

## 10. NEHRU'S FOREIGN POLICY —A REVIEW

ADI H. DOCTOR\*

NEHRU commenced his speech at the Bangalore Session of the Indian National Congress in 1960 thus: "One of the main things which in the years following independence have attracted the world's attention to India has been our broad-based approach to international affairs, particularly the policy of non-alignment."<sup>1</sup> This quotation from Nehru indicates the broad basis on which Nehru founded the foreign policy of this country. Any coherent and rational foreign policy needs, what David Wilkinson has called 'a general line of policy' on which to base itself and which helps provide a running thread of unity through its various facets such as defence policy, armaments, foreign aid, and specific area policies.<sup>2</sup> For Nehru that general line of policy was non-alignment.

Although it is customary to speak of non-alignment as Nehru's foreign policy and some even accused him of following a foreign policy which was 'a figment of his personal opinion and obsessions,' Nehru was shrewd enough to know that foreign policies are not determined by one or two individuals however powerful or important they may be. As Nehru observed in a speech at the reception to Russian leaders in 1955, "India has a very strong individuality for thousands of years. We have a mind of our own, a soul and spirit of our own," Nehru went on to assert, therefore "to consider that we can tie ourselves with this or that group regardless of what we are, seems to be a complete misunderstanding of what India has been in the past, or what she is or what she is going to be in the future."<sup>3</sup> In

\*Dr Adi H. Doctor is Head, Department of Politics and Civics, Bombay University Centre of Post-Graduate Instruction and Research, Panaji, Goa, India.

other words, newly independent India was not going to tie its foreign policy to that of any other power, however mighty. It was Nehru's faith that India must particularly avoid the two super-powers and their 'cold' war. It was Nehru's firm belief that India's foreign policy can and ought to be non-aligned. Now, 'ought' was a moral issue; 'can' was a matter of geography.

Explaining the geopolitical compulsions of non-alignment to the Constituent Assembly (Legislative), on 8 March, 1948 Nehru said, "I can understand some of the smaller countries of Europe or some of the smaller countries of Asia being forced by circumstances to bow down before some of the greater powers and becoming practically satellites of those powers, because they cannot help it. The power opposed to them is so great and they have nowhere to turn. But I do not think that consideration applied to India."<sup>4</sup> Again, in the Rajya Sabha in 1957, Nehru observed, "I do not say that our country is superior, that we are above passion and prejudice, hatred and fury. But as things are, there are certain factors which help us. First of all, we are geographically so situated that we are not drawn into controversies with that passionate fury that some other countries are. This is not due to our goodness or badness, but is a matter of geography."<sup>5</sup>

But non-alignment was not a mere geographical dictate. It was a policy, Nehru claimed, based on India's moral heritage. "I have not originated it," he once explained. "It is a policy inherent in the circumstances of India, inherent in the past thinking of India, inherent in the whole mental outlook of India, inherent in the conditioning of the Indian mind during our struggle for freedom and inherent in the circumstances of the world today. I come in by the mere accidental fact that during these few years I have represented that policy as foreign minister."<sup>6</sup>

Nehru refused to accept that "there are only two ways of action in the world today, and one must take this way or that . . . I repudiate that attitude of mind. If we accept that there are only two ways, then we certainly have to join the cold war—and if not an actual military bloc, at least a mental military bloc. I just do not see why the possession of great armed might or great financial power should necessarily lead to right deci-

sions or a right mental outlook . . . I say this with all respect to the great countries. But I am not prepared even as an individual, much less as the foreign minister of this country, to give up my right of independent judgement to anybody else in other countries. That is the essence of our policy.”<sup>7</sup>

And it was not once but on many occasions after 1947 that Nehru repeatedly asserted that his foreign policy had grown “out of our past way of thinking and our declarations”: and that our policy must be “in keeping with the tradition and temper of the country”. It would be an exercise in itself to determine and elaborate the various aspects of India’s past heritage which went into the making of the non-alignment policy, but one can certainly mention here Buddha’s elucidation of the *Majhima* or Middle Path; the *Gita* doctrine of *anasakti* or non-attachment; the *Vedant* instruction to be detached *saksi* or spectators of the world and the Jaina belief that all doctrines are only partial truths.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to geographical and past compulsions, Nehru, a very vocal foreign minister elaborated on several occasions other contemporary compulsions.

