

## The Evolution of Nationalist Foreign Policy

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One of the factors that facilitated India's ready interaction with the world outside, immediately on independence, was the already well-established diplomatic engagement even under colonial rule. At independence, India was a member of 51 international organisations and a signatory to 600 odd treaties. India had signed the Versailles Treaty after the First World War, largely as a result of having contributed more than a million soldiers to that war. In the 1920s, it was a founding member of the League of Nations, the International Labour Organisation, and the International Court of Justice. It participated in the Washington Conference on Naval Armaments in 1921-22. From 1920 there was an Indian high commissioner in London. Even before the First World War, Indian nationals were staffing a few diplomatic posts. It was no accident that Indians formed the largest and most influential non-Western contingent in the United Nations and allied agencies very soon after independence.

The basic framework of India's foreign policy was structured much before 1947.

A significant and inevitable fallout of the Western influence on the nationalist intelligentsia was a growing interest in and contact with the dominant international currents and events. Gradually, the nationalist thinkers came to realise that colonialism and imperialism had an international character and much wider implications. With the development

and crystallisation of an anti-imperialist nationalist ideology, there emerged a nationalist foreign policy perspective. The evolution of this policy perspective can be traced under these broad phases.

### **1880 to First World War: Anti-Imperialism and Pan-Asian Feeling**

After 1878, the British undertook a number of expansionist expeditions which were opposed by the nationalists. These expeditions included—

- the Second Afghan War (1878-80);
- the dispatch of troops by England in 1882, to suppress the nationalist uprising by Col. Arabi in Egypt;
- annexation of Burma in 1885;
- invasion of Tibet under Curzon in 1903; and
- a number of annexations during the 1890s in the north-west to stop the Russian advance. The nationalists supported the tribal resistance to these adventures by the British.

In place of an aggressive imperialism, the nationalists advocated a policy of peace. C. Sankaran Nair, the Congress president in 1897, said, “Our true policy is a peaceful policy.” So, the emerging themes during 1880-1914 were—

1. solidarity with other colonies fighting for freedom, such as Russia, Ireland, Egypt, Turkey, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burma and Afghanistan;
2. pan-Asian feeling reflected in—
  - condemnation of annexation of Burma in 1885,
  - inspiration from Japan as an example of industrial development,
  - condemnation of the participation of Japan in the international suppression of the I-Ho-Tuan uprising (1895),
  - condemnation of the imperialist efforts to divide China,

- defeat of the Czarist Russia by Japan which exploded the myth of European superiority,
- Congress support for Burma's freedom.

## **World War I**

The nationalists supported the British Indian Government in the belief that Britain would apply the same principles of democracy for which they were supposed to be fighting. After the conclusion of the War, the Congress insisted on being represented at the Peace Conference. In 1920, the Congress urged the people not to join the Army to fight in the West. In 1925, the Congress condemned the dispatch of Indian Army to suppress the Chinese nationalist army under Sun-Yat-Sen.

## **1920s and 1930s—Identifying with Socialists**

In 1926 and 1927, Nehru was in Europe where he came in contact with the socialists and other leftist leaders. Earlier, Dadabhai Naoroji attended the Hague session of the International Socialist Congress. He was a close friend of H.M. Hyndman, the famous socialist. Lajpat Rai also made contacts with the American socialists during his visit to the USA from 1914 to 1918. Gandhi had close relations with Tolstoy and Rolland Romain. In 1927, Nehru attended the Congress of Oppressed Nationalists at Brussels on behalf of the Indian National Congress. The conference was organised by political exiles and revolutionaries from Asia, Africa and Latin America, suffering from political and economic imperialism. Nehru was one of the honorary presidents along with Einstein, Madam Sun-Yet-Sen, Rolland Romain and George Lansbury. Nehru came to understand the international character of US imperialism during his European experience. Nehru was also nominated to the executive council of the League Against Imperialism. The Congress also decided to open a foreign department to be in touch with the other

peoples' movements. In 1927, Nehru also visited the Soviet Union and was very impressed by the achievements of the infant socialist state. He saw Russia as a bulwark against imperialism.

### **After 1936—Anti-Fascism**

The 1930s saw the rise of Fascism in Europe and the struggle against it. The nationalists saw imperialism and fascism as organs of capitalism. They lend support to the struggle against fascism in other parts of the world in Ethiopia, Spain, China, Czechoslovakia. In 1939, at the Tripuri session, the Congress dissociated itself from the British policy which supported fascism in Europe.

In 1939, the Japanese attack on China was condemned by the nationalists. The Congress also sent a medical mission under Dr Atal to China.

