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Diplomatic Testimony and Institutional Silence during the 1971 Bangladesh Genocide

A Communication Analysis of American Diplomatic Documents, 28 March–10 April 1971

Abstract

How can an institution receive explicit reports of mass violence while limiting their implications for its own conduct? This article examines five American diplomatic records dated between 28 March and 10 April 1971 to analyse the relationship between testimony, acknowledgement, and responsibility during the Bangladesh genocide. Through a qualitative reading of reporting, collective dissent, senior discussion, and departmental response, it distinguishes four communicative operations: naming violence, assessing credibility, assigning obligations, and regulating circulation. The documents reveal disagreement not simply over information, but over the policy consequences that information should carry. Reports identifying targeted violence were answered through arguments concerning uncertainty, sovereignty, citizen protection, and appropriate channels. Yet departmental statements, evacuation measures, invitations for policy proposals, and an expressed convergence of views complicate any claim of complete institutional suppression. The article therefore understands institutional silence as a selective limitation of acknowledgement and consequence, rather than an absence of speech. Its contribution is an explicit analytical distinction between receiving testimony and allowing testimony to reshape institutional responsibility. The findings remain confined to the selected exchange and do not substitute American diplomatic perceptions for Bangladeshi experiences or establish a comprehensive causal explanation of United States policy.

Keywords: Bangladesh genocide; diplomatic testimony; institutional silence; collective dissent; framing

1. Introduction

A report of mass violence can arrive at the proper office, provoke discussion, and receive a formal answer without acquiring the consequences its authors demand. This possibility is central to the American diplomatic exchange examined here. Between late March and early April 1971, officials in Dacca described targeted violence and challenged their government's response. Their interlocutors in Washington did not simply lack information. They contested the appropriateness, evidential basis, timing, and circulation of the proposed response. The analytical problem is therefore how knowledge becomes institutionally consequential, and how that process can be interrupted even when communication continues.

The Bangladesh Liberation War supplies the historical setting, but the object of inquiry is deliberately narrower than the war's diplomatic history. The article examines five

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records from the opening phase of the crisis, published in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS). These comprise an early warning, a collective dissent, a senior telephone conversation, a departmental reply, and a further statement of disagreement. Their close relationship permits an examination of how reporting becomes argument and how an argument about atrocities becomes an argument about official responsibilities. It does not permit a comprehensive account of American knowledge throughout 1971.

The familiar prominence of the Blood Telegram makes this distinction necessary. Gary J. Bass's *The Blood Telegram* situates American diplomacy within a wider history of the crisis. The present article returns to a small documentary sequence to investigate its communicative organisation. It asks which descriptions of violence were advanced, which forms of response were requested, and how authority over the response was exercised. Its contribution is an interpretive framework for reading these relationships, not the discovery of previously unknown records or a claim that the selected documents exhaust the existing scholarship.

This approach also connects diplomatic history with the study of representation. Muntassir Mamoon's discussion of *Shankar's Weekly* identifies political cartoons as material for understanding representations of the Liberation War (13). Diplomatic records constitute a different representational setting: their immediate audience consists principally of officials empowered to assess and act upon information. Their language is consequently significant both for what it describes and for the administrative purposes it serves. A report may identify victims, but it may also define the limits

of the reporting office's authority or invite a decision from another level.

The article uses “Bangladesh genocide” as its historical frame while keeping contemporary diplomatic usage separate from legal adjudication. The International Association of Genocide Scholars' 2023 resolution recognises the crimes committed during the Liberation War in terms of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. That later scholarly recognition is distinct from the evidential status of a particular 1971 cable. Similarly, the appearance of the word genocide in a diplomatic document is evidence of contemporary naming, not an independently sufficient demonstration of every element specified in the Genocide Convention (United Nations, art. II).

The central argument is that institutional silence can operate through selective acknowledgement. An institution may recognise suffering while declining the attribution of responsibility or the policy obligation proposed by its witnesses. This claim requires careful limits. Citizen protection, uncertainty, and the maintenance of communications were real matters of official concern in the exchange. Their invocation cannot automatically be treated as deception. The task is to examine how they shaped the answer, including evidence that complicates the argument. Following a conceptual and methodological discussion, the article analyses naming, dissent, and response before examining counterevidence and the archive's representational limits. Throughout, the question is what the documents enable us to say about institutional communication, rather than what later knowledge might

tempt us to assume about every participant's motives during this formative diplomatic exchange.