It is generally observed that Nehru conceived of non-alignment to avoid spill-over of the cold war to the new nations because such a spill-over would prevent the developing nations from reaching decisions independently. However, Nehru would have advocated a non-aligned policy even if the historical circumstances of his day were different and there was no intense cold war. This is because Nehru’s study of European history had made him highly suspicious of alliances. Their competitive and entangling nature had not brought peace in the past and Nehru felt they were not going to bring peace and security to the present either. Addressing the Lok Sabha in 1956 Nehru said, “it is clear that the approach of military pacts like the Baghdad Pact and SEATO is a wrong approach. It sets in motion all the wrong tendencies and prevents the right tendencies from developing. When the pacts are bad in themselves, it is a matter of little consequence whether you suspect any country participating in these pacts of dishonesty or a lack of *bona fides*.”<sup>9</sup>

Asian countries entering into alliances, Nehru claimed, would provide the more powerful nations of the West with an

opportunity to solve Asian problems 'minus Asia'. Further, the policy of alliances by its very nature leads to a "suicidal arms race, causes misunderstandings and tensions". Non-alignment was to Nehru a sure way of creating 'areas of peace' and reducing the dangers of war. Nehru described non-alignment as a policy which is nationally profitable for any country. In this sense one may say that Nehru conceived of non-alignment neither as expediency nor as strategy but almost as a kind of irrefutable theory of international relations. Nehru welcomed and strongly supported any friendly getting together. He supported the Commonwealth precisely on this ground. But alliances, according to Nehru were built on shared antagonism and not on amity.

Even if a military pact is made for a justifiable defensive reason, Nehru felt, that its continuance would sooner rather than later begin to endanger peace. Elaborating this point with reference to NATO, Nehru stated, "I must say that at that time it seemed to me nothing but a justifiable reaction for certain countries who were afraid of certain developments to join together in defence. But observe how this NATO developed. In the first place it developed geographically. Supposed to be the North Atlantic Community, it spread to the Mediterranean, to the coasts of Africa, to Eastern Africa and to distant countries which had nothing to do with the Atlantic community. Internally too it began to extend itself. The various resolutions of the NATO powers, meeting from time to time, gradually extended the organization's scope. When the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was first envisaged, it was for defence. But gradually we found that it was supposed to cover the colonial possessions of all those powers also . . ." <sup>10</sup>

Elaborating the Commonwealth connection, Nehru in a reply to S.A. Dange, the Communist Member of Parliament, clarified that in joining the Commonwealth 'we have not bound the future down.' To Dange's objections to the Indian Navy joining in manoeuvres with some Commonwealth navies, and chiefly the British navy, Nehru observed, "I do not think he is justified in his objections . . . We send our Chiefs of Staff to London occasionally to participate in what is called a joint exercise. We send them because it is a very good opportunity for gaining wider knowledge of modern methods insofar as one

can get them there. I do not say that there are no other places where we can get them. But it does not involve taking part in manoeuvres or thinking of a defence policy vis-a-vis other countries. For instance, whenever there is a Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference, there is usually, side by side with it, a conference on defence matters. We do not attend it . . . because we have nothing to do with the defence approach or the peace and war approach of the United Kingdom or the Commonwealth countries.”<sup>11</sup> In brief, Nehru welcomed the Commonwealth precisely because it was a friendly getting together of statesmen. It involved no military or defence understanding and in no way tied India's foreign policy down to that of any other country.—As Professor Rana so well puts it, Nehru welcomed the Commonwealth because it helped “improve the operation of the international system through generating non-alignment”.<sup>12</sup>

There was another way, too, in which India's practice of non-alignment, Nehru felt, would help improve the operation of the international system. Nehru believed that by being non-aligned India would be able to act as a ‘bridge of understanding’ between the rigid, ideologically bi-polarised world and thus contribute to peace. Now, initially both sides looked on non-alignment with suspicion. But its honest and sincere practice by Nehru gradually made the super-powers overcome their early antipathy (Russia after Stalin's death and USA after the Dulles era), and they began to see non-alignment for what it really was, a genuine desire for independence from super-powers. Lawrence Martin describes Nehru as a “man with the mission to mediate”.<sup>13</sup> True, all Nehru's attempts at mediation did not succeed (his attempt in 1960 to end cold war for instance); nevertheless the ceasefire in Korea and the Geneva Conference for the settlement of the Indo-China conflict must be mentioned as two leading examples where Nehru did play a major and successful role as mediator and bridge of understanding between the East and the West.

