NEHRU'S CONCEPT OF NON-ALIGNMENT

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In the twenty-four years of Indian independence, India has demonstrated a far greater international influence than her economic and military power would seem to warrant. This was due almost entirely to the impressive leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru served as Prime Minister for the first seventeen years of independence, and was successful in keeping India on a separate path, apart from the two great power blocks. This achievement required an extraordinary personality with a special leadership ability. Such a person was Jawaharlal Nehru. It must be noted, however, that he underwent a long period of development prior to independence and thus the events and associations which influenced Nehru necessitate further examination.

In India there had never been such a serious threat to British supremacy as that which began following the First World War. It was then, in 1919, that Mahatma Gandhi introduced his policy of satyagraha (non-violent non-cooperation) which he had first tested in South Africa.[1] India was ripe for any serious political action and the passage of the Rowlatt Bills[2] by the British provided the opening needed. Young Nehru, eager to express his nationalist leanings, wanted to join the Satyagraha Sabha but was dissuaded by his father who called for a more moderate approach.

Nehru's nationalistic fervor came as an ironic development from his British education. He attended Harrow and later Cambridge University between 1905 and 1912, where he came under the influence of numerous nineteenth century British writers and, more importantly, Fabianism. However, it was not for another twenty years that Nehru developed a genuine interest in practical socialism as opposed to the theoretical socialism which had interested him at Cambridge.[3] His development as a "real" Englishman did not deter him from seeking to apply British concepts of justice and law to his native India. Armed with these ideas, but not knowing how to implement them, Nehru saw Gandhi as the realization of his dreams.

Nehru's relationship with Gandhi grew stronger spiritually but not necessarily politically. They both realized that they sought virtually the same goals for India but occasionally through different programs. Nehru opposed Gandhi for his stress on cottage industry, distrust of science, and his religious symbolism. He praised Gandhi for his activism, courage, political acumen, sense of timing, and his call for national self-respect.[4] A profound respect for one

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[1] Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1059), p. 59.

[2] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1962), p. 40. The Rowlatt Bills were a series of laws containing provisions for arrest and trial without the normal checks and formalities which the laws were supposed to provide.

[3] Brecher, p. 48.

[4] Paul F. Power, "Indian Foreign Policy: The Age of Nehru," *The Review of Politics,* XXVI No. 2 (April, 1964), p. 259.

another persisted and through Gandhi's assistance Nehru rose to prominence in Indian politics. As a result of his overzealous activity, Nehru found himself a frequent "guest" of British prisons. Yet in 1927, Nehru represented the Indian Congress at the "Brussels Congress of Oppressed Nationalities" where there existed a movement against colonialism and capitalism. From this Congress a permanent "League Against Imperialism" was established with George Lansbury as president. The league grew more and more communist oriented and eventually excommunicated Nehru for his part in the Delhi truce between the Congress and the Government of India.[5]

Nehru continued his advance in politics by accepting in 1928 the office of General Secretary of the Congress for the express purpose of preventing the Congress from slipping away from the goal of independence.[6] In this capacity, Nehru sought to lay the ground work for social, economic and ideological changes which were necessary for the eventual independence of India. It was at this time that Nehru's interest in socialism began to manifest itself in the preparation of socialist, and at times Marxist, oriented programs, particularly in the field of agriculture. These suggested programs did not meet with a great deal of favor in the government. It was for this and similar actions that Nehru dropped from the scene of Indian politics and spent most of the 1930's in British jails.[7]

The second world war quite naturally slowed the drive for Indian independence. However, after the war with renewed Indian insistance, the British permitted the formation of an interim national government. On September 7, 1946, just six days after the formation of the interim government, the first official announcement on foreign policy was broadcast over All-India radio:

> We propose as far as possible to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may lead again to disasters on an even vaster scale. . . . The world in spite of its rivalries and hatreds and inner conflicts, moves inevitabily towards closer co-operation and the building up of a world commonwealth. It is for this one world that free India will work. . . .[8]