2. Testimony and Institutional Silence: A Conceptual Framework

Diplomatic testimony combines proximity to events with membership in an institution. Officials report what they observe, what others tell them, and what they infer from incomplete evidence. They also communicate within a hierarchy that distributes authority to assess information and determine policy. These functions do not always align. Proximity may strengthen a claim to knowledge without granting the witness control over the response. Conversely, authority to respond may rest with officials whose access to events is mediated through reports. The documents examined here make the relationship between these positions visible without resolving every disagreement in favour of either.

Robert M. Entman's account of framing offers a useful vocabulary for this relationship. Framing involves selecting and making aspects of perceived reality salient in ways that support problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and proposed remedies (52). Applied to this exchange, the question is not simply whether violence appeared in the record. It is whether the violence was framed as targeted persecution demanding condemnation, an internal conflict requiring restraint, or an emergency requiring the evacuation of Americans. These interpretations could overlap, but they directed attention toward different objects of responsibility and different possible actions.

Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial* provides a broader conceptual point: knowing about suffering and

acknowledging its implications are not identical. This article develops that distinction into a bounded analytical proposition. Institutional silence is understood here as a restriction on the public attribution, administrative circulation, or practical implications of reported violence. The definition does not imply that all restraint constitutes denial. It identifies a question that must be answered through documentary comparison: which parts of the testimony were accepted, which requested consequences were disputed, and what reasons were offered for separating them?

Miranda Fricker's discussion of testimonial injustice directs attention to credibility and power. Her account concerns a speaker receiving an unfair credibility deficit through prejudice. The present documents do not independently establish that specific mechanism. Disagreement between senior and subordinate officials is not, by itself, evidence of testimonial injustice. Fricker's framework is therefore used as a sensitising question rather than a ready diagnosis: when a report is received, are its factual claims assessed, or is the standing of the speaker made the main problem? The distinction prevents institutional hierarchy from becoming a substitute for evidence of prejudicial treatment.

Four analytical dimensions follow. Naming concerns the vocabulary used to describe violence and identify those targeted. Credibility concerns the distinctions between observation, report, rumour, and uncertainty. Obligation concerns the connection drawn between knowledge and an expected institutional response. Circulation concerns who may receive, discuss, or transmit the communication. These are interpretive dimensions rather than variables assigned numerical scores. A single passage can address several at

once. A request to limit distribution, for example, can express concern for confidentiality while also restricting the audience available to a policy challenge. Its meaning depends on its context and stated purpose.

The term silence consequently requires an identifiable object. Silence about perpetrators differs from silence about suffering; restricted internal distribution differs from complete suppression; delayed public criticism differs from an absence of humanitarian action. Treating these as equivalent would make the concept impossible to challenge. The present analysis instead tests a specific proposition: the exchange shows efforts to contain the consequences of testimony while allowing some reporting and discussion to continue. Evidence of public statements, evacuation activity, policy invitations, or renewed ordinary communication must therefore be incorporated. A persuasive interpretation should explain such evidence alongside the restrictions, rather than preserve its thesis by defining every institutional action as another form of silence. This requirement gives the interpretation an identifiable evidential boundary and a basis for revision.

3. Sources and Analytical Method

The primary corpus consists of five connected records published by the United States Department of State's Office of the Historian. Telegram 959, dated 28 March 1971, reports violence in Dacca and recommends a response. Telegram 1138, dated 6 April and published as document 19 in FRUS volume XI, records collective dissent. Document 20 in that volume reproduces a telephone conversation between William Rogers and Henry Kissinger on the same date. Telegram 58039, dated 7 April, gives the department's

reply. Telegram 1249, transmitted on 10 April, elaborates the dissent and adds the principal officer's comments.

The selection follows an explicit argumentative connection rather than a claim to statistical representativeness. The departmental reply identifies the dissent cable as its reference; the later telegram expands the dissent; and the senior conversation discusses the contested message. The 28 March report supplies an earlier formulation of naming and response within the same crisis. Together they allow a close reading of a bounded exchange across different institutional positions. They do not constitute five independent confirmations of the events described. Repetition can reflect shared information or reference to an earlier message rather than separate observation.

