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Winning the Peace

THE war is over. Through the claims and counter-claims of tanks and planes destroyed and casualties inflicted the somber fact stares the two countries in the face that at considerable cost in human and material terms they have achieved nothing. This had begun to be plain well before the cease-fire on early Thursday morning. A cease-fire looked inevitable even a week ago and Pakistan's seeming last-minute hesitations could not possibly last: and they didn't. Bhutto called the emergency session of the Security Council only to rub in Pakistan's demand that cease-fire and withdrawal of forces must be followed by action on the Kashmir issue, adding this time the threat that Pakistan would quit the UN if such action was not forthcoming.

While the war has benefited neither country, it has had two general consequences: on the negative side, it has embittered feelings and hardened attitudes on both sides; on the positive side, it has forcibly drawn the attention of the world to the fragile quality of peace on the Indian sub-continent and to the fact that the basic causes of this cannot be left to be taken care of by passage of time. In the Security Council's resolution the major powers have as good a basis as they can hope for to follow up this awareness with action.

India's own response to the Security Council resolution has to be measured but positive at every stage. The withdrawal of forces to the positions of August 5 will be no easy matter. There is the question of the Pakistani infiltrators who are already in Kashmir. The resolution which calls for withdrawal of "all armed personnel" could be taken to cover them. However, how is their withdrawal to be secured? The abandonment of the strategic passes captured by the army across the cease-fire line in Kashmir will present another difficult decision. In his speech in Parliament on Wednesday announcing the cease-fire Prime Minister Shastri clearly stated that India will not agree to an automatic withdrawal by both sides to the positions of August 5 without adequate safeguards against recurrence of armed infiltration into Kashmir. What safeguards will the U N give?

It is, however, the part of the resolution which refers to steps to be taken to settle "the political problem underlying the present conflict" which will present us with the hardest decisions. It is no use pretending that the sense and purpose of this reference do not conflict with our position on Kashmir. The possibility of a negative response to this part of the resolution is, therefore, very great. It is particularly likely that a miscalculation of the extent of international support for our position may lead to false steps. It will not do to formulate our response to the U N resolution on the assumption that the West has written off Pakistan. It is a sobering thought in this context that this is the first time in years that a Security Council resolution has made a reference to the Kashmir question, which we have always tried to prevent and in the past succeeded in preventing with the help of the Soviet veto. That the present resolution had the support of the Soviet Union would seem to indicate that the big power agreement over ending the war is likely to extend to finding a solution to the Kashmir problem.

There is no need, however, to view this as a development unfavourable to our interests. What is necessary is to subject to rigorous scrutiny —reappraisal, if necessary—what our interests really are. The need to bend all energies and resources to the tasks of development and to maintain and strengthen the secular character of the nation as also the emerging pattern of power relations in Asia dictate that friendly relations with Pakistan are important to our interests. This is certainly not to say that we ought to accept Pakistan's demands on Kashmir or on any other matter. To be convinced that there is no alternative to sticking fast to our positions short of giving in altogether is to betray a sad want of faith in the possibilities of diplomacy.

As Prime Minister Shastri said in his broadcast on Thursday night, let us not mistake the cease-fire for the dawn of peace. At the same time, let us not hamstring our efforts to win a peace with inflexible attitudes and rigid postures.

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