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### **India's foreign policy : Nehru and Non-Alignment**

The parameters of India's foreign policy were broadly laid down by Jawaharlal Nehru long before independence. To him freedom was not only a triumph but also an opportunity. He saw in India's release from the colonial grip, not merely the end of alien domination, but also the beginning of an era full of promise for bringing about renaissance in the country. Post-British India meant to him not merely an independent geo-political entity but a strong and powerful force in the international arena acting in concert with other similar forces for restructuring world affairs in the direction of global peace, equality among and justice for the people.<sup>1</sup>

There are two apparently contradictory views on Jawaharlal Nehru's personal contribution to the policy of non-alignment. One of these, which tends to minimize his personal role in the formulation of this fundamental and long-term strategy of India's foreign policy, has been expressed, understandably, by Nehru himself in his own words:

It is completely incorrect to call our policy "Nehru" policy. It is incorrect because all that I have done is to give voice to that policy. I have not originated it. 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

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circumstances of the world today. I come in by the mere accidental fact that during these few years I have represented that policy Foreign Minister. I am quite convinced that whoever might have been in charge of the foreign affairs of India and whatever party might have been in power in India, they could not have deviated very much from this policy. Some emphasis might have been greater here or there because, as I said, it represents every circumstance that goes towards making the thought of India on these subjects.<sup>2</sup>

In fact foreign policy is never original, it is determined by a certain order of facts, geographical, historical and economic. “one characteristic of our foreign”, Jawaharlal Nehru once said, “it that it is not foreign”.<sup>3</sup> What he was emphasizing was that India’s foreign policy (and for that matter the foreign policy of any country) is rooted in the domestic determinants – history, traditions, culture, geography, economic resources, level of economic development, military strength, political institutions – and of course the international milieu at a given time. The foreign policy aims of the British rule were neither a guide nor relevant to India’s needs and status after 1947. moreover, the partition of the country had created a new set of problems. Therefore the foreign relation, that India had to forge after independence were essentially to be evolved in a new setting and the process was one of learning by making mistakes or avoiding them.<sup>4</sup>

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The other view expressed by Michael Brecher, tends to ascribe the conception, formulation and implementation of the policy of non-alignment almost entirely to Nehru. Brecher wrote:

In no other state does one man dominate foreign policy as does Nehru in India. Indeed, so overwhelming in his influence that India's policy has come to mean in the minds of people everywhere the personal policy of Pandit Nehru. And justifiably so for Nehru is the philosopher, the architect, the engineer and the voice of his country's policy towards to outside world. This does not mean that he operates in a vacuum, for the aspirations discussed earlier provide the framework within which policy must be devised. Nor is he entirely free from the influence of individual and institutions in India. It does not mean, however, that he has impressed his personality and his views with such overpowering effect that foreign policy must properly be termed a private monopoly....It was he who provided a rationale for India's approach to international politics since 1947. it was he who carried the philosophy of non-alignment to the world at large. And throughout this period he has dominated the policy-making process.<sup>5</sup>

It was within this broad framework that Nehru tried to evolve a role for India on the world scene. He did not conceive it in isolation from the mainstream of world events. "India's struggle today is part of the great struggle which is going on all over the world for the emancipation of the oppressed," he wrote in his

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autobiography. “we cannot...separate it from the rest. What happens in India will effect the world and world events will change India’s future”, he added.<sup>6</sup>

Nehru strove for friendship and amity with all nations. India, as he said in an article in Foreign Affairs (April, 1963) entered the family of independent nations with a clean state without any inherited hatreds or territorial ambitions, determined to cultivate friendly and cooperative relations with all countries. He had the abiding conviction that the world, in spite of its rivalries and hatreds, moved inevitably towards closer cooperation. He stretched out his hand in friendship to all in the world, even to those who traduced him. But he made it clear that this would not in any way dilute the principles on which independent India’s foreign policy was based. These principles were dear to him, to the country he led and to its people who had struggled for their fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>

The geographical insularity caused by the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean, which has made India very different from most of the European countries for example from the geopolitical point view, also enabled her to stay away, to a certain extent, from the political and ideological crusades of the mid-twentieth century. Nehru recognized this geographical condition for non-alignment when he said:

I do not say that our country is superior or 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

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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>8</sup>

Nehru did not voice his opposition to war plans only in Asia but he did so in other regions of the world too. His passion for peace was embedded in India's glorious past, in the traditions laid down by Buddha, Ashoka and Mahatma Gandhi. It was rooted in the firm and unshakable belief that no nation, more so a developing one could advance in an atmosphere of war or war-like preparations. Nehru's dedication to the cause of peace was total. Peace became the watchword of our country's foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

Nehru did not entirely accept this romantic idealism of modern Indian thinking on national and international politics, and certainly introduced a large measure of objectivity into the formulation and implementation of Indian foreign policy. But he constantly referred to the influence of the Gandhian tradition on India's political behaviour, particularly international behaviour, and to the ideal of one world as a basic goal of foreign policy. The logical outcome was a foreign policy which would steer clear of the contemporary power balance and open up a new dimension of international relations. This was precisely the function of non-alignment.<sup>10</sup>