The unit of analysis is the passage that describes violence, evaluates knowledge, proposes or defends an action, or regulates communication. Each document is read first within its own structure and then in relation to the others. The comparison distinguishes what a speaker reports from what the speaker requests and how an addressee answers that request. Particular attention is given to changes in the object of discussion, such as a movement from violence against Bengalis to the safety of American citizens, or from policy criticism to the risk of a press leak.

The analytical record is made traceable through numbered paragraphs and published page references. Telegram 959 connects reporting in paragraphs 1–4 with a proposed diplomatic response in paragraph 5. The dissent cable joins a collective declaration to the principal officer's separate comments. The telephone conversation is located on pages 47–48 of volume XI. The departmental response combines a

defence of public restraint, an evacuation account, and instructions concerning distribution. The final telegram separates the staff's elaboration from Blood's concluding assessment. These distinctions provide the basis for the interpretations developed below, without invented coding frequencies or reliability statistics.

Chronology requires an additional precaution. A transmission date is not necessarily the date on which every passage was composed. Blood states that the substantive comments transmitted on 10 April had been written alongside the original dissent; his concluding comments address a subsequently perceived convergence (“Telegram 1249,” par. 10). Accordingly, the article does not interpret the entire 10 April document as a reaction composed after Washington's reply. It also separates contemporary text from FRUS editorial notes. Later contextual information and memoir references supplied by editors are not silently attributed to the participants' knowledge at the time.

The method remains qualitative and interpretive. It does not establish private intentions, measure the effectiveness of evacuation, reconstruct every route by which information reached the president, or identify the policy outcome of every recommendation. Nor does it use the frequency of the word genocide as a measure of moral awareness. Negative cases are actively retained: acknowledged uncertainty, accounts of official action, and indications of renewed dialogue are considered alongside restrictive language. Finally, the corpus privileges American official communication. Its strength lies in making an institutional argument inspectable; its limitation is that Bangladeshi experiences appear through an external administrative

record. The article therefore treats diplomatic testimony as evidence about both reported violence and the politics of reporting, while refusing to equate the archive with the full experience of those who endured the violence.

4. Naming the Early Warning and the Limits of Knowledge

Telegram 959 places the problem of naming at the beginning of the exchange. Its subject identifies the reported violence as “Selective Genocide,” while its opening describes the consulate's position as one of horrified witnessing. The body connects the violence to military action and the targeting of Awami League supporters, students, intellectuals, Bengalis, and Hindus. It also reports people seeking refuge and describes the immediate security environment (“Telegram 959,” pars. 1–4). The significance of this language is relational: the violence is presented as directed against identifiable people, rather than as an undifferentiated breakdown of public order.

The document is nevertheless not a transparent inventory of verified deaths. Its language distinguishes reports from rumour, including in its discussion of individual university figures. Those qualifications must survive historical interpretation. Converting every reported name into an established casualty would erase the document's own evidential distinctions. Equally, the presence of uncertainty about particular individuals does not mean that the cable makes no broader claim about targeting. An adequate reading holds both points together: the message advances a patterned account of violence while marking uneven certainty within the information available to its authors (“Telegram 959,” pars. 1–2).

This distinction matters because institutional responses can move between different scales of uncertainty. Doubt about a particular report may justify checking that report. It does not automatically invalidate every description in the same message. Conversely, the force of an overall account cannot make each detail certain. The analytical question is therefore how uncertainty is specified and used. Does it lead to a request for corroboration of an identified claim, or does it become a reason to defer the wider response? The early cable establishes the evidential terrain on which that later disagreement takes place, without itself answering every question of verification.

The final paragraph makes the report explicitly political. Blood questions the existing American posture and proposes that shock be communicated at least privately to the Pakistani government. He anticipates that identification as the source might lead to his removal and compromise the consulate's communications (“Telegram 959,” par. 5). The requested response is thus neither an undefined demand to act nor an uncomplicated appeal for public denunciation. It is a specific diplomatic proposal accompanied by an assessment of institutional cost. The witness asks the institution to make reported knowledge matter while acknowledging that doing so could weaken its capacity to continue reporting.

That acknowledgement complicates an opposition between courageous witnessing and purely bureaucratic caution. Concern for communications appears within the critical report itself. The relevant disagreement is not whether consequences exist, but which consequences should govern the decision. For the cable's author, the possibility of reduced

reporting capacity does not eliminate the case for a private expression of shock. In this sense, testimony includes practical judgement. Its moral language and its administrative reasoning support one another: the document explains why a response is warranted and identifies the operational vulnerability that the response might create.