Although this pronouncement set the format for Indian policy, complete freedom to embark on any plans did not exist until August 15, 1947, at which time the Mountbatten Plan for the partition of India and Pakistan was implemented.[9]

With the ascendance of Nehru to the position of Prime Minister, an entirely new era in Indian history began. Nehru assumed his position under the banners of four main concepts: democracy, planning, secularism, and nonalignment.[10] Democracy was for Nehru, patterned after the representative democracy of the Western nations. Nehru's awareness of the ability of religion

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[5] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 124-127.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 130.
[7] *Ibid.,* p. 139.
[8] George N. Patterson, *Peking Versus Delhi* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 79-80.
[9] *Brecher,* p. 351.
[10] Michael Brecher, *Nehru's Mantle: The Politics of Succession in India* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 187.

to hinder effective government caused him to espouse secularism; that is, a separation of religion and state. With respect to planning, it is important to recall Nehru's former enchantment with socialism. In an address to the National Congress in April of 1936 he stated views which, apart from the references to independence which were no longer relevant, remained relatively unchanged through the early years of independence.

> I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the world's problems lies in socialism, and when I use this word I do so not in a vague humanitarian way but in the scientific, economic sense. . . . Much as I wish for the advancement of socialism in this country, I have no desire to force the issue in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence.[11]

The willingness to compromise and remain flexible, inherent in this statement, was a recurrent pattern in Nehru's political advancement.

The last of these four points, non-alignment, bore by far the greatest international significance. Nehru sought quite early after independence to establish an Indian foreign policy designed to afford India the possibility of self-assertion and freedom of action under all circumstances. A policy of neutrality like Switzerland's, based on the guarantees of stronger powers, was no longer really meaningful. The only meaningful guarantee was (and is) one against war itself; to say that wars will exclude any particular country when wars are world-wide is obviously absurd.[12]

Instead, Nehru established a policy of non-alignment, but of a very special nature as he explained in the fall of 1949:

> I am asked why India does not align herself with a particular nation or a group of nations, and told that because we have refrained from doing so, we are sitting on the fence. . . . But I should like to make it clear that the policy India has sought to pursue is not a negative and neutral policy. It is a positive and vital policy that flows from our struggle for freedom and from the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi's. How can . . . peace be preserved? Not by surrender to aggression, nor by compromising with evil or injustice, but also not by taking and preparing for war. Aggression has to be met, for that endangers peace. At the same time . . . the very process of marshaling the world into two hostile camps precipitates the conflict that it has sought to avoid.[13]

It is quite clear that this statement does not advocate mere pacivity. It dictates an aggressive diplomatic mission and at the same time acknowledges that forceful imposition of one country's will upon another must be met, with force if necessary.

It must be remembered that Nehru's pre-independence experiences lay with a method which attempted to deal frontally and energetically with evil without using evil as a weapon. It means basically taking suffering upon one-

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[11] Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Freedom* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1962), pp. 35-36.

[12] M. N. Das, *The Political Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: The John Day Co., 1961), p. 231.

[13] Herrymon Maurer, "The Middle Ground where Nehru Stands," *Commentary*, II No. 3 (March, 1951), p. 208.

self rather than inflicting suffering on others. One must not meekly submit to the will of the evil-doer but instead put one's soul against the will of the tyrant. But Nehru did not take the risk of dispensing with an armed forces as Gandhi would have. Half of the budget went to the military in 1951.[14] Obviously Nehru thought that in addition to pitting the soul against the will of the tyrant, a bit of brawn could prove useful.

The early years of Nehru's non-alignment policy met with sharp responses, intermittently positive and negative, from the two great powers. During 1948 and 1949 both local and Soviet communist parties condemned India for her so-called compromises with the British. These attacks were leveled primarily due to the lack of any real anti-British sentiment, for the Indian government recognized that continued cooperation, especially economic, with the British could prove to be mutually beneficial. Yet Nehru was accused of conducting the country's affairs with the support of warmongers and trying to cut off the Indian people from their "natural allies and liberty loving peoples." [15]

During this same period a positive view was taken, as can be expected, by the United States government and press. The *New York Times* of October 23, 1948 presented this statement:

