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Research Article

JAWAHAR LAL NEHRU POLICY ON NON-ALIGNMENT AND PANCHSHEEL

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ABSTRACT

Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the leading strategists of the Third World. He was a perfect democrat to the core. His agnosticism and opposition to all forms of organised religion paved the way for secularism. He disliked narrow nationalism and stood for freedom of intercourse with the rest of the world. Though firm supporter of non-violence yet, at times, he forswore violence for the attainment of social transformation. As head of the government, he fostered national unity but like other leaders of the Third World he had to face many problems - i.e. communalism, poverty, Indo-Pakistan estrangements, armed conflict with China, vacillation and lack of decision on Kashmir. There were some critics who felt that he was too preoccupied with the internal and external matters of Indian security and gave little importance to defence matters. But this is not true. His views on colonialism, imperialism, non-alignment, disarmament, world government suggested that all these aspects of foreign policy played an important role in shaping and formulating Indian security policy.

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INTRODUCTION

The major challenge to India's security during the Nehru period came from the politics of the Cold War. The period following the Second World War was one of unprecedented military and political consolidation, resulting in military blocks and alliances. The cooperation and understanding that existed between the USSR and the Western states during the Second World War began to evaporate gradually. Moreover, ideological differences and the resultant socio-economic structure widened the gulf between the two power blocks led by the USA and the USSR. The early post-war period is usually described in terms of rigid bipolarity, two-camp doctrine and intense ideological hostility. This was the Cold War at its chilliest, marked by hostile and punitive anti-Soviet doctrine of containment and the flexing of the US nuclear strategic superiority.¹ The bipolar balance came to depend on the development of military power even more than in the past.

The intensification of the Cold War rivalry profoundly influenced the working pattern of the newly emerging countries. As a result of these tendencies, security treaties and alliances came into existence and the great powers succeeded in establishing their defence links with the countries of Asia. The object of military alliances and treaties was to contain the opposite ideology. To Nehru, the protection of territorial integrity and sovereignty was the prime objective of any

country because the Cold War rivalry, with its block politics, threatened to take away that independence. Military pacts and aid were anathema to him. He maintained that security treaties were not conducive to peace and that he disliked the Cominform as much as he disliked NATO, CENTO and SEATO. He vehemently opposed the Western-sponsored alliance on the grounds that they brought the Cold War to the very borders of India and thereby endangered India's security.

This extreme sensitivity of Nehru and others was largely due to the fact that these security pacts represented an indirect return of Western power to an area from which it had recently retreated. There was also a repeated reference in these treaties to "defensive area". To Nehru, this was a dangerous extension of the idea of defence because it was "partly determinate" and "partly indeterminate." He pointed out that the countries concerned were free to expand their respective "defensive areas" if they so desired by merely claiming that some additional territory was also part of that area.

Nehru also visualised that the security pacts between a huge "giant and little pigmy" had no meaning in a military sense. In the nuclear age, the only countries that counted were those great powers which were in a position to use nuclear bombs.² At the same time, Nehru felt that "there is no real danger against nuclear weapons. The best way to prevent war is to avoid it. The only effect of these pacts and alliances in nuclear age is to hold a kind of threat. These threats are being thrown

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about by both the power blocks. But even this business of threatening through military pacts has become obsolete."³ Elaborating further, he observed that "the treaty like Manila does not add to their strength. Positively, therefore, it has little contribution to make. Negatively, it has definitely added to the tensions and fears of the situation."⁴ In this context, he also stated that the moment a country developed a Maginot-line mentality or felt that others would defend it, it would grow soft. A country had to face challenges relying on its own strength and on its own gallant men. Nehru illustrated this by asking whether India could expect foreign armies to come and sit on the Himalayan peaks to defend the country.⁵ Moreover, he said, the spread of this policy to Asia in the 1950s had also diverted the people from thinking on economic progress besides the question of integrity, sovereignty and independence of the country.