The cable's use of genocide also requires analytical precision. Article II of the Genocide Convention concerns specified acts committed with intent to destroy a protected national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, in whole or in part. Political affiliation alone is not among its listed group categories (United Nations, art. II). The cable's grouping of political and religious targets therefore cannot be imported wholesale into a legal conclusion. Its historical importance lies in showing that explicit language of targeted destruction entered official communication at this early moment. The subsequent question is what institutional force that naming acquired. The record supports an analysis of contemporary recognition and proposed response; it does not relieve the researcher of distinguishing diplomatic description, historical explanation, and the requirements of legal classification.

5. Collective Dissent and Diplomatic Judgement

The 6 April dissent changes the form of the intervention. Instead of presenting only a report and a recommendation, it records an expressly collective challenge to policy. Officials associated with the consulate, aid administration, and information service identify their position as one taken in their professional capacity. The opening joins moral interests with national interests, objects to the absence of condemnation, and questions the treatment of the crisis as an internal matter (“Telegram From the Consulate,” par. 1). The

communication is therefore an attempt to redefine responsible official conduct from within the institution that determines it.

Collective authorship matters because it alters the basis on which the message asks to be heard. The signatories present their disagreement as shared professional judgement, rather than an isolated personal reaction. The list of names makes that judgement attributable. Nevertheless, signatures do not disclose each person's private reasoning, degree of conviction, or independent access to every reported event. The document supports a claim about an authorised collective statement, not a psychological reconstruction of its contributors. Its evidential value resides in the public position they adopted within the diplomatic system and the response that position elicited.

Blood's appended comments establish a second, distinct layer of authority. He authorises use of the telegram, supports the officers' right to dissent, and subscribes to their views while declining to sign their statement as principal officer (“Telegram From the Consulate,” pars. 4–5). Reducing the document to a lone heroic voice would obscure this arrangement. The text preserves both collective initiative and supervisory support. It also shows that authority can enable criticism within an organisation: hierarchy is not only an obstacle to testimony, since a superior can make a channel available and defend the legitimacy of its use.

The cable's argument further resists a simple division between morality and strategy. Blood predicts a Bengali victory and independence, and reasons that continued one-sided support could damage future American relationships (“Telegram From the Consulate,” par. 6). This is a

prospective judgement expressed in April, not evidence that every official already knew the eventual outcome. Its function is to make policy revision intelligible in the institution's own terms. Moral objection is accompanied by an argument about future interests, giving the dissent more than one basis on which to claim official attention.

The later elaboration sharpens the dispute over what counts as legitimate reasoning. The staff reject the treatment of their reaction as merely emotional, question the legitimacy of military rule, and connect the crisis to self-determination (“Telegram 1249,” pars. 3–5). These are substantive disagreements about description and political authority. A humanitarian frame centred on suffering can coexist with an official view that the sovereign government's jurisdiction sets limits on response. The dissent challenges that coexistence by arguing that the identity of the governing authority and the character of its violence must enter the assessment of responsibility.

Read together, these passages show testimony being translated into a claim upon the institution. The officers do not merely ask Washington to know more; they ask it to reason differently about what it already receives. The distinction explains why an answer consisting only of concern or continued observation would not satisfy their stated objection. At the same time, the text does not establish that their proposals would necessarily have achieved their intended effects. Its importance for this analysis is narrower and more secure: it makes visible a contested connection between description, moral evaluation, anticipated political outcomes, and professional obligation. The institution's response can then be assessed against the actual terms of that

connection, rather than against an unspecified expectation that awareness should automatically produce immediate and effective policy action.

6. Responsibility and Circulation in Washington's Response

The Rogers–Kissinger telephone conversation on 6 April brings circulation to the foreground. Rogers objects to the dissent cable and its distribution; the discussion anticipates a leak and political exposure. Kissinger states an intention to withhold the message from the president around the time of a speech and not to forward it ("Transcript" 47–48). This is direct evidence of an expressed decision about a particular communication. It does not prove that the president received no information about the crisis from other sources, or that the decision determined all subsequent handling of the cable.

The conversation is significant because the report's institutional reception becomes a problem of audience and timing. Concern about atrocities remains present, but concern about the cable's movement competes with it. Reports of violence by East Pakistanis also enter the discussion ("Transcript" 48). Such references cannot be taken as independently verified findings merely because senior officials mention them. Here they are evidence of the arguments being brought into the exchange. The communicative effect is to contest the dissent's authority while directing attention toward the risks its circulation could create for the administration.

