Preface

This reconstruction of the events and decisions leading to the creation of the new independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971 draws upon many sources, many previously unavailable. We have based our analysis primarily on interviews with key political leaders and their principal advisers and associates in each of the countries immediately involved—Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. In addition, we have used numerous reports published by participants and observers of the grim events of 1971 and accounts by others with greater distance in terms of involvement, if not emotion. In several instances, these reports constituted primary data. We have, however, extended them and modified their interpretations in light of extensive new primary evidence.

Given the complexity of the accounts, our commitment to reconstructing the decision-making process and sequence of events as closely and accurately as possible, and our concern to elicit and record to the fullest extent possible every nuance of sentiment and perception, we decided from the outset that whenever possible we would conduct the interviews together. We believe that the joint interviews created an easier atmosphere for the participants, which often resulted in our being allowed more time for our inquiries. In addition, "observer reliability" was considerably enhanced, and we were able to obtain almost verbatim accounts of the recollections of those interviewed.

Our meetings ranged from one to two-and-one-half hours. Nearly half of those involved were interviewed twice, and several key figures were interviewed three or more times. Between interviews with one person we met with other participants, which allowed us in the follow-up interviews to present respondents with new interpretations and episodically countervailing evidence and in some cases to pursue new avenues that might otherwise have gone unexplored. In all cases we had unrestricted access to the
people we interviewed, and we were able to interview everyone alone, except for Gen. Agha Mohammed Yahya Khan (president of Pakistan from 1969 to 1971), whose son was with him because of the general’s physical infirmity at the time.

We interviewed as wide a range of participants in the decisions affecting war and peace in South Asia in 1971 as time, reason, and accessibility allowed. We did most of our interviews in India from June to September 1978 and in Bangladesh in July 1978. In April and May 1979 we interviewed people in Pakistan, England, and Washington, D.C. In India we met with the prime minister and principal ministers privy to decision making and senior civil servants intimately involved in affairs concerning Bangladesh, including major figures in key ministries as well as in the Prime Minister’s Secretariat. In Pakistan and Bangladesh we interviewed not only important figures in the President’s Office and the Office of the Chief Martial Law Administrator, their counterparts in East Pakistan, and general officers commanding at the time, but also leaders of political parties who were central participants or intermediaries in the early negotiations to reach a constitutional agreement.

We were unfortunately unable to interview several important leaders: Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who was hanged the morning we arrived in Pakistan to start conducting our research; Gen. Tikka Khan, who was under confinement when we were in Pakistan; and several leaders of the Awami League, including the two most dominant—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had been assassinated, and Tajuddin Ahmed, who had been murdered in the Dhaka Central Jail along with several other leaders before we began our study.

Before we began our interviewing, we developed a framework for a more focused and refined exploration by researching the generally accessible public documents. We spent more time in joint preparation for a particular interview than in the interview itself. We were fortunate at the outset of our research to be able to use records of international radio newscasts in the Archives of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi. We are indebted to the institute’s directors, K. Subrahmanyam and P. R. Chari, who made its facilities available to us, and to the research scholars affiliated with the institute, whose lively interest in our
work made our periods of research there much more challenging than they would otherwise have been. The newscasts of special utility to our inquiry were those of Radio Pakistan (in Bengali, Dari, English, Kashmiri, Punjabi, and Pushto) and All-India Radio (Bengali, English, and Hindi), together with newscasts of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, Radio Moscow, and the Voice of America. The newspaper archives of the Indian Council on World Affairs in Sapru House next door to the institute were most useful in refining the sequence of events. The members of the staff there were ever willing to help us locate materials.

Our analysis is also based on documents from the U.S. Department of State, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Council, and Executive Office of the President released to us under the Freedom of Information Act. In addition we used testimony on file at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Since these recollections were given, and are held, in confidence, we have not presented them in our analysis in any manner that is directly attributable to their sources.

We wish to express our deepest appreciation to those who supported our project. Our gratitude goes to the Canada Council and the International Crisis Behavior Project at McGill University, whose director, Michael Brecher, extended support to the project during the early stages. We are also grateful for the assistance of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies in our research in Pakistan. Both the International Crisis Behavior Project, under whose auspices our study was launched, and the American Institute of Pakistan Studies supported our ideas for the interviews. Richard Sisson extends his appreciation to the Council on Foreign Relations and to the Research Committee of the Academic Senate and the Council on International and Comparative Studies of the University of California, Los Angeles. Leo Rose expresses his appreciation to the Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Our gratitude also goes to Celia Carrera, without whose patience and expert word-processing skills, this study would have been even longer coming to closure.

Finally, we want to thank all the people we interviewed for giving so freely of their time in recalling particulars of critical decisions and events and for sharing their feelings about them, the
motivations behind decisions they made, and their perceptions and sentiments about the motivations and calculations of others. In many cases these recollections were as intense and vivid as if the speakers were reliving their experiences—released after having been frozen in time.