Chapter 3

July–August: the Indo–Soviet Treaty

Despite these successes at the diplomatic level, in East Bengal itself the military and political situation facing the Pakistani authorities after the end of June became increasingly difficult. There was a continuing outflow of refugees; and although there was a lull in the second and third weeks of June, it proved to be temporary. The refugee figures again began to mount steadily from the approximately six millions reported by the Indian government in mid-June. Very few of those who had crossed the border earlier seemed to be willing or able to make use of the facilities provided for their repatriation. Inside East Pakistan the widespread damage done to property and communications during the military operations still had to be repaired. Almost everywhere those Bengalis who had stayed at their posts maintained a sullen and uncooperative passivity which delayed the work of reconstruction.

In East Pakistan and in India the leaders of the Bangla Desh movement and their official and unofficial supporters had spent the months of May and June in preparing for a terrorist and guerrilla campaign against the Pakistani ‘occupation forces’. As we have seen, by the end of April the establishment of control by the Pakistan army over the main centres of population in East Bengal had been followed by the withdrawal of a nucleus of organized Bengali resistance forces with the other refugees over the borders into India. Groups of ‘freedom fighters’ were also beginning to form in the interior, among the swamps of the Sundarbans in the south-west, in the Noakhali area (where there had been a small-scale revolutionary peasant ‘Naxalite’ movement before 25 March), and especially in the forested hilly areas in the centre of East Pakistan, south of Mymensingh.

The entry on to Indian soil of these armed groups of former members of the East Bengal Rifles, the East Pakistan Rifles, the Bengali

89 On pp. 75–6 there is a discussion of the possibility that the renewal of the exodus—in which Hindus had now become the largest elements was deliberately fostered by the military administration in East Pakistan, notwithstanding Islamabad’s official policy of reconciliation.

90 Their problems are discussed in K. Subrahmanyam, pp. 54–67, 77–9.
Police and other paramilitary forces—perhaps some 20,000 men in all—provided a means for the extension of Indian support for Bangla Desh. The provision of assistance for the *Mukti Fauj* (people’s army), followed logically from the earlier Indian decision, made at the end of March, that there could be no immediate direct intervention. As soon as it had become apparent by the end of April that a nucleus for a Bangla Desh military effort existed, the support already given to the Bangla Desh political forces was extended to it. When the straggling and dishevelled groups which had taken part in the Bengali resistance after 25 March arrived at the Indian borders they were greeted by the Indian Border Security Force and by representatives of the Bangla Desh Awami League provisional government, which had been proclaimed by Mr Tajuddin Ahmed earlier in the month. In mid-April the rudiments of a military structure was set up across the Indian borders under a former regular officer in the Pakistan army, Colonel A. G. Osmani, who was appointed to serve as a member of the Bangla Desh cabinet and as the commander of the *Mukti Fauj*. In later months his preoccupation with the preparation of a regular war on conventional lines came under heavy criticism from those who envisaged a long-drawn-out partisan war. But the authority he carried over from his former rank provided a valuable link between those Bengalis who, like himself, had been regulars in the Pakistan army and their new leaders in the complicated and fractious world of the exiled Bengali politicians.

Early in May Osmani’s forces were already beginning to think out their strategy while they were being regrouped in camps provided for them by India. As well as the regulars from the former Pakistan military and paramilitary units, there were among the floods of refugees who were beginning to pour across the border many young men anxious to volunteer for the fight against Pakistan. Some were recruited into the regular formations under Osmani’s command, but for most of them a brief spell of training as ‘freedom fighters’ was all that could be arranged. Much of this effort at military training arose spontaneously among young Bengali refugees; but instruction, arms, and other facilities were increasingly provided by the Border Security Forces and the Indian army. As the months passed after the beginning of May the Bangla Desh government-in-exile was also more and more active in mobilizing financial support in India and elsewhere for the purchase of arms.

Although the political world of Bangla Desh in exile was deeply divided by factional disputes, its almost complete dependence upon Indian support nevertheless held it together. Within the Awami League provisional government the most important of these divisions