The departmental reply of 7 April is more extensive and should be read on its own terms. It identifies protection and evacuation of Americans, the internal character attributed to

the conflict, and conflicting reports as reasons for public restraint. It also explicitly rejects equating the violence attributed to the different sides. The reply lists earlier public statements concerning developments, suffering, restrictions on journalists, and humanitarian assistance ("Telegram 58039," par. 2). These passages disprove a literal claim that the department had said nothing. The relevant issue is what those statements acknowledged and whether they answered the dissent's demand for condemnation.

The reply also supplies a detailed defence of evacuation decisions. It gives an account of recommendations, approval, Pakistani objections to an American military airlift, and alternative arrangements ("Telegram 58039," par. 4). The present corpus cannot independently adjudicate every operational claim in that account. Analytically, however, the passage shows how responsibility is prioritised. The department treats the allegation of inadequate protection of Americans as a particularly serious charge requiring evidence. This focus does not erase concern for Bangladeshi suffering, but it establishes a more immediate and institutionally defined obligation around which the reply organises its defence.

The same message welcomes policy proposals and acknowledges that a possible independent Bangladesh would have implications for review. It then directs further messages in the series into the NODIS channel, explicitly linking restricted dissemination to the possibility of press leakage ("Telegram 58039," pars. 5–6). Openness to recommendations and control over their circulation appear together. The resulting pattern is neither unrestricted deliberation nor complete exclusion. Dissent remains

admissible, while the department seeks to govern the audience and route through which it becomes available. That combination is central to the article's understanding of selective acknowledgement.

The strongest conclusion concerns the architecture of response, not the private sincerity of its authors. Washington answers reported violence through several institutional responsibilities, some directed toward victims and some toward Americans, policy management, and confidentiality. The question of condemnation is thereby situated among other questions over which the centre claims authority. Caution may be operationally defensible in particular circumstances; the documents do not eliminate that possibility. They do show that receiving testimony does not settle which obligation takes precedence. The silence identified here concerns the limited uptake of the witnesses' requested attribution and response, together with an explicit effort to narrow circulation. This interpretation preserves the reply's substantive content while explaining why extensive official speech could coexist with the dissenters' charge that their government had failed to answer the violence adequately.

7. Counterevidence and the Representational Limits of the Archive

The 10 April telegram prevents the exchange from being read as a simple progression toward total suppression. After the staff's substantive objections, Blood reports a sense that Washington, Islamabad, and Dacca are approaching a common understanding. He discourages another rebuttal and proposes that forthcoming recommendations proceed through ordinary channels, with restrictions appropriate to

their sensitivity (“Telegram 1249,” pars. 10–11). These remarks are consequential counterevidence. They show an expressed expectation that policy discussion can continue and that recommendations need not remain identified exclusively with a dissenting group or confined to the special channel.

Their force must nevertheless be specified. An expressed sense of convergence is not proof that the parties agreed on every factual question, reversed policy, or achieved the proposed outcome. Nor does a proposal to resume normal transmission establish that every later communication followed that route. The document records an assessment and an intended procedure at that moment. Its temporal structure also matters: because the substantive critique had been drafted earlier, it cannot be treated as an uninterrupted escalation composed in response to the department's latest position. The record contains criticism and attempted accommodation within the same transmitted message.

This counterevidence refines the central argument. If institutional silence meant the complete disappearance of testimony, the continued exchange and invitation for proposals would refute it. If it means a contested limitation on the consequences and circulation of testimony, those same passages reveal its boundaries and possible negotiation. The analysis therefore identifies neither an omnipotent centre nor powerless witnesses. It identifies officials seeking to influence policy through an institution that could answer them, restrict their audience, and still leave room for further recommendations. The conclusion is about an uneven communicative process, not a closed system whose outcome was already fixed.

The archive introduces a second limitation. FRUS makes selected American official records accessible, but its availability should not determine whose experience counts as historical knowledge. In these documents, Bengalis commonly appear as people reported upon, sheltered, targeted, or represented in an argument about American conduct. Their presence in the record is significant, yet mediated. The credentials of diplomatic witnesses may help explain why a report reached decision-makers; they do not make those witnesses the owners of the events described. An account centred on their moral conflict risks displacing the people whose suffering made that conflict possible.