Nehru believed that India's goal (non-alignment) and UNO goals, in normative terms, were similar. India, through the practice of non-alignment could help strengthen the capacity of the international system to work for peace. The more non-alignment was generated, the more would this be conducive to the political extension of the UNO system to all parts of the world.

This is why Nehru willingly took part in all UNO peace-keeping activities—the UNEF after the Suez conflict, the UNOC during the Congolese crisis of 1960-62, etc.

Two countries have put India's non-alignment to considerable strain—Pakistan and China.

If we observe Indo-Pakistan relations during the Nehru era, we find that Nehru consistently made efforts to establish friendly relations with Pakistan and create an atmosphere in which all disputes could be amicably discussed and settled. As early as 1950, India offered to sign a no-war pact with Pakistan which Pakistan summarily rejected on the ground that the declaration by itself would be of little avail, except on condition of a prior agreement on compulsory and automatic procedure of settlement of all Indo-Pakistan disputes. Nehru, reacting to Pakistan's insistence on arbitration for settlement of disputes as a prior condition to signing the declaration, pleaded for the signing of a 'no-war declaration' as a first step towards settlement of all disputes in a civilized way. Nehru declared, "a 'no-war declaration' brings more security than military preparation and created a better atmosphere for the solution of problems." In spite of Nehru's pleadings Pakistan went ahead and in 1954 entered into a military alliance with the USA.

Pakistan put up a number of innocent reasons for its military pact. Prime Minister Mohamed Ali stated that with the American economic and military aid, "Pakistan was destined to become the sheet-anchor of international stability and security in this region." And a strong Pakistan, the leader claimed, would promote progress and stability in 'the Muslim world'. Finally, to cap it, the Pakistan Government reacted to India's opposition by arguing that India's opposition stemmed from the fact that she desired Pakistan to remain weak.

India, however, had very solid reasons for opposing SEATO. First, she correctly feared that this would bring the cold war to India's door. "If Pakistan accepted this aid", said Nehru, "she became part of a great group of nations, lined up against another." For instance, Nehru wondered, how could Pakistan after receiving aid, avoid taking sides, say on Korea. Second, a greater source of worry for India was, how could USA itself stay impartial and fair in any dispute between India and Pakistan after a formal alliance treaty? And third, Nehru rightly

fears that Pakistan was less interested in cold war politics and more in settling the Kashmir issue by force and that she had joined the alliance more to serve this end than any other.

On all the three issues Nehru's fears proved correct. The later fifties and early sixties saw the cold war spill into this sub-continent. The USA became openly partisan on the Kashmir issue and finally Pakistan did seek to settle the Kashmir issue by force. As a result of the cold war spill-over, Nehru's attitude on plebiscite hardened. At this time the Nehru Government was actively considering the issue of demilitarisation in Kashmir as a prelude to arrangements for a plebiscite. But now, Nehru argued that it was futile to talk any more of demilitarisation in Kashmir when Pakistan as a whole was getting militarised. Nehru now began to speak of "the changed circumstances which made a plebiscite under the UN auspices impossible." And worst of all, as Nehru feared and dreaded a sort of arms race began in the sub-continent.<sup>14</sup>