On the Palestine issue, the Congress lent support to the Palestinians. It expressed sympathy with the Jews, but urged that the Palestinians not be displaced and that the issue be settled by direct dealing between the Jews and the Arabs without Western intervention. It also opposed the partition of Palestine.

### **After Independence**

Nehru is often called the architect of independent India's foreign policy. He realised the importance of the need to have direct contact with other nations and to cooperate with them in enhancing world peace and freedom; he also understood the importance of maintaining an identity as a free nation and not become a satellite of any other nation, however mighty. In his address to the Constituent Assembly on December 4, 1947, Nehru laid the foundations of India's foreign policy: "...the art of conducting the foreign affairs of a country lies in finding out what is most advantageous to the country. We may talk about peace and freedom and earnestly mean what we say. But in the ultimate analysis, a government functions for the good of the country it governs,

and no government dare do anything which in the short or long run is manifestly to the disadvantage of the country.”

The main challenge to Nehru was to evolve a policy that could help India compete on the world arena with the modern states, and for that, he realised, a drastic socio-economic and technological transformation of the country was required. His objective was to transform India without becoming dependent on any particular country or group of countries to the extent of losing independence of thought or policy. What India needed was peaceful relations with all nations so that it could concentrate on its developmental efforts, and relations good enough for it to get the necessary help in that direction without compromising its freedom. In the circumstances, non-alignment seemed to be the right policy.

### ■ Panchsheel and Non-Alignment

Panchsheel and Non-Alignment are the foundations of India's foreign policy.

#### **Panchsheel**

It was on April 29, 1954, that Panchsheel, or the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, were first formally enunciated in the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India. It was stated in the preamble to this agreement that the two governments had resolved to enter into the agreement on the basis of five principles, namely,

- (i) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty
- (ii) Mutual non-aggression
- (iii) Mutual non-interference
- (iv) Equality and mutual benefit
- (v) Peaceful co-existence.

In June 1954, when the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai visited India, he and his Indian counterpart, Jawaharlal Nehru in a joint statement elaborated their vision of Panchsheel as the framework for the relations between the two countries as well as the basis on which relations with other countries

### Historical Perspective on Panchsheel

In the classical language, the word 'sheel' doesn't mean 'principle' but 'character'. The term is taken from the Indonesian usage of the word — and Indonesians may have been influenced by Buddhist use of the word 'sheel'. Most Indians think 'Panchsheel' was Jawaharlal Nehru's valuable contribution to the world, as it first received world attention when he and Zhou Enlai issued a joint statement in Delhi on June 18, 1954. In fact, the credit for formulating these principles should go to Zhou. While receiving the Indian delegation to the Tibetan trade talks on December 31, 1953, he enunciated them as "five principles governing China's relations with foreign countries".

T.N. Kaul, a joint secretary in the external affairs ministry at the time or Director General for Asian Affairs in Delhi, was impressed and conveyed his appreciation and the significance of these principles to Nehru, with whom he enjoyed a close rapport. Nehru agreed and Kaul took the initiative to mention them at the very outset of his draft text of agreement. That was in January 1954. However, the response from the Chinese foreign office was in the negative. At the time Zhou wasn't in China.

When Zhou returned to Peking, he, with his native genius for compromise, found a via-media. He suggested that the five principles may not be included in the main text prominently, but could appear in the preamble. India accepted the compromise. But two months later, when Zhou visited Delhi, Nehru and Kaul emphasised these principles in the joint statement issued on June 18, 1954. China's hesitant formulation caught worldwide attention because of Indian sponsorship. Zhou propounded the principles but Kaul picked them up and Nehru propagated them. Nehru enjoyed high regard in the NAM and soon other Asian countries like Burma and Indonesia followed suit.

Nehru and Zhou were leaders who strove hard to forge close ties between India and China and usher in a better world order through Panchsheel. Their efforts, however, were undermined and undone by the machinations of self-seeking or vindictive colleagues and they died disenchanted men.

*Source:* An article by V.V. Paranjpe, formerly Chinese language expert to the Government of India, in the Hindustan Times of June 2004.

should be maintained. The two leaders expressed the hope that Panchsheel “will also help in creating an area of peace which as circumstances permit can be enlarged thus lessening the chances of war and strengthening the cause of peace all over the world.”