Scholarship concerned with Bangladeshi experience provides an essential corrective to this tendency. Nayanika Mookherjee's *The Spectral Wound* addresses sexual violence and public memory, while Yasmin Saikia's *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh* centres remembering and wartime experience. These works direct attention to dimensions that the present diplomatic corpus cannot adequately recover. They are invoked to mark the limits of the article's perspective, not to supply unexamined corroboration for particular incidents in the cables. A diplomatic communication study cannot become a history of survivors merely by appending their experiences to an argument whose evidential centre remains elsewhere.

The same caution applies to the term witness. Consular testimony includes direct observation, information received from others, and interpretation. Maintaining those differences is part of respecting the original sources of knowledge, including people whose names do not survive in the official exchange. Future comparison with Bangladeshi

testimony, local records, and other diplomatic archives could investigate where accounts converge and where institutional selection changes what becomes visible. Such research would extend the evidence rather than merely enlarge the number of American documents. For the present study, the appropriate boundary is clear: these records illuminate how one foreign institution processed reports of violence. They neither determine the total meaning of 1971 nor confer historical reality upon experiences that existed independently of foreign acknowledgement.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The five documents reveal a distinction between access to information and acceptance of its proposed consequences. Reports from Dacca named targeted violence, challenged policy, and requested an altered response. Their reception involved disputes over certainty, sovereignty, protection, professional judgement, and distribution. This pattern makes an exclusively informational explanation inadequate for the selected exchange. The institution was not simply waiting for a report to arrive. Its officials were arguing over how received reports should enter decisions and which obligations they should activate. The resulting struggle concerned the authority of knowledge as much as its availability.

The article's contribution is to separate four dimensions that are easily collapsed: naming violence, assessing credibility, assigning obligations, and regulating circulation. Their separation allows a more precise account of institutional silence. A document can be received and discussed while its proposed attribution of responsibility is left unanswered; recommendations can be invited while their audience is

narrowed. Conversely, an institution can take protective or humanitarian action without adopting the full interpretation advanced by its witnesses. These distinctions make criticism more exact because they identify what was acknowledged, what was contested, and what the surviving record leaves unresolved.

The findings also qualify the idea that moral language lies outside professional diplomacy. In the dissent, moral objection accompanies arguments about future political relationships and the likely direction of the conflict. In the early warning, a proposed response is accompanied by an assessment of communication risks. The officials' disagreement therefore cannot be reduced to emotion on one side and calculation on the other. Both reporting and response contain judgements about evidence, consequences, and institutional duty. What divides the positions is partly the weight assigned to those judgements and the response each position considers appropriate.

A further implication concerns the evaluation of early warning. The existence of a warning should not be treated as the endpoint of analysis. Researchers also need to examine what happened to its categories, requested measures, and intended audience. In this case, the route from reporting to senior discussion reveals that information could become politically troublesome precisely because it was available for circulation. The question then changes from whether knowledge existed to how its movement and implications were governed. This is an analytical lesson drawn from the exchange, not a universal causal law about all responses to mass violence.

The limitations remain substantial. Five connected records cannot establish the totality of American knowledge, the intentions of every participant, or the effectiveness of alternative policies. They cannot determine all the reasons for restraint or independently verify every reported incident. Public statements, evacuation measures, invitations for proposals, and Blood's expressed perception of convergence prevent a claim of complete suppression. The interpretation would need revision if broader evidence showed that the proposed responses were fully adopted through other channels. Its strength is that its claims can be checked against particular passages, rather than protected through a definition of silence that explains every possible outcome.

For scholarship on the Bangladesh genocide, this bounded approach keeps external acknowledgement in proportion. American records are valuable evidence of how reports were received and managed; they are not the measure of Bangladeshi suffering, resistance, or historical agency. The documents show an institution capable of receiving explicit testimony while disputing the responsibilities attached to it. They also show witnesses attempting to make that testimony consequential through collective judgement and continued engagement. Institutional silence, in this exchange, was neither a simple lack of words nor an unbroken refusal to listen. It was a contested limitation on what acknowledged violence would require the institution to say, circulate, and do. Understanding that limitation helps explain why the arrival of knowledge could coexist with a profound disagreement over the adequacy of the response.

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The Mirpur Killing Field or Boddho Bhumi. The remains were recovered from a safety tank. Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh. December 197. Photographer: Rashid Talukder