Another testing and tiring period for non-alignment came in the early sixties with the heating up of the Sino-Indian territorial dispute. Deteriorating Sino-Indian relations put the Soviet Union on the horns of a dilemma. If she supported China this would certainly force India to abandon non-alignment; if she backed non-aligned India, this would exacerbate the already strained Sino-Soviet relations. The initial reaction of the Soviet Union was strict neutrality—it merely regretted 'the frontier incidents' and claimed that these would only serve to help the imperialist powers of the West to divide the two largest States in Asia and discredit peaceful co-existence. Naturally China found this neutrality galling, but Nehru had every reason to be pleased with it and could consider it a triumph of the non-alignment policy. In fact, 1960 was a great year in the development of Indo-Soviet friendship. In that year Khrushchev visited India and the joint communique issued at the end of the Soviet dignitary's visit proclaimed that at no time in the past had Indo-Soviet relations rested "on a firmer basis of friendship and understanding than now". The year also witnessed the signing of several new agreements with the USSR covering trade, technical assistance, cultural relations and aid for existing and new projects. On the other hand, 1960 marked a turning point in Sino-Soviet relations. Sino-Russian relations sharply deterio-

rated with the Soviet refusal to share nuclear technology with China and the withdrawal of its specialists and technical advisers from China. The Chinese charged the USSR of being friendlier to neutral India at the cost of socialist China; compelling the Russians to retort that China was quarrelling with India over a purely national issue and thereby harming the cause of socialism in Asia.

In the autumn of 1962 the Chinese invaded India and in a rather swift action managed to get away with limited territorial gains. The act of invasion was a direct challenge to the Soviet thesis that India was genuinely non-aligned and compelled the Soviets to take sides in the Sino-Indian dispute. Perhaps the Soviets did not expect China to invade Indian territory. Faced with a sudden choice and embroiled simultaneously in the Cuban crisis, the immediate Soviet reaction (much to India's surprise and annoyance) was to endorse the Chinese position and to urge India to accept the Chinese offer of cease-fire on the terms laid down by the Chinese. Fortunately for India Nehru was firm and rejected the offer saying that the Chinese terms were totally unacceptable. Nehru's firmness paid. Russia faltered only briefly. Very quickly it again sided with India and renewed its attack on China. No doubt the Chinese invasion compelled Nehru to look to the West for immediate assistance which (thanks again to Nehru's practice of genuine non-alignment) was readily forthcoming. Another casualty of the invasion was Krishna Menon, the pro-Soviet defence minister, who was forced by irate Congressmen to resign. Of course the West, while giving assistance, kept urging Nehru to settle the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan on the basis of plebiscite. But here again a firm Nehru won the day. On the whole, though India lost territorially to China, one can safely assert that Nehru weathered the 'China storm' quite successfully as far as the practice of non-alignment was concerned.<sup>15</sup>

Nehru was a man endowed with a sense of moral mission. This was reflected in several of his speeches. Time and again he would remind his people and the world at large of the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes. Even as early as 1947 when replying to a debate on the Objectives Resolution in the Constituent Assembly on 22 January, Nehru said, "We have struggled sufficiently, we may have to struggle again, but under



the leadership of a very great personality we have sought always to think in terms of friendship and goodwill towards others, even those who opposed us . . . .”<sup>16</sup>

Non-alignment, in Nehru's mind, was associated with negotiations and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Alignment and cold war, to Nehru, implied abandoning negotiations and resorting to a show of force.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, Nehru was not unconcerned with the nation's security. In a reply to a debate on foreign affairs in the Lok Sabha (9 December, 1958) Nehru categorically asserted, “Every country's foreign policy, first of all, is concerned with its own security and with protecting its own progress. Security can be obtained in many ways. The normal idea is that security is protected by armies. This is only partly true; it is equally true that security is protected by policies . . .”<sup>18</sup>

Scholars speak of the dual objectives of the non-aligned policy—moralistic or normative and security. Now as Pakistan, China and Goa indicate it was not always possible for Nehru to adhere to the normative goal of settling all disputes peacefully. Perhaps as A.P. Rana suggests, the normative objective came into play only in relation to super-power conflict, and not in relation to Pakistan and China which indicated only the security objective.<sup>19</sup>

However, in this writer's view the cornerstone of the policy of non-alignment, as Nehru himself had claimed, was the nation's ability to judge each international issue on its merit. Let us review Nehru's foreign policy from the angle of this acid test. In other words, was India able to judge world events objectively and impartially free from cold war politics?

