

The Second
G. Parthasarathi Memorial Lecture

Delivered by Shri C. R. Gharekhan on
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1st NOVEMBER 1986 WAS a proud day in my career. On that day, I assumed charge of the office of Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations. It was not that I was proud of my achievement in the career or of the fact that I was, until then at least, the youngest officer to occupy that prestigious post, though there was a bit of it, I must confess. It was the realization that that position had had a series of eminent luminaries before and of course after me. But for me, the one name that came to mind that day was that of the person in whose memory the JNU is holding this lecture series. Mr.Parthasarathi was my PR when I first served at the UN mission from 1965 to 1968. Whatever I learnt about the UN was during those years. I have no hesitation in saying that the Indian mission enjoyed a clout and wielded influence in the United Nations then which has not been equalled since, yes, not even when I was PR! He was an affectionate boss, and considerate. My wife and I fondly remember the many kindnesses that we received for Mr Parthasarathi and his highly articulate and talented spouse. But he also expected the best efforts from his officers. It was a great experience to watch him operate, with able assistance from his deputy PR, Brajesh Mishra. For the first and perhaps the only time, India managed to get a report from the Secretary General which categorically endorsed India's stand in the war with Pakistan in 1965. It is a different matter that we could have got even a better report had the Ministry accepted what the SG had first drafted, but which he modified somewhat under pressure from the other side and its backers. He continued to take interest in my career in subsequent years. He was responsible for my posting as Ambassador to Vietnam and I believe he had something to do with my posting to prime minister's office where I served for five years.

Mr. Parthasarathi, as every one knows, had a most wonderful career in diplomacy and served in several crucially important missions such as Pakistan, china, UN, etc. As Chairman in charge of Policy Planning with the rank of cabinet minister, he was involved in many crucial decisions. What is perhaps only slightly less known, and acknowledged, is the extremely important, seminal role he played in handling two

very tough, intractable questions impinging on domestic security: Kashmir and the Mizo problem. It was his negotiations with Afzal Beg, appointed by Shaikh Abdulla as his personal envoy that led to the Indira Gandhi – Sheikh Abdullah agreement. The negotiations demanded a high degree of skill, tact and patience and only Mr. Parthasarathi , who possessed all these qualities in abundance and who had the added advantage of having witnessed his father, Mr. Gopaldaswami Aiyanger, function as the Prime Minister of Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of Kashmir, who could have pulled it off. Mr. Parthasarathi also provided all the inputs for Mrs. Indira Gandhi's speech in the Parliament when she introduced the accord and obtained Parliament's approval for it.

Mr. Parthasarathi's another major achievement was his successful negotiation with the Mizo leader Laldenga over 1982-84. If Mizoram has enjoyed relative stability for over two decades, the credit in no small measure goes to Mr. Parthasarathi.

As the first Vice Chancellor and mentor of this University, Mr. Parthasarathi has left an indelible imprint on its evolution and blossoming into a world class institution of higher learning.

It is therefore entirely appropriate for the Jawaharlal Nehru University to start a lecture series in memory of this great son of India and a matter of honour and privilege for me to be invited to deliver this lecture Thank you, Mr. Sopory.

I am an unabashed admirer of Mr. Nehru, unabashed but not an uncritical one. We in India have a tendency to elevate our leaders to a high pedestal; in fact, we almost deify them. This is not fair either to the leaders or to ourselves. Unfair to the leaders because it makes them infallible, just as gods are supposed to be perfect. Unfair to ourselves since we deny to us the benefit of lessons that we might learn from the lives of our leaders.

Nehru knew that foreign policy was all about protecting and promoting national interest. The best definition of the function of foreign policy was given by Mr. Nehru a month before he became Prime Minister of independent India. In a letter

written on 11 July 1947 to Einstein, in reply to the latter's letter of 14 June on the question of the creation of the State of Israel, he said the following:

... national policies are unfortunately essentially selfish policies. Each country thinks of its own interest first and then of other interests. If it so happens that some international policy fits in with the national policy of the country, then that nation uses brave language about international betterment. But as soon as that international policy seems to run counter to national interests or selfishness, then a host of reasons are found not to follow that international policy.

