters Bangladesh, it has increased the salinating effects in the southwest quadrant of Bangladesh.[63]

India has always shown insensitivity to the need of Bangladesh to share the Ganges waters. As has been argued in the *Eastern Waters Study* :

> Throughout the planning and early construction of the barrage at Farakka, India resisted the discussions on Ganges water sharing persistently sought by Pakistan, since Bangladesh was then East Pakistan. In the mid-1970s, as India was completing the Farakka Barrage, it was drawn into concrete discussion of the need for sharing dry season water when Bangladesh inscribed the issue on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly. Although New Delhi always accepted the principle of a Bangladeshi entitlement, it evidently agreed to talks at that time at least partially in response to the prospect of embarrassment in the United Nations.[64]

The problem is all the more serious for Bangladesh because ; as has again been aptly maintained by Rogers, *et al.*, "in the general politics of the region, Bangladesh... has no strength to balance against India's size technical advancement, financial resources, and geographical position."[65] Yet any pragmatic solution to the above mentioned dual problems faced by Bangladesh is

dependent upon the Indian willingness to cooperate. As Mr. Humayun Kabir, First Secretary of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, DC, has said, any durable solution to the problems of water shortage in the dry season and recurring flood during the monsoon in Bangladesh would necessarily involve making some sort of arrangement with India, which might not agree, or even respond favorably, to this.[66] In such a situation, as the U. S. does not have that much stake in Bangladesh, a low priority area with no visible U. S. interest, it is doubtful whether the U. S. would go to the extent of antagonizing India to help Bangladesh solve her problems. Even if the U. S. may have genuine concern for Bangladesh, she cannot do much for her when it involves dealing with India, because "the United State's small and currently declining economic aid to India gives it no voice in the overall design of India's development program *which is essentially self-reliant.*"[67]

However, this should not give rise to pessimism, because the U. S. can make a really noteworthy contribution to the solution of the problems of Bangladesh for the latter's longterm benefit, in such a way that does not depend so much on India's cooperation. This can be done by assisting Bangladesh in the implementation of her National Water Plan of 1986, which is the outcome of five years of work ledy by the Master Planning Organization, and also included experts from Harza Engineering Company International, a Chicago firm.[68] The Water Plan is described by the Eastern Waters Study Group as "an excellent study of its water resources." The U. S. government can assist by providing the lion's share of

the $ 6 billion necessary "over 20 years for flood control and drainage works and tubewell irrigation projects" which are also designed for meeting "Bangladesh's food production needs until 2005."[69]

As far as the solution of her specific problem of flood is concerned, the goal of the government of Bangladesh, as expressed by the Minister of Irrigation in March 1989, is that "the water which enters the country from the outside, will be conducted to the sea with the greatest possible directness, and with no damage to us.[70] The Ministry of Irrigation also developed a *National Flood Protection Programme* in 1988 in response to the latest flood in Bangladesh.[71] Of the eleven "Guiding Principles" formulated in that program, seven are designated as "short-run actions that can immediately help the population deal with future floods."[72] Popularly known as a "soft" program of flood proofing, the *Eastern Waters Study* has recommended that "[t]he donor countries and the other riparian countries should endorse these seven principles as valuable first steps for Bangladesh's response to the floods."[73]

Thus we can see that there are a number of studies which are addressed not only to the cost-benefit but also the technical aspects of solving the problems of water shortage and flood faced by Bangladesh. The situation there is volatile because many people fear that "high floods will come again this year and, at worst, become a permanent annual feature of the country's life.[74] Perhaps another danger looms large in Bangladesh, because any disaster accuring from future floods will disturb the "political, and even the deeper social, stability of the

country."[75] Hence, as has been recomended by the Eastern Waters Study Group, "[t]here is an urgent need for the World Bank, as coordinator of the Aid to Bangladesh Consortium, to take a lead in mobilizing donor support *especially* for this *Bangladesh National Water* Plan."[76]

Many people are inclined to express skepticism that once the U.S.'s initial enthusiasm dies down in the absence of any live pictures of the struggle through which Bangladesh is going, the U.S. would continue to give serious attention to supporting the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 through the necessary follow-up process. Some scholars argue that "it is much easier in Washington, D. C. to mobilize political support for providing resources to disaster victims than to mobilize support for longer-term actions that might make disasters less likely or afflicted societies better able to cope with them."[77] In the case of the U. S. response to the flood of Bangladesh in 1988, I am personally optimistic that U. S. support will be durable.