The difficulty in defining non-alignment as independence of approach and judging each issue on merits, is that, so defined all nations could choose to call their foreign policy non-aligned. After all, which country would confess that its policy is not independent or that it does not judge issues on merits? Secondly, being non-aligned in the sense of judging each issue on merits may neither be feasible nor desirable for small nations that feel threatened by stronger neighbours.

If we examine Nehru's foreign policy by his own yard-stick, we find that although he comes out well, there was nevertheless what may be called ‘the tilt towards the Soviet Union’ dictated

by national interest.

Nehru's claim to have been non-aligned can be judged with reference to two major issues—violation of Human Rights by nations and aggression. A study of our voting behaviour in the UNO reveals that every time the issue of violation of Human Rights came up for discussion we readily and roundly condemned the western nations for any lapse but when it came to condemning the Soviet bloc of nations we did not show the same moral indignation. Thus whenever the issue of apartheid and racial discrimination came up in the General Assembly our representative spared no words in condemning the same. So harsh was our criticism that on one occasion (the second General Assembly Session) we had to be told to couch our protest in more polite language. In sharp contrast every time there was a reference to violations of Human Rights either by the Soviet Union or East European countries, we either refrained from entering into the debate or abstained from voting. Similarly, India refused to support the resolution condemning the shocking treatment meted out to Cardinal Mindszenty; and when in the ninth session of the General Assembly the issue of forced labour in the Soviet Union was being discussed our delegation condemned the measure as deliberately selective and mischievous.

As in the case of Human Rights, so in the case of aggression, our policy tended to tilt towards the Soviet Union. During the Nehru era the West came in for severe condemnation for aggression on two occasions—first when the Dutch attempted to get back to Indonesia after the Second World War and second, in 1956 when Egypt was invaded first by Israel and then by the British and French. In the case of Indonesia, Nehru accused and condemned the Western powers of complicity and tacit approval of the Dutch attempt to get back to Indonesia. In the case of aggression on Egypt, our delegate Arthur Lal, called it “the manifestation of the law of the jungle” and “a mockery of the charter”; while cabinet minister, Krishna Menon, sparing no words, called the Israeli and Anglo-French action as “aggression without qualification”. But the scene changes completely when we turn to examine the instances of communist aggression. Take for instance, the Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956. Here, as Berkes and Bedi comment,

“Certainly, Nehru’s public concern over Hungary was as noticeably tardy as his cry of alarm over Egypt was prompt.”<sup>20</sup> When the General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the Soviet Union for sending troops and tanks into a sovereign nation to quell a popular uprising, India abstained and Krishna Menon, justifying the intervention, made the unconvincing remark, “The General Assembly cannot deal with a member State as if it were a colonial country.” When on 4 November, 1956, Cuba, Peru, Italy, Pakistan and Iceland proposed free elections in Hungary as part of a sovereign people’s right to self-determination, India again stoutly opposed the move. It was only after Soviet intervention had successfully quelled the rising with armed might that Nehru made statements to indicate that he did not fully appreciate Soviet policy. On 19 November, Nehru even admitted to the Indian Parliament that “the desire of the majority of the people for a change had been suppressed by Soviet armed might. When the Soviet troops did not leave Hungary in a hurry, and the position became more embarrassing for India, Krishna Menon called upon the Secretary General to bring about a “cessation of intervention” and a withdrawal of foreign troops. But when it came to voting in the General Assembly, India still continued to abstain from voting against the Soviet bloc. Explaining India’s abstention from voting on a resolution condemning Soviet intervention, in September, 1957 the Indian delegate Arthur Lal said that India was more concerned with creating “an atmosphere favourable for developments of a healthy character”.

Before the Hungarian episode, when in June, 1950 North Korea committed aggression on South Korea we reacted similarly, showing a marked reluctance to condemn the communist act of aggression. Thus we made every effort to assuage the Chinese, going to the extent of stating that the most effective way of terminating the war was to accept the communist regime as representing China in UNO.