> The feeling in American diplomatic circles is that eventually India will arrive at a point when she cannot stay on the fence in the East-West conflict — and that at that point she will choose to stand with the Western democracies. Thus there is considerable political sympathy in Washington, and a disposition to try to help Mr. Nehru to solve his country's problems.[16]

There obviously existed in American circles a tendency to doubt the stability of Nehru's non-alignment policy, if not Nehru himself. The self-righteous view, that the only moral choice India would eventually have would be to side with the West, indicated mere American toleration of a supposedly passing fancy. Yet a complete misinterpretation and false evaluation of India policies was evident six months later upon India's announcement to retain membership in the commonwealth. The *New York Times* of April 28, 1949 stated:

> It is a historic step, not only in the progress of the commonwealth, but in setting a limit to Communist conquest and opening the prospect of a wider defense system than the Atlantic Pact.[17]

This sort of an interpretation could only have angered Nehru, for the use of a purely economic alliance as an integral part of the "cold war" politics was precisely what he had sought to avoid.

India's attitude during the Korean conflict quickly shattered the American self-assured attitude toward India. India did not fall into the Western camp and the frustration gave vent to indignant protests and cries of outrage.

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[14] Maurer, *Commentary* II No. 3 (March, 1951), pp. 213-214.
[15] K. P. Karunakaran, *India in World Affairs 1950-53* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 238.
[16] Karunakaran, p. 238.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

The fact that India could have actually submitted and supported the Chinese formula was beyond American understanding. The American press no longer carried glowing reports of optimistic signs in India.[18] As would be expected, American disenchantment gave way to Soviet favor. The Soviet Union began a gradual slowdown of its hostility to India but it was not until 1956 that local communist parties relaxed their assaults on Nehru's government. Until this time they had repeatedly accused Nehru of failing to meet the needs of the people but, with the friendly reception of Nehru in China and the Soviet Union, their accusations were deflated and severe opposition dropped off.[19]

The general attitude of the Soviet Union and the United States toward India has developed into a traditional state of flux. India seeks to judge each issue independently, apart from pressures created through alliances. Therefore neither the Soviet Union nor the United States has ever been able to effectively gauge the Indian reaction to any specific action. India cannot be taken for granted to side with anyone on any particular issue.

In spite of her relative unpredictability, India has, over an extended period, swung from an anti-western stance to a more pro-western stance beginning in the late 1950's. The anti-western orientation manifested itself in (1) a favorable view of Marxism, (2) the denunciation of American imperialism, (3) the lack of condemnation for Soviet moves into Eastern Europe in 1945, (4) the support of the Chinese formula for Korea, and (5) the lack of protest over the Soviet response to the Hungarian Revolution.[20]

The shift occurred after approximately 1958 at which time India (1) recognized Marxian economic faults, (2) opposed the militancy of communist governments, (3) was strongly affected by Chinese moves against Tibet, (4) was plagued by communist instigated local unrest, and (5) denunciated Hanoi for specific intervention in South Vietnam.[21] Nehru personally attributed his slight pro-western shift to two general factors. First was a suspicion of power which could have been derived from his exposure to 19th century British liberal and socialist thought, Buddhism, or merely astute observations of recent political history. Second was the recurrent theme of disenchantment with Marxism. Nehru saw failure in the system because of rigidity, contradictions and lack of concern for essential human needs. These two factors meant that Nehru's search for international order would proceed with less certainty and overall effectiveness but also with a greater appreciation of the liberalism and freedom in the capitalist bloc.[22]

It was this international order that had always intrigued Nehru and toward which his hopes and ambitions had essentially been directed. It is for this end that his non-alignment concept was implemented. He hoped that India could attain a reasonable understanding with both power poles. This sort of aggressive non-alignment caused him to reject, as early as 1933, the alternate policy of isolationism. Nehru saw civilization as a pool, contributed