Non-alignment

In such a situation, India had only two options, either to join some military block or to pursue an independent policy by keeping away from such blocks. India opted for the latter. Geoffrey Tyson maintains that some of Nehru's guiding principles in foreign affairs were, based upon the realities of the situation. Power politics, India's poverty and lack of massive armed strength were only to be compensated by a posture of objectiveness and genuine moral authority.⁶ Other factors like history and geography also cannot be ignored, and they played an important role in the shaping of India's attitude towards the outside world.

The main thrust of independent India's foreign policy as perceived by Nehru was: "the pursuit of peace, not through alignment with any major power or groups of powers but through the liberation of subject people, the maintenance of freedom, both national and individual, the elimination of racial discrimination, and the elimination of want, disease and ignorance which affect the greater part of the world's population."⁷ Thus, non-alignment was considered essential for fulfillment of India's national goals because it promoted internal stability. Nehru felt so deeply about nonalignment that he thought it could realise the goals set forth in Article 51 of the Indian Constitution - i.e. (i) to promote international peace and security; (ii) maintain just and honourable relations between nations; (iii) foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealing of organised people with one another; and (iv) encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.

Nonalignment, with its focus on the concept of "peace" came to form the central objective of India's policy. In his broadcast to the nation on September, 1946, Nehru declared; "we propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the politics of groups aligned against one another which have led in the past to disasters.... We shall take part in international conferences as a free nation with our own policy and not merely as a satellite of another nation."⁸ Nehru again and again asserted that "there are talks of cold war and rival camps and groupings and military blocks and alliances, all in the name of peace. We are in no camp and in no military alliance. The only camp we should like to be in is the camp of peace and goodwill."⁹

In this way, internationally, India's policy of nonalignment not only helped in defusing the tensions of a bipolar world but also

offered the developing countries the inspiration not to get entangled in power politics and thereby endanger the process of their development. In the case of India this approach worked as a guarantor of the nation's defence and security. The defence strategy implicit in it was that, in the long run, by laying the foundation of heavy industries and by waging general war on poverty India would succeed in strengthening its security. An assumption of this policy was that, in the short run, India would not be attacked by any country.

It has been argued by some that though Cold War politics was subtly managed by nonalignment, defence was largely neglected. H.V. Kamath criticised the "neutral policy of foreign affairs" and even expressed his doubts whether that policy would save India from the danger of war, if war broke out.¹⁰ He also stressed the need for strong fortification on the frontiers and defence of the air space of the country as also a plan for the mobilisation of the entire nation.¹¹ In a similar vein, Kunzru felt that lofty moral principles were not enough and it was necessary for the country to bring about a correlation between interests and the power to protect them.¹² Hence, it was necessary for the government to regard the defence of the country as one of the most vital problems which should engage its attention even before the economic problems of the country had been solved.¹³ Some even went to the extent of suggesting that India should have a coordinated and integrated system of defence with neighbouring countries.¹⁴

Nehru, on his part, regarded nonalignment as more important for the defence of the country than a policy of alignment because he did not conceive of any kind of invasion or attack on India at that early period.¹⁵ He was more concerned with the emerging world scenario arising out of the devastating World War II, and fear of another war involving India would have crippled the country completely. To deal with external powers, India took recourse to diplomacy, and to provide security within, intense economic development was pursued. To promote Indian national interests based on the concept of defence and development, "nonalignment made both strategic and political sense for India".¹⁶ Thus, the policy of nonalignment was a positive expression of India's political and economic independence and also led to expansion of the area of peace.

While advocating the creation of the area of peace, Nehru was trying to achieve the same thing as the big powers were seeking by spreading the area of pacts and military alliances. Viewed from this perspective, both the Western and Eastern models were inadequate for serving the cause of peace. Nehru's approach aimed at the elimination of war from the mind, while the other approach ended in arms race and increased tensions and conflicts. And if the view that war resides in the minds of men is accepted, then the approach of nonalignment and peaceful coexistence cannot be faulted. What is needed is courage and will in nations to follow the path of peace and peace no longer will remain a utopian dream. With the increase of the area of peace on the periphery of a nation, the danger of conflicts and tensions is pushed further away. The area of peace must serve as a peaceful buffer zone. Hence, the wider the area of peace - i.e. the area of nonalignment - the lesser the chance of exploitation and likelihood of war.