This can be ensured by persuading the U. S. decision makers that they have a moral obligation as well as a global compulsion to help solve the problem of flood and cyclone faced by Bangladesh. If the U. S. neglects either of these, not to mention her national interest, Bangladesh cannot rely only on the humanitarian instinct of the U. S., or, for that matter, of other developed countries, for any lasting benefit. As has already been argued, Bangladesh can, *inter alia*, refer to global warming, which poses a serious threat to the world environment, especially in aggravating the problems of the already disaster-prone countries like Bangladesh, to persuade the

U. S. to play a larger role in mitigating her sufferings. There is no doubt that global warming has now become an issue not only of major importance but also of global concern at a time when

> [s]cientists have estimated that global mean temperatures could rise 4 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit by the middle of the next century if greenhouse gases continue to accumulate at current rates. By way of comparison, the Earth's mean temperature is about 9 degrees Fahrenheit warmer now than it was during the last ice age, when much of the United States was covered with mile-thick glaciers.[78]

That the U. S. is also aware of this phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that in the 1988 presidential campaign, George Bush vowed that if elected, his administration would address the issue, saying he would "combat the green house effect with the White House effect."[79] However, his Administration has not paid much heed to the concern expressed even by the U. S. scientists. It has shown skepticism about the danger posed by global warming, ostensibly because it would prefer to avoid the cost of addressing the problem. The Administration's attitude toward the problem was reflected in a recent testimony (on May 8, 1989) by a noted atmospheric scientist, James E. Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, who said that he was manoeuvred into altering his written testimony by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).[80] In that Senate hearing, seven leading U. S. scientists revealed that "recent evidence suggests that the so-called 'greenhouse effect' is accelerating and may already be moving out of the reach of human inter-

vention."[81] According to Stephen H. Schneider of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, "There is virtually no scientific controversy' about atmospheric changes that are gradually raising the Earth's temperature.'"[82]

It was only after the embarrassment caused by the publication in various newspapers of the report of the Administration's manoeuvers that President Bush offered to host a "global workshop" which would identify issues to be incorporated in a formal treaty to limit the problem. Instructions to that effect were given on May 11, 1989, to the U. S. delegation attending a 30-nation international meeting, sponsored by the United Nations in Geneva, to work out "an international consensus on the steps necessary 'to prepare for a formal treaty negotiating process'."[83] Even though, as has been expressed by Rafe Pomerance, head of the World Resources Institute, President Bush's move has not spelled out a "clear-cut declaration" of U. S. environmental policy[84], we hope that the administration will have such a policy, which will make provision for repairing damage done to other countries as a result of U.S. actions contributing to the global warming process, acid rain, etc. The then-U. S. Governor of the IMF and IBRD, Nicholas F. Brady, in his statement in the 1988 Annual Meetings of the Board of Governors of the World Bank Group in Berlin (West), from September 26-28, 1988, declared : "In pursuing our notional objectives, we must recognize our shared responsibilities to improve the world in which we live."[85]

As Mr. Alexander Shapleigh has told me, USAID is thinking in terms of organizing an international seminar

in London later this year (1989), with expected major participation by Japan and France, and also the UN, especially UNDP. The proposed conference may come up with a number of recommendations for the solution to the particular problems faced by Bangladesh. The solution may be either engineering or technical in nature, but the question remains that there must be political willingness as well as commitment by the participating governments and international organizations ; among these, the U. S. may take the lead. This is necessary because any effort they make together with private foundations in rich countries to assist Bangladesh in solving her above-mentioned problems would also be "an effective vehicle for economic development support."[86] If the U. S. President takes the lead and the Congress gives him necessary authorization, USAID can play an important role in providing the lion's share of the funding and, more important, in coordinating activities of other international donors to effect a proper solution to the problems faced by Bangladesh. We are now to wait and see how the U. S. administration responds to the challenge of Bangladesh's dual problems of water shortage in the dry season and severe flooding in the monsoon by not only giving necessary political support but also providing economic resources to work out a durable solution to these problems.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

More than two thousand years ago, the noted Athenian historian Thucydides asserted : "Wealth to us is not merely material for vain glory but an opportunity

for achievement ; and poverty we think it is no disgrace to acknowledge but a real degradation to make no effort to overcome."[87] In the latter part of the second half of the twentieth century, the Athenian advantage of prosperity is enjoyed by the U. S., and unfortunately Bangladesh is really one of the "wretched of the earth", to borrow the phrase of Frantz Fanon, not only because of her dire poverty but also because she is a highly disaster-prone country. It is not a disgrace for Bangladesh to acknowledge this basic fact. However, it would have been a matter of degradation for her if she had made no serious efforts to overcome it.