[18] Karunakaran, pp. 238-239.
[19] Palayam M. Balasundaram, "Is India's Role in World Affairs Misunderstood?" *Pacific Spectator*, X No. 1 (Winter, 1956), p. 30.
[20] Power, *The Review of Politics* XXVI No. 2 (April, 1964), p. 282.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 282. Note: The condemnation of Hanoi by India came as a result of India's membership on the International Truce Supervisory Commission for Vietnam.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

to by many nations and not merely the creation or monopoly of any one people or nation. Nations today are subject to large scale interdependence and are constantly influencing and being influenced. It is therefore impossible to speak of separate histories of nations but rather of a composite world history connecting the threads from all nations.[23]

To achieve these views, Nehru realized the absolute necessity for peaceful coexistence, if not outright cooperation. Yet in the early 1930's Nehru believed the differences between the Soviet Union and the United States were so fundamental that they could never live in peace. By the 1950's he saw changes in both systems and in conjunction with the "cold war" standoff, peaceful coexistence was deemed possible. As a result of the border disputes with China in the early 1950's, Nehru drafted his "Panchshila" or "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." These are:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territory
2. Non-aggression
3. Non-interference in each other's internal affairs
4. Equality and mutual benefit
5. Peaceful coexistence.[24]

However, peace itself presented numerous problems to Nehru. The peace of the thirties led him to view peace as merely that interval between two wars. Peace could mean "merely a preparation for war" or the "continuation of the conflict in economic and other spheres." [25] He expounded these views by stating:

> There is a continuous tug-of-war between the victors and the vanquished, between the imperialist powers and their colonial dependencies, between the privileged classes and the exploited classes. The war atmosphere, with all its accompaniments of violence and falsehood, continues in some measure therefore even during so-called peace time, and both the soldier and the civilian official are trained to meet this situation.[26]

It became clear for Nehru that aid was essential in the establishment of permanent peace. This, he felt, must be accomplished through the gradual abolition of blind national hostilities when it would benefit both parties to act cooperatively.

> I do not believe in a narrow autarchy. But the internationalism that I look forward to is not one of common subjection, imposed from above, but a union and co-operation of free nations for the common good. It is this kind of world order that will bring peace and progress to mankind.[27]

Nehru attempted to view all events within an international context; that is, to view even local events with the thought of what they could mean inter-

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[23] Das, p. 195.
[24] Willard Range, *Jawaharlal Nehru's World View: A Theory of International Relations* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1961), p. 38.
[25] Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography,* p. 541.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Eighteen Months in India 1936-1937* (Allahabad, 1938), p. 184 as quoted in Das, p. 192.

nationally. He saw the struggle for Indian independence as possessing in some way an international significance and therefore as adding to the event even greater justification. In his words:

> The struggle for Indian freedom is essentially a part of the world struggle for the emanicipation of the exploited everywhere and for the establishment of a new social order.[28]

To maintain an international outlook, the national policies have to be so formulated as not to exhibit a means for the realization of selfish interests. The temptation to pursue limited, short range, self-centered aims is at times difficult to overcome. Of these inherent difficulties, Nehru was fully aware.

> Every intelligent person can see that if you have a narrow national policy it may enthuse the multiude for the moment . . . but it is bad for the nation and it is bad internationally because you lose sight of the ultimate good. Therefore we propose to look after India's interests in the context of world co-operation and world peace, insofar as world peace can be preserved.[29]

The obvious problem than was to formulate only national policies which coincided with international goals. In order for this to be accomplished, every nation had to give of itself and deny itself certain interests. To expect any nation to act in such a manner at a time when nationalistic fervor and competition still ran high, was rather naive. In spite of the high idealistic statements of Nehru which have been cited, he was fully aware of the realities of the situation. He recognized that at present only individuals could sacrifice national goals for the ideals of internationalism, but not so nations. As early as 1947 Nehru spoke of the relationship between national interests and international interests.