For the country's progress, the question of peace became of paramount importance to Nehru as it provided an effective shield in projection India's image externally. It meant that the policy of nonalignment was not to be considered in isolation but in cooperation and consultation with others. It also implied a position to judge issues without bias. Therefore, in the long run, it was Nehru's plea of collective peace and not Dulles' defence and security arrangements which succeeded in restoring some measures of peace in Asia. Whether it was the Korean War (1953) or the Geneva Accord on Indo-China (1954) or the Suez Crisis (1956) or the Syrian problem (1957) or the Iraqi revolt (1958), Nehru played an active role in bringing peace to these areas. His western critics often failed to acknowledge Nehru's contribution in the solution of problems by peaceful methods.

Panchsheel

On the issue whether nonalignment was a means or end, Nehru asserted that it was not an end in itself but a means to give foreign policy a more positive content. His policy of Panchsheel, the principles of international relations, was in fact an extension of the policy of nonalignment. Nehru said that "in India, peaceful coexistence is not a new idea. About 2,200 years ago Ashoka proclaimed it and inscribed it on rock and stone, which exist today and give us his message. This is the lesson of tolerance and peaceful coexistence and cooperation which India had believed in through the ages. In the old days, we talked of religion and philosophy, now we talk more of the economic and social systems. But the approach is the same now as before."¹⁷

The five principles of Panchsheel which Nehru put forward in recognition of the right of each country to fashion its own destiny were: respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's national affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.¹⁸ These principles were first accepted by China. Subsequently, they were accepted by Burma, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. They were further elaborated at the Bandung Conference and the rest is history.

Critics, however, pointed out the inconsistency between the high moral tone of Panchsheel and India's own dealings with its neighbours. Speaking of weak and powerful nations, Kripalani argued that in such cases coexistence was that of the lamb with the lion, when the lamb was safe in its belly.¹⁹ The Chinese attack in 1962 further shattered a number of major illusions on which Indian foreign policy had progressed.

In spite of the criticism, Panchsheel provided a most powerful weapon for the balancing of international forces with the finest skill. The critics of Panchsheel overlooked the fact that Nehru was aiming at changing the attitude from a war mind to a peace mind. He did not neglect the defence and security of the country but only avoided over militarism at the cost of development. By the year 1955, Nehru's contribution to world peace was being hailed as one of the great successes of the age. Panchsheel became the "battle cry of peace." Indeed, 1955 was the finest year of his Prime Ministership and world statesmanship. Whether it was receiving the U.N. Secretary-General in India or being received by the Pope in his private library, right from Kampuchea to Egypt, Bandung to Moscow or other parts of Europe, Nehru's policy of peaceful coexistence

was becoming more and more pronounced. Even John Foster Dulles, a bitter critic of nonalignment, sent Nehru a personal letter of thanks for his successful mediation in the release of US airman taken prisoner by China. In his own country, too, Nehru came to be regarded as a "Shanti doot" or an apostle of peace. There was no finer tribute to Nehru's vision of peace than the one that came from a crusty old enemy, Winston Churchill, who, on February, 21, 1955, wrote to Nehru hailing him as the "Light of Asia."

CONCLUSION

It could be well argued that India's experiences during the Nehru period demonstrated that for the purposes of evolving a practical security policy he paid much attention to the concrete problems and situations. His formulation was both realistic and idealistic.

To call Nehru wholly an idealistic or visionary man would be a wrong assumption. Like any other practical statesman of his time, he was well aware of the implications of the contemporary power politics. His major concern was to transform the conflict-ridden world into a world of peace and thereby give nations sufficient time to develop internally. For this, in the long run, the country has to be made powerful economically and industrially and, in the short run, the country needed to be prepared to meet any eventuality.

To summarise, it can be said that national security under Nehru was: first defence against threat and aggression; secondly – strengthening and modernisation of the defence structure; thirdly, building up by democratic means a rapidly expanding and technological progressive economy; fourthly, establishing a social order based on social justice and equal opportunity to every citizen; and fifthly, support to the UN and promotion of international peace and security as a factor in relaxing world wide tensions.

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