As per the documents of the Ministry of External Affairs, Panchsheel was incorporated into the Ten Principles of International Peace and Cooperation put forward in the Declaration issued by the April 1955 Bandung Conference of 29 Afro-Asian countries. The universal relevance of Panchsheel was emphasised when its tenets were incorporated in a resolution on peaceful co-existence presented by India, Yugoslavia and Sweden, and unanimously adopted on December 11, 1957, by the United Nations General Assembly. And in 1961, the Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in Belgrade accepted Panchsheel as the basic principles at the centre of the Non-Aligned Movement.

### **Non-Alignment**

The global environment that India faced after independence was very different from what existed before the Second World War. The major players on the world stage before the War, namely, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan, lay subdued, their vast empires shrunk or shrinking fast. The United States, which had followed an isolationist policy, keeping aloof from active international involvement, became dramatically active. The Soviet Union had acquired unprecedented influence in Eastern Europe besides gaining recognition as a powerful state for crushing the German might on the Eastern Front where most of the German military casualties had occurred. If the US demonstrated its nuclear weapon capability in 1945, the USSR followed suit with its own nuclear test in 1949. The Cold War that began in the wake of the Second World War had no precedent in history. Almost the entire developed world was divided into two opposing nuclear-armed blocs, with the US and the USSR leading as ‘super powers’. The balance of power diplomacy of the pre-war years thus disappeared from the industrialised countries. The Third World became a surrogate field for super power competition. Meanwhile, decolonisation was

proceeding apace, and more and more independent countries were emerging, mostly in Asia and Africa. China was aligned with the Soviet Union till the mid-fifties. India found itself the largest country with the ability to manoeuvre between the two blocs.

At this point of time, the Soviet Union did not possess the economic or military support capability to influence the countries emerging from the colonial yoke. It was the West, which tried to incorporate the newly independent countries into its strategic grouping. Alignment with the West was economically attractive, but it would have created a dependent relationship, which was seen by most of the newly independent countries as obstructive to a self-reliant development. The idea of aligning with the communist bloc was not possible for India, in spite of its socialist leanings; it could not visualise a Chinese-type restructuring of the society and economy, being basically attuned to a liberal democratic political vision. Political non-alignment was, therefore, prudent as well as pragmatic.

The principles of non-interference in the domestic

#### **Five Criteria of Non-alignment**

The Preparatory Committee of the first non-aligned conference laid down the following five criteria of non-alignment:

- (i) A country should follow an independent policy based on peaceful co-existence and non-alignment.
- (ii) It should have consistently supported national freedom movements in other countries.
- (iii) It should not be a member of multi-lateral military alliances concluded in the context of super-power conflicts.
- (iv) If it has conceded military bases, these concessions should not have been made in the context of super-power conflicts.
- (v) If it is a member of a bilateral or regional defence arrangements, this should not be in the context of super-power politics.

#### **Five Pioneering Leaders of the NAM**

- (i) President Tito (original name Josip Broz) of Yugoslavia
- (ii) President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt
- (iii) President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana
- (iv) President Sukarno of Indonesia
- (v) Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India



affairs of other countries and maintenance of one's own sovereignty (which are the basic postulates of India's foreign policy) evolved into the crystallisation of the concept of non-alignment. The term 'non-alignment' got currency in the post-**Bandung Conference** (1955). Non-alignment implies the active refusal of a state to align itself with either party in a dispute between two power blocs. In the conference of non-aligned powers—the **first non-aligned movement or NAM summit**—held in Belgrade in 1961 and attended by 36 Mediterranean and Afro-Asian powers, Jawaharlal Nehru explained the essence of non-alignment: "We call ourselves the conference of non-aligned countries. Now the word *non-aligned* may be differently interpreted but basically it was used and coined almost with the meaning: non aligned with greater power blocs of the world. Non-aligned has a negative meaning but if you give it a positive connotation it means nations which object to this lining up for war purpose, military blocs, military alliances and the like. Therefore, we keep away from this and we want to throw our weight, such as it is, in favour of peace".

Non-alignment is the characteristic feature of India's foreign policy. India was one of the founder-members of NAM. In the Cold War era, India refused to favour any super power and remained non-aligned. Non-alignment, however, is not to be confused with neutrality. A neutral state remains inactive or passive during hostilities between two blocs. Neutrality is maintained basically in times of war, whereas non-alignment has relevance both in times of war and peace. Neutrality is equivalent to passivity, a neutral country has no opinions (positive or negative) on issues at all. However, adherence to non-alignment is to have positive and constructive opinions on international issues. India has firmly and convincingly asserted its 'non-aligned' and not 'neutral' stand on various issues. Non-alignment as one of the principles of India's foreign policy attempts to promote international peace, disarmament and territorial independence. It aims at democratisation of international relations by putting an end to imperialism and hegemony and establishing a just and equal world order.