It is a matter of regret me that Bangladesh has been branded as an international basket case ; this is a wrong notion of the people of that country, who are persistently fighting against all odds to stand on their own feet. The history of Bangladesh since independence in 1971 testifies that she has had to appeal for international assistance, not owing to her own fault, but rather because she was constrained to do so as a result of a series disasters imposed on her by foreign governments as well as the unseen hand of nature. However, as was appreciated by Mr. Frederick M. Cole of OFDA, who accompanied the U. S. mission headed by Mr. Jay F. Morris of AID to Bangladesh in September 1988, for more than a decade, from 1975 to 1286, Bangladesh did not appeal for any international assistance, except in 1978, when she faced a problem of refugees imposed by the Burmese government, and in 1985 when she was hit by a severe cyclone, although during that period she was hit by as many as 54 "non-declared" disasters,

including eleven floods, seven cyclones, twelve storms and one drought, apart from the above-mentioned two "declared" disasters.[88] Bangladesh really deserves commendation from all quarters, as she relied primarily on self-help to combat those many disasters.

As far as U.S. prosperity is concerned, her viewpoint in utilizing this has been eloquently expressed in the speeches made by two of her post-war presidents—John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson. In 1958, before he became president. John Kennedy maintained that "American agricultural abundance offers a great opportunity for the United States to promote the interests of peace in a significant way,"[89] In 1968, President Johnson expressed the view that "[w]e know that a grain of wheat is a potent weapon in the arsenal of freedom."[90] But James Warner Bjorkman has shown that in spite of these pious intentions, such a "seemingly well-insulated program" as American food policy has been discredited as a result of presidential manipulation", as was the case in President Johnson's "short-tether' on food shipments during the latter half of the 1965-67 famine" in India.[91]

Coming back to the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988, it has been seen that in its enactment, political considerations took precedence over humanitarian concern. In the follow-up; though there have been encouraging signs so far, many people still express doubt whether the U. S. will assist Bangladesh in solving her problems of water shortage in the dry season and severe flooding in the monsoon by going to the extent, if necessary, of reorienting her relations with India. Evidently

the U. S. cannot be expected to go to that extent purely on humanitarian grounds. However, if Bangladesh can develop some bargaining strength, the U. S. might be persuaded to do that which will again prove the contention of the present paper that even in providing disaster assistance to Bangladesh, U. S. national interest takes precedence over humanitarian concern.

There are some reasons to be optimistic because, as has been expressed by such a prominent congressman as Rep. Matthew McHugh (D-N. Y.), a growing number of legislators espouses the view that genuine development in the Third World countries is also in the interest of the U. S.[92] Already the Report of the Task Force on Foreign Assistance to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U. S, House of Representatives (popularly known as the Hamilton Report) of February 1989, recognized the fact that "people can rise from poverty if they are healthy and educated and have the opportunity to participate in the economy.[93] It is imperative that for a poor and disaster-prone country like Bangladesh, which apparently seems to be a "hopeless," case and destined as "never to be developed," disaster relief be made a component part of foreign assistance to see if new hope can be instilled in such a case. This means essentially that in developed countries like the U. S., provision should be made for grants in case natural disaster hits any country, in addition to regular bilateral development assistance. This would demonstrate genuine desire by the donor countries to improve the lot of the poor recipients.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that now is high time to mobilize resources by persuading the Presi-

dent and the Congress to make positive and meaningful contributions to the solution of the dual problems of water shortage in the dry season and severe flooding in the monsoon faced by Bangladesh. Otherwise the enactment of the Bangladesh Disaster Assistance Act of 1988 and its logical extension, i. e. the findings of the Eastern Waters Study will be of no avail.

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4. See *Bangladesh : A Country Profile, op. cit.*, p. 12 ; see also *Bangladesh—Floods* (Situation Report No. 10, Office of U. S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, AID, October 4, 1988), p. 1.
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8. U. S. Global Interests in the 1990s : A New Approach (Final Report of the Seventy-Fifth American Assembly,