Commentators have given several reasons why India’s non-alignment tended to tilt towards the Soviet bloc. Some said it was because Nehru knew that he could afford to condemn the West more vehemently, after all aid would not stop nor diplomatic relations be seriously hazarded. Whereas in the case of Russia one could not be that sure. Others argued that for India,

Russia was too close and too powerful to be lightly treated or violently condemned. But in this writer's view the real reason was fairly obvious. By mid-fifties Russia had gone out of its way to woo India and had assured her full support on Kashmir and Goa. America on the other hand had been markedly pro-Pakistan and in the case of Goa, Secretary Dulles had gone to the absurd length of calling Goa a province of Portugal. Our national interest lay in cultivating the Soviet Union, especially for its vetoes on Kashmir; and this is precisely what we did despite our non-alignment. In other words, Pakistan joining the American alliance system and the USA's unabashedly pro-Pakistan tilt, were responsible for the continuing tilt towards the Soviet bloc in India's non-alignment policy, throughout the Nehru era.

In a speech before the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) on 8 March, 1948, Nehru said, "It is certainly true that our instructions to our delegates have always been to consider each question first in terms of India's interest and secondly on its merits—I mean to say if it did not affect India, naturally, on its merits—and not merely to do something or give a vote just to please this power or that power. . ."<sup>21</sup> Going by this test, it can be unhesitatingly stated that Nehru's foreign policy successfully adhered to the test of non-alignment.

Nehru's enunciation and practice of non-alignment, which we have dealt with above, may however, be distinguished from what has now come to be called the Non-aligned Movement. As Peter Willetts points out, "Non-alignment of the 1960s is primarily a policy for the Third World, a defensive policy for small States." With Nehru the emphasis was altogether different. "India's approach", as Willett puts it "was not to be wary and antagonistic towards the Great Powers but to assert that it is a Great Power. Certainly not a great power of the first rank, but great power that relies not so much on economic and military might as on the prestige of an independent, moral foreign policy."<sup>22</sup>

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3. Cited in Atulanand Chakrabarti, *Nehru: His Democracy and India*, (Calcutta, Thackers Press, 1961).
4. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy* (Selected Speeches), 1971, p. 32.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
7. *Ibid.*
8. For past cultural determinants see Murthy, *India's Foreign Policy*, (Calcutta, Scientific Book Agency, 1964); K.P. Misra, *Studies in Indian Foreign Policy*, the essay by Michael Brecher, 'Specific Sources of Indian Neutralism'; J. Bandyopadhyaya, *Making of India's Foreign Policy*, (Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1972), pp. 55-76; A.P. Rana, *The Imperatives of Non-Alignment*, (New Delhi, MacMillan (India), 1979 (Reprint) Ch. 7. For a contrary view, viz., Non-alignment not a Hindu heritage, see Rehman, *The Politics of Non-alignment*, pp. 4-8, also Ch. 3.
9. For Nehru's views on alliances see Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-98.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
12. A.P. Rana, *Imperatives of Non-Alignment*, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-224.
13. L.W. Martin, *Neutralism and Non-alignment*, (New York, Praeger, 1962), p. 98.
14. Other consequences of Pakistan-USA (and later China) tie up was that India was forced to develop special relations with the U.S.S.R. and befriend Arab Nations. See, P.C. Jha, "Foreign Policy of India and Pakistan". *South Asian Studies*, July, 1969.
15. At the Bangalore Session of the Indian National Congress, 17 January 1960, Nehru said, "Some people ask, 'Do you still believe in this policy of non-alignment, in spite of the danger on your frontiers?' I am surprised at this kind of argument which shows a lack of understanding as to what this policy is. What has the danger on the frontier got to do with the policy of non-alignment? I do not see any connection. In fact, if I see it at all, this is the very moment when I should stick to the policy of non-alignment even more firmly because it is now the testing time for my thinking, for India's thinking. . . ." Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
19. A.P. Rana, *The Imperatives of Non-alignment*, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
20. Berkes and Bedi, *Diplomacy of India*, (Oxford Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 39.
21. Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy*: (Selected Speeches), p. 33.
22. Peter Willets, *The Non-Aligned Movement: The Origins of a Third World Alliance*, (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1978), p. 5.