Nehru clearly perceived this ideological base of Indian foreign policy from the beginning of his career as Prime Minister and foreign minister, and often

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referred to it in explaining the rationale of non-alignment. In 1956, for example, he stated in the Indian parliament:

The world seems to be divided into two might camps the communist and the anti-communist and either party cannot understand how anyone can be foolish enough not to line up with itself. That just shows how little understanding these people have of the mind of Asia. Talking of India only, and not of all Asia, we have fairly clear ideas about our political and economic structure. We function in this country under a constitution which may be described as a parliamentary democracy. It has not been imposed upon us. We purpose to continue with it.... We intend to function on the economic plane, too, in our own way.... We have no intention to turn communists. At the same time, we have no intention of being dragooned in any other direction.... We have chosen our path and we purpose to go along it, and to vary it as and when we choose, not at somebody's dictate of pressure; and we are not afraid of any other country imposing its will upon us by military methods or any other methods.... Our thinking and our approach do not fit in with this great crusade of communism or crusade of anti-communism.<sup>11</sup>

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watchword of our country's foreign policy. As he put it himself so well in his speech in the constituent assembly on march 18, 1948.

Peace thus came to be the sheet-anchor of India's foreign policy, its intimate objective to the realization of which Nehru devoted all the years of his prime ministership. This objective was embodied in his famous five principles popularly known as **Panchsheel**. These were:

(1) Respect for each other's territory, integrity and sovereignty.

(2) Non-aggression.

(3) Non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

(4) Equality and mutual benefit.

(5) Peaceful co-existence.

(6) Panchsheel has acquired a specific meaning and significance in world affairs. About the most important ingredient in India's foreign policy, the instrument, as it were, for giving shape and form to it, was Nehru's policy of non-alignment. He was its architect, and he nurtured it with care and tenderness, with persistence and patience.<sup>12</sup>

A generally acceptable and dynamic foreign policy which made India an important actor on the international stage could provide a common focus for the nation as a whole and thus help the difficult process of national integration and state building. Of utmost importance from this point of view, needless to say, is the balance of political forces in a newly independent state. While the Indian

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National Congress represented the mainstream of Indian thinking of political and ideological issues, there were segments of political opinion and organization on both the right and the left inside the congress and outside, which could have been seriously disaffected of India's alignment with one of the two power blocs, to the point of threatening the internal security of the state. Such alignment or even the suspicion of it would also have seriously antagonized the other power bloc. Only a policy of non-alignment could have prevented the acute polarization of the domestic political forces and thus created one of the essential condition for state building. That Nehru recognized this compelling influence of the domestic milieu on foreign policy vice versa was evident when he said: "The internal policy and foreign policy of a country affect each other. They should, broadly, be in line with each other, and have to be integrated. By and large, there has been in India an attempt at this integration."<sup>13</sup>

Last but not least, the international milieu in which the newly independent India found herself was a major determinant of the broad orientation and strategy of Indian foreign policy.<sup>14</sup>

In this politico-military-economic, historical, geographical, cultural and international environment, elements of independent India's foreign policy were evolved. These elements were/are : pursuit of non-alignment, maintenance of world peace, pacific settlement of disputes, peaceful coexistence of nations of diverse social-political-economic systems (especially cooperative relations with

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immediate neighbors); opposition to the remnants of colonialism (since largely vanished) and neo-colonialism; anti-apartheid; promotion of both its own economic development (and that of other third world countries); development of an 'Asian-identity' and intra-Asian co-operation; working for disarmament; and support to, strengthening of international organizations- the United Nations in particular. These elements reflected not merely "official policy"; they represented the foreign policy of the people of India as such. <sup>15</sup>

It would thus appear, the policy of non-alignment was indicated by the realities of India's geography economic development recent political and ideological tradition, domestic milieu and international milieu. It was more or less a logical corollary of the given basic determinants of foreign policy. In this sense it is correct to say, as Nehru did, that the policy of non-alignment was not the inspiration or creation of anyone individual, that it was not rooted in India's history and geography and the outcome of many given conditions. But Nehru's self effacing statement regarding his personal role in the formulation of Indian foreign policy is quite wrong in the equally important sense that what was logical in the given situation was inevitable.

The percepts of non-alignment constitute not merely an ingredient of our foreign policy but represent the very essence and pervading spirit behind the evolution of this policy. Above all, non-alignment has served its purpose as a policy designed to safeguard and further our national interests. <sup>16</sup> India, following

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the path laid down by Nehru, has developed friendly and cooperative relations with its neighbours, Banglades, Nepal, Burma, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the countries of Indo-China, Afganisthan, Iran and the Arab countries. Those countries are our geo graphical and cultural neighbors.

India is also in the forefront of countries developing close political and economic relations with Latin America and the Caribbean.

India's policy of non-alignment is not an idealistic and romantic international posture though it is actuated by the ideas of peace, freedom, equality and cooperation. This is a policy calculated to safeguard the country's national interests. The first prerequisite in the pursuit of non-alignment is, therefore, the development of internal economic, social and political stability and strength. From the beginning India has given primary importance to planning for socio-economic development.

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