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## **INDIA'S NON-ALIGNMENT AND THE INDO-SOVIET TREATY**

The impact and implications of a treaty on the foreign policy and relations of the contracting parties can and should be studied in terms of the provisions of the treaty at the time it is entered into. But a more important consideration in this context should be the performance of the two parties subsequent to its conclusion. Hence it is suggested that the letter of a treaty are of limited significance and the performance of much greater importance. This is so because history abounds with examples, where inspite of friendship treaties, adversary relationship developed between parties to the treaty concerned. The Sino-Soviet Treaty is a recent instance in point.

These generalisations should be kept in mind while evaluating the impact of the Indo-Soviet Treaty on India's non-alignment. In August 1971, when this treaty was concluded there were some, including this author, who thought that the treaty might adversely affect non-alignment though it was also pointed out at that time that much would depend on the operation of the treaty subsequent to its conclusion. The passage of a decade indeed is an appropriate vantage point to attempt an evaluation in this regard. While doing so we may concentrate on :

- (i) the broad framework of India's non-alignment; and
- (ii) how was this affected by the text of the treaty but more so, by India's international performance.

The values which India's non-alignment seeks to promote revolve around the furtherance of national interest in an international order based on peace and justice. The leaders of non-aligned India understood it unambiguously that the conduct of foreign policy was not an exercise in sainthood and, therefore, pursuit

of national interest should have primacy over all other objectives. National interest of India, as also of other countries, is determined by her geopolitical, economic and other considerations obtaining at a particular point of time.

Non-alignment was chosen to be a means or an instrument of foreign policy by India in order that she might give fuller meaning and content to her newly achieved political independence. Not content with formal transfer of political power she wanted to go beyond and autonomously shape her destiny in a manner which would protect and promote her national interest, which essentially lay in accelerated socio-economic development of her poor, backward and, in terms of power, a weak society. She looked upon international peace as pre-requisite to the achievement of these objectives, and upon the cold war, bloc politics as injurious and requiring to be opposed.

Let it be pointed out that the initial phase of India's non-alignment (1947-54) synchronized with a period of great tension, a period when the cold war between the two Super Powers was in full swing and hence it was logical that India should give high priority to this item on her agenda of work in international relations. Nevertheless, the cold war was neither the sole nor the most critical reference point of India's non-alignment, which really emanated and grew in a wider complex of national and international factors in the post-war period. This can be substantiated by the fact that the genesis of non-alignment preceded the cold war.

While non-alignment was non-bloc in character, for India it has never been a policy of equidistance from blocs because within the basic framework of non-alignment—dissociation from military alliances conceived in the context of great power rivalry—India has fashioned her relationship in accordance with the needs and requirements of her national interest. Implicitly, and at times explicitly, her leaders have also made it clear that the notion that non-alignment is a “natural ally” of a power bloc, is antithetical to the basic non-bloc and independent philosophy of nonalignment.

In a nutshell, *India's non-alignment is rooted in her national interest which consists in development domestically and independence of action internationally. It has meant a non-bloc policy, rejecting the concept of "natural ally" on the one hand and the theory of mechanical equidistance from blocs on the other.*

In the context of these fundamentals, let us take into account the major thrust of India's foreign policy in the backdrop of the Indo-Soviet Treaty.

Let us first recapitulate the terms of the treaty. It pledged the two parties to maintain mutual friendship and to respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This meant that Moscow undertook the obligation to support the Indian position in Kashmir which the Soviet Union considers a part of India's territory. The two parties promised to consult each other on international matters of mutual concern and to increase their cooperation in various fields. They undertook the obligations not to enter into any military alliance directed against either of them and not to allow the use of their respective territories for any action detrimental to the other party. While neither party should support any third state in a military aggression against the other party, they promised to consult each other in case of such an aggression in order to take appropriate measures to protect their security. Thus the Soviet Union professed a threat addressed to those who were against India's interest in the 1971 subcontinental crisis. Finally, and most importantly for this discussion, the Soviet Union promised to respect Indian non-alignment. It is evident from all this that the contents of the treaty in themselves did not violate the spirit of non-alignment; in fact they affirmed it.

Almost instantaneously, the treaty gave to an extent psychological and political boost to India in a very difficult situation. The influx of ten million refugees from East Pakistan, forced to come to India by the terror unleashed by the West Pakistani military rulers, posed India with a problem of enormous proportions. It was not easily possible for India to cope with this situation. With treaty in

the background, India could help the creation of Bangladesh and protect her own independence and integrity.