In other words, Nehru saw foreign policy as an instrument to promote national interest. He was clear in his mind that national interest is the only abiding principle in international relations and will always trump other principles. Mr. Nehru's definition of foreign policy can hardly be improved upon. Did he live by his own concept of national interest? Did he let personal prejudices or preferences affect his own conduct of foreign policy or did he get carried away by transitory, though important, events?

Continuing in the same vein as in his letter to Einstein, Nehru stated in an interview to New York Times on 1 September, 1948: India would develop an active concern in world affairs, pursuing an independent policy compatible with her own national interests.

Again, in March 1948, he told the Constituent Assembly: purely from the point of opportunism, an independent policy is the best.

There is an interesting quote from Mr. Nehru's speech in constituent assembly a year later: "What does independence consist of? It consists fundamentally and basically of foreign relations. That is the test of independence. All else is local autonomy. Once foreign relations go out of your hands into the charge of somebody else, to that extent and in that measure you are not independent". I doubt if any scholar would disagree with Mr. Nehru's definition of the essence of independent policy.

Independent policy is one thing, policy of non-alignment is another. There is confusion about what an independent policy means. It does not suggest that a country must be consistent in its approach irrespective of developments in the world, or that it cannot take sides in a given situation or criticize another country in a situation for fear that it would be seen, by its own people, as abandoning independence. If it is in its selfish interests, it should not hesitate to take a position that might appear to be 'not fully independent'. Who decides what is national interest? Naturally, it has to be the government of the day. One government may come to the conclusion that signing a nuclear agreement with some country will serve national interest while some other government may take a different view. To that extent, it may be preferable to have a consensus among principal political parties on foreign policy issues though this may not always be possible or even desirable.

The choice of the phrase 'nonalignment' was not very felicitous, in my view. It suggested a negative approach to international relations. Foreign service officers of my generation spent long hours explaining to our colleagues from other countries that nonalignment was not a negative concept. While remaining neutral or unaligned between the two blocs, India stood for justice, freedom, and all other high values. To quote Nehru: 'Where freedom is in danger or justice threatened or where aggression takes place, we cannot and shall not be neutral'. While this was good rhetoric, it did not manage to remove the perception that India was sitting on the fence on international issues of the day. The theory was that nonalignment would permit us to deal with situations on the merits of each case, without being tied to a hegemon. In practice, it is not the merits of the case but our interests in each that should decide our approach. As events evolved, even our claim to be nonaligned came under cloud, and not without reason.

There was widespread perception in the West that Nehru was not truly nonaligned or was nonaligned with a tilt to the East. This perception was shared by many in India and is still prevalent here. Is this true and if it is, how did it happen?

Nehru started his stewardship of India's foreign policy with a clear bias towards the West. In a letter to Krishna Menon dated 26 June, 1948, he said: "we want friendship with Russia... but the whole basis of Russian policy appears to be that no essential change has taken place in India...(since independence).. That of course is complete nonsense". Again, he directed that Britain and United States be informed that in the world as it is, there was not the slightest chance that India would line up with Soviet Union in war or peace...Asian peoples had no sympathy for Soviet expansionism ". According to Krishna Menon, who was very much inclined towards the East, Nehru told him : 'India needed assistance of the United States, particularly food, machinery and capital goods; why not align with United States somewhat and build up our economic and military strength?' At the same time, he added a word of caution: ' not at the price of subservience, important not to get too tied up with American business interests, according to Gopal, his biographer.

When the United States displayed an unfriendly attitude towards India in the Security Council on the Kashmir issue, Nehru began to be disillusioned with the West. In the beginning, he avoided any step that might worsen relations with the West, still wary of the Soviets. "If there is a world war, there is no possibility of India lining up with Soviet Union... it is obvious that our relations with United States and Britain in political and economic matters are far closer than with other countries. We have practically no such relations with the Soviet Union, nor is it likely that they will develop to any great extent for obvious reasons", note on foreign policy dated Feb 1950.

Gopal observes that Nehru was, thanks to some extent to Soviet attitude, leaning heavily towards western powers, but this policy required some understanding on the part of the great powers; Stalin did not see this and Dulles failed to grasp it later, leading to wavering of nonalignment.