> Whatever policy you may lay down, the art of conducting the affairs of a country lies in finding out what is most advantageous to the country. We may talk about international goodwill and mean what we say. 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 dares do anything which in the short or long run is manifestly to the disadvantage of that country.
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> Therefore, whether a country is imperialistic or socialist or communist, its Foreign Minister thinks primarily of the interests of that country.[30]

With such an acknowledgement it is easier to understand the Indian invasions of Hyderabad and Goa. In both cases international law was opposed to Indian action. The Goa incident has received the greatest international attention and involves two major points. First, India became the cause of increased international tension, for any increase in the global total of fighting is dangerous even if not directly between the East and West.

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[28] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Recent Essays and Writings* (Allahabad, 1934), p. 120, as quoted in Das, p. 193.

[29] Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, 1947, II (December 4, 1947), as quoted in Das, p. 200.

[30] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence and After* (New York: The John Day Co., 1950), pp. 204-205, as quoted in Range, pp. 45-46.

Second, the event cut through Nehru's peace policies and rendered his stand somewhat questionable.[31]

In spite of these "black eyes" the overwhelming majority of Indian international efforts have vouched for the success of her policy. Indians seem firmly convinced that the increased flow of aid from the United States and the Soviet Union after the China-India border dispute in 1962 was directly related to their non-aligned policy. They feel that had they taken sides during the "cold war" the Soviet Union would automatically have been aligned with China. As it was, the Soviet Union gave its moral support to India.[32] Further successes were achieved as, (1) India helped bring about cease fires in Korea and Indochina, (2) President Eisenhower, on December 8, 1953, expressed a willingness to accept India's proposal for an informal meeting of the principal powers concerned with atomic energy and (3) India played a role in the release of American airmen held by Red China.[33]

With such overall successes in conjunction with India's increasing ability to provide an alternate choice to the power blocs, Nehru sought to reaffirm India's non-alignment policy in 1963.

> Non-alignment was not due to any indifference to issues that arose, but rather to a desire to judge them for ourselves, in full freedom, and without any preconceived partisan bias. It implied, basically, a conviction that good and evil are mixed up in this world, that the nations cannot be divided into sheep and goats, to be condemned or approved accordingly, and that if we were to join one military group rather than the other it was liable to increase and not diminish the risk of a major clash between them.[34]

Not only is there satisfaction expressed here for the success of India but also a deep personal pride. Consequently, we have frequently used "Nehru" and "India" interchangeably and quite legitimately. Seldom has a political leader so completely dominated his nation's foreign affairs. Nehru did not merely restate or manage India's foreign policy. He was often solely responsible for its creation. His dual role as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister granted him a great deal of leeway and significantly reduced any opposition he may have had.

The reaffirmation of non-alignment furnishes, more importantly, a greater understanding of the extent to which traditional Indian philosophy influenced Nehru. According to Nehru, the most pressing problem of the world is not the conflict between the Western powers and the Communist powers but rather between peace and war. Neither is the East-West conflict regarded as one of good versus evil. It is exactly this deliberate avoidance of absolutes that pervades traditional Indian philosophy. Nothing is expressed in terms of black or white. Everything is relative and subject therefore to compromise.

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[31] "Mr. Nehru's Adventure," *The Spectator* CCVII No. 6965 (December 22, 1961), p. 920.
[32] W. Norman Brown, *The United States and India and Pakistan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 355.
[33] Balasundaram, *Pacific Spectator* X No. 1 (Winter, 1956), p. 34.
[34] Norman C. Walpole *et al., U.S. Army Handbook for India* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 473.

Professor Appodarai, a leading Indian intellectual, offered a concise translation of this philosophy into political terms.

> To keep the peace, try peaceful means — negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration; listen to the viewpoints of both parties to a dispute expressed by their duly constituted representatives, hesitate to condemn either party as an aggressor, until facts proved by international enquiry indisputably testify to aggression: believe the bona fides of both until proof to the contrary; and explore fully the possibilities of negotiations and at least localize war — this is India's view.[35]

If this is indicative of India, then it too is indicative of Nehru, for Nehru was India. The firm foundation which he created for Indian policies has enabled his successors to follow his lead with relatively high success. This foundation stresses the prevalence of moral concerns over a wide spectrum of diplomatic, ideological, and strategic considerations, even if not always to India's best interests.

[35] Patterson, pp. 75-76.