Apart from the immediate context India's international behavior during the past decade is instructive. It is well known that India has fairly close relationship with the Soviet Union in the political, economic and security spheres. These spheres cover domestic as well as international aspects. Though in this article these need not be recounted but it merits mention that the help and assistance of the Soviet Union in case of Kashmir and Goa, in our oil exploration, industrial development in making available some security equipment has served India's interests and thus strengthened non-alignment in a different way. The Soviet Union in return also derived economic and political advantages from this relationship.

What is more relevant for the theme of this article is to identify areas where the perspectives of the two countries have been, or are, different and where India has followed a non-aligned course, independent of and sometimes divergent from the Soviet Union. It is this which would indicate as to how the treaty affected India's non-alignment.

Firstly, let us begin with Asian Collective security proposal which predates the treaty by a couple of years. As a tactical diplomatic move, the Soviet Communist Party Chairman Leonid Brezhnev in the course of his address to the International Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow on 7 June 1969, stated that "the course of events is also bringing to the fore the need to create a collective security system in Asia." As is evident, this was floated just as an idea without spelling out the framework, perhaps with a view to seeking reaction of the countries in Asia. The proposal became a subject of considerable speculation and discussion.

In so far as India was concerned, there was no question of her joining any alliance but some sympathy was shown to it if the proposal meant cooperation in economic and other related fields. The proposal remained vague and on account of lack of support by countries like India faded out of discussion.

A couple of years later when the Indo-Soviet treaty was signed, some westerners tried to say that it "represented the first link in the chain visualised in the so-called Brezhnev plan," a view which was entirely falsified by later developments.

Thus India did not buy the idea of Asian Collective Security and kept her independent, non-aligned posture intact.

Secondly, there is incompatibility of interest in so far as nuclear proliferation is concerned. India's implosion in Rajasthan in May 1974, clearly indicated difference in the interests of the two countries, spread over the non-proliferation Treaty and the question of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. On the NPT, the two countries have opposite views and policies. As we know, the Soviet Union is for adhering to it while India is totally opposed to it because, in her opinion, it is unjust to try to prohibit horizontal proliferation without placing any restrictions on vertical proliferation which is more expensive and immensely more dangerous. It is India's contention that the NPT seeks to create a regime which would perpetuate the present international order based on domination and exploitation of the non-aligned world. It is not in the interest of a country like India to accept such a regime. It would restrict India's options, circumscribe her independence and thus impair her non-alignment.

Similarly, the positions of the two countries are dissimilar on peaceful nuclear explosions. India has made it clear that she cannot agree to any international regulation of peaceful nuclear explosions unless the nuclear weapon powers first agree to stop their nuclear weapon tests and then agree to submit themselves to the same system of international regulation of their nuclear activities, including peaceful nuclear explosions, as would be applicable to the non-nuclear weapon powers. On the other hand, while the Soviet Union is herself experimenting with PNEs, she does not really want others to do the same. Without ruling out the future possibilities for the nuclear explosions, her view is that "they can be considered only in exceptional cases when an urgent problem crops up which cannot be

solved by alternative means." But the real problem is that PNEs might undermine the basic motivations of the NPT. This divergence remains notwithstanding the fact that the Soviet Union did not condemn the Indian implosion.

Thirdly, with regard to the Indian ocean a zone of peace the divergence of opinions, and perhaps of interests, has been quite evident. In 1971, when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution tabled by Sri Lanka and other non-aligned countries, envisaging the creation of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean, India supported it unequivocally but the Soviet Union abstained. The Soviet opposition has been on the ground that the zone of peace idea attempts to create a special regime in the Indian Ocean which, if implemented, would prevent the foreign naval presence, including that of the Soviet Union, in the Indian Ocean. For many years the Soviet Union continued to abstain, along with the United States and its friends and allies but since a couple of years ago the Soviet voting behavior on this issue in the UN changed and she began voting for the resolution along with India and the other non-aligned countries. But inspite of this change India continues to oppose the Super Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean which is causing new tensions in its littoral and hinterland. Thus it is clear that India holds a position which is different from and independent of the Soviet Union.

Lastly, the case of Afghanistan is perhaps very significant in the context of the theme of this article. The case is not only of current interest but, at least in the near future, it is likely to be a bone of contention between different powers in which the stakes of the Soviet Union and India are very high, though in different ways.