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
10. See M. A. Halim, "Lending Policy of the World Bank with Special Reference to its Contribution to the Economic Development of Bangladesh from 1972 to 1978", unpublished master's thesis, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, August, 1979.
11. *Bangladesh-Floods, op. cit.*, p. 2
12. Hans J. Morgenthau, in his *Politics Among Nations* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, first published in 1948), made a plausible argument that any foreign policy measure is taken for the promotion of national interest.
13. See a working draft prepared by Donald F. McHenry, with the assistance of Fred K. Kirschstein, on behalf of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, on "Ethical Considerations and Foreign Policy", in *Appendices : Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy*, Volume 7 (U. S. Government Document, June 1975), p. 300.
14. *Ibid.*
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17. Joint Ministerial Committee of the Board of Governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the Transfer of Real Resources to Developing Countries (Development Committee). *Environment and Development : Implementing the World Bank's New Policies* (Washington, DC : A World Bank Publication, 1988), pp. 14, 4.
18. *Ibid*, p. 17.
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24. *The Times* (London), March 8, 1989.
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26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
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33. For the transition from realist through pluralist to globalist perspectives of international relations, see Paul Viotti and Mark Kauppi, *International Relations Theory* (New York : Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), especially pp. 5-11.
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36. *Ibid.*
37. Experts estimate that "the U. S. trade deficit is likely to stay above $ 100 billion for the next few years." See Robert D. Hormats, "The International Economic Challenge", in *Foreign Policy*, No. 71 (Summer 1988), p. 107.
38. Charles S. Lenth, "The Role of the Peace Corps in U. S. Relations with South Asia", in *Appendices*, Vol. 7, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*
41. For a brief account of this, see *ibid.*, pp. 270-72.
42. See *Bangladesh—Floods, op. cit.*, pp. 7-8, for a detailed account of this.
43. See Memorandum for the President on "Bangladesh Flood Report" (prepared by Jay F. Morris, Deputy Administrator, USAID, September 19, 1988), p. 2. Emphasis added.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Bangladesh—Floods, op. cit.*, p. 5.
46. *Eastern Waters Study, op. cit.*, p. 1
47. Dr. Khan told me this in an interview on April 12, 1989.
48. The interview of Mr. Bannerman took place on May 11, 1989.
49. Ms. Lopez told me this on April 12, 1989, when I had a detailed discussion with her on this matter.
50. This information was supplied by Ms. Faye Henderson of the Office of U. S, Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) on May 3, 1989.
51. See *Bangladesh—Floods, op. cit.* pp. 3-11.
52. This information was also supplied by Ms. Henderson of OFDA.
53. Out of the total estimated deaths of the 1974 flood in Bangladesh of 28,000, a vast majority, i. e., 27,500 were the result of disease and starvation, whereas no death from starvation was reported in the total deaths from flooding of 2,055 in 1987, and 2,600 in 1988 until October 4, 1988. This information was gathered from official records in the OFDA.
54. Lloyd I. Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *et al.*, "The Coordination of Complexity in South Asia", in *Appendices*, Vol. 7, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
55. James A. Nathan and James K. Oliver, *Foreign Policy Making and the American Political System* (Boston : Little, Brown and Co., second edition, 1987), p. 145.
56. *The Times of India* (Bombay), December 4, 1988. Figures for the affected people and those who were rendered homeless

were obtained from the OFDA.

57. The interview with Mr. Cole took place on May 3, 1989. At that time, two other representatives from the OFDA, Ms. Henderson and Ms. Mary Little, were also present.
58. *Bangladesh—Floods, op. cit.*, p. 3.
59. Mr. Shapleigh told me this in an interview on April 26, 1989. Ms. Molly Kux of the Asia and Near East Bureau, USAID, was also present at that time.
60. *Eastern Waters Study, op. cit.*, p. xi.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 61.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
65. *Ibid*, p. 30.
66. Mr. Kabir expressed this view in an informal discussion session on April 12, 1989.
67. *The Eastern Waters Study, op. cit.*, p. 73. Emphasis added.
68. Ministry of Irrigation (Bangladesh), *National Water Plan*, Vol. I, "Sector Analysis", Vol. II, "Resources", Vol. III, "Alternative Plans", and "Summary Report" (Dhaka, 1986).
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70. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 24.
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77. For example, this excellent, highly relevant comment was made by Dr. I. M. Destler, Professor, School of Public Affairs, and Director of the Foreign Policy Process Seminar, University of Maryland at College Park.
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80. *Ibid.*
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88. The relevant data were provided by Ms. Henderson of the OFDA.
89. Quoted in James Warner Bjorkman, "Public Law 480 and the Policies of Self-Help and Short-Tether: Indo-American Relations, 1965-68," in *Appendices*, Vol. 7, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-209, especially p. 192.
92. Rep. Matthew McHugh expressed his opinion to the Foreign Policy Fellows when they met and had discussions with him on April 20, 1989.
93. *Report of the Task Force on Foreign Assistance to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U. S. House of Representatives* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, February 1989) p. 30.

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2. Ms. Constance A. Carrino, Policy Adviser for Population, Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of State, Washington, DC.

3. Mr. Frederick M. Cole, Assistant Director, Asia/Pacific of the Office of U. S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), USAID.
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5. Ms. Faye Henderson, OFDA.
6. Mr. Humayun Kabir, First Secretary, Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington, DC.
7. Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, Economic Minister, Embassy of Bangladesh, Washington, DC.
8. Ms. Molly Kux, Asia and Near East Bureau, USAID.
9. Ms. Mary Little, OFDA.
10. Ms. Siria Lopez, State Desk Officer for Bangladesh, Department of State, Washington, DC.
11. Mr. Alexander Shapleigh, Bangladesh Desk Officer, Office of South Asian Affairs, USAID.

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