Ever since the Soviet action in Afghanistan towards the end of the year 1979, Moscow has attempted to enlist support of countries like India for her action. The first major effort of the Soviet Union to evolve such a common view about the solution of the problems created in Afghanistan was made in February 1980

when her veteran Foreign Minister and politburo member Andrei Gromyko visited India. He came to India in an attempt to bridge the gap between New Delhi and Moscow. After several hours of discussion with his counterpart in New Delhi Narsimha Rao and with Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi the divergencies could not be eliminated. The joint statement issued at the conclusion of his visit was conspicuous because of the absence of any reference to the developments in Afghanistan and their impact on the region. It was obvious that India did not share the Soviet perceptions of the Afghan developments which had dominated Gromyko's talks in New Delhi. In fact the joint statement did not even record the exchanges on Afghan developments of which a daily briefing was given by an official spokesman during the talks. It was reported that India sought some Soviet gesture to help develop a regional response to prevent the extension of Cold War to its doorsteps. On the other hand, the Soviet Foreign Minister steadfastly maintained the Soviet position that the compulsion of circumstances which precipitated the Soviet action in Afghanistan continued and the time was not propitious for any unilateral action or initiative.

As the press and public noted that this was perhaps for the first time in many years that India and the Soviet Union could not agree on a major issue of international affairs affecting them directly. Reflecting the reality of the situation a leading Indian daily correctly said: "The Soviet Union and India's positions on Afghanistan remain as far apart at the end of the Gromyko's visit to New Delhi as they were before."

Subsequently, in December 1980, Leonid Brezhnev visited India and obviously one of the most important mission of his stay in New Delhi was to enlist India's support for the Soviet policy in Afghanistan. Unfortunately for the Soviet Union, though trade and other protocols were signed, there was no harmonising views on Afghanistan. Once again it was unusual that the joint statement remained silent on Afghanistan. The effort to slur over the differences was nowhere so manifestly evident as in the absence of any reference to

Afghanistan. President Sanjiva Reddy speaking on behalf of the nation at the official banquet to the visiting Soviet leader frankly said that "we in India remain opposed to any form of intervention covert or overt, by outside forces in the internal affairs of the region". This was a very clear hint by India of her anxiety at the situation in Afghanistan. It was reported that Mrs. Gandhi also consistently maintained, during the talks, that the Soviet Union must withdraw its troops from Afghanistan because their continuing presence would have serious impact in the region, particularly India. As against this, Brezhnev made it clear that unless the southern neighbours of Afghanistan reached a good neighbourly agreement with the government of Karmal, there could be no Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

It merits mention that a notable feature of Brezhnev's visit was his address to members of Parliament of India. In this address the Soviet President came out with a revised version of his earlier doctrine for Asian Collective Security, involving the Soviet Union, China and Japan with the regional states to make the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean free from tensions. His five-point formula was for the liquidation of foreign military bases, non-deployment of nuclear weapons, non-use of force against countries of the region, respect for the non-aligned status and removal of all obstacles to normal trade and unfettered use of sea lanes for peaceful purposes. It was of some significance that the five-point peace plan was not even mentioned in the joint statement what to say it being endorsed or applauded by India though some points in the plan were unexceptionable.

It may be recalled that the Soviet President's visit had attracted world-wide attention. The ailing leader did not come to India just to provide greater inputs or contents to the bilateral relations. It was indeed a difficult time for the Soviet Union which was distinctively on the defensive. Obviously the real purpose of his visit was to placate India to take a more sympathetic view of her action in Afghanistan, an effort which did not succeed.



Since India almost obstinately asserted her independence in thinking and action on the Afghan issue, it is evident that the two sides agreed to disagree on an important problem of regional and international relations without diminishing substantial, and mutually advantageous, bilateral relations.

It should be unambiguously clear from this discussion that India's relations with the Soviet Union in political, economic and security fields are based on mutuality of interests. In a sense closeness of relationship is inherent in their geopolitical and geostrategic locii. But this has not always led to identical or similar perspectives in international relations. Sometimes a section of Western opinion has been critical of India's voting behavior in the UN and of a few of her omissions and commissions in the realm of her foreign policy. In most of these cases India's inspirations and motivations have not been adequately understood and appreciated.

In spite of the Indo-Soviet treaty, the essential thrust of India's foreign policy has been independence of action in a manner which subserves her basic national interests. That is why there was no qualitative change in Indo-Soviet relations even during the Janata Government. India's non-alignment, both in its theory and practice, since the conclusion of the treaty a decade ago, has remained what it was before. No provision of the treaty and no instance of India's foreign policy behavior would suggest otherwise.