Britain's perfidy in the Security Council on the Kashmir question and America's abandonment of its own independent policy in favour of leaving it to and being guided by Britain influenced Nehru's 'wavering on nonalignment' to use Gopal's

phrase. Gradually, Nehru became quite vocal and even vociferous in criticizing America, not only about its policy towards India, but also other aspects of American life and culture. In a letter to his sister Vijayalaxmi Pandit, he said: "either the American are very naïve or singularly lacking in intelligence... they go through identical routine whether it is Nehru or the shah of Iran or Liaqat Ali(who too had received enthusiastic welcome in United States in May 1950). Again, 'there does seem to be a concerted effort to build up Pakistan and build down India. It surprises me how immature in their political thinking Americans are!"

From the summer of 1954, with the induction of Pakistan into CENTO and SEATO, the drift away from the United States towards the communist states became very pronounced. To quote Nehru again "and yet, no one knows what American policy is, except strong language and powerful emotions.. Americans seem to imagine that every problem could be solved if there is enough shouting and talking about it. My own view is that a little silence might help". Typical English understatement!

Talking about Indian scholars going to America under the Fullbright scholarship programme, Nehru wrote: "I am all for broadening of outlook of a person... But mere breadth is not enough, there must be some depth also. As far as I am concerned, there is neither breadth nor depth about average American".

Nehru was so disappointed with America that he demanded UN to withdraw American members from UNMOGIP, but the UN refused. He decided to withdraw all facilities to the Americans and finally UN agreed to replace them when their terms expired.

Despite his disillusionment with United States, when the Soviet Ambassador suggested and produced a draft of a non-aggression treaty embodying the Five Principles of the Tibet agreement, Mr. Nehru shied away.

Mr. Nehru was sensitive to any suggestion that he was veering away from nonalignment. When the Bhilai steel plant agreement was signed with Soviet

Union in 1955, he rejected suggestions that he was nonaligned more in favour of one side than the other. "I belong to neither bloc and I propose to belong to neither whatever happens in the world. If we have to stand alone, we will stand by ourselves whatever happens and we will face all consequences ". This to the closing session of the Bandung Conference on 22 April 1950.

Nehru came under most criticism, and his nonalignment policy was subjected to harsh words, during the Hungarian crisis of 1956. The facts of that crisis are no doubt familiar to this informed audience and I shall not review them. There was great appreciation in America of Nehru's initial comments on the happenings in Hungary at a press conference. He said that what was happening in Hungary was a national upsurge and suggested withdrawal of soviet forces from Hungary. But this appreciation did not last long when India did not support UN resolutions on Hungary. The contrast with the categorical and strong Indian attitude to the Anglo-French-Israeli action in Suez at the same time made India's profile on Hungary look as biased and not nonaligned. Krishna Menon's style of functioning, his rhetoric and his tendency to act independently without awaiting instructions from Delhi made matters worse. Nehru tried to explain and justify India's stand to the international audience as well as to the Indian public opinion, including in his own party. Mr. S. Dutt, who was foreign secretary at the time, wrote in his memoir 'With Nehru In The Foreign Office', "Nehru was anxious not to make any statement critical of the Soviet Union without being sure of the facts". Since the Soviet Union had taken a firm line against the Anglo-French aggression in Egypt, Nehru was keen to avoid any public condemnation of the Soviet action in Hungary. He defended Krishna Menon in public but sent him a telegram not to vote against any other resolution on Hungary without specific instruction from Delhi. He was sensitive to the criticism and tried to make up for it by subsequent statements in various forums ,associating himself with the condemnation of Soviet action at the conference of four Colombo powers-India, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia-on November 14. He continued to feel unhappy about Hungary. When Imre Nagy was executed in June 1958, he expressed shock and said he was worried about its consequences. One way Nehru chose to express his continued

unhappiness was to refuse repeated requests from the Hungarian government to raise our diplomatic representation to the embassy level; it was done only in December 1959.

Nehru's stance on the Hungarian question was not in keeping with the essence of nonalignment, but it was entirely in consonance with his own definition of an independent or 'selfish' policy. By 1956, India's defence relationship with the Soviet Union had acquired great deal of substance. More importantly, India had come to depend and count on the soviet support in the Security Council on the Kashmir question. Soviet veto had to be invoked often to avoid censure or imposition of unacceptable demands from the security council. Thus, it made sense to retain soviet goodwill and not to alienate it, especially at a time when it felt isolated internationally.

India found itself perilously close to nonalignment deteriorating into isolation when tensions with China had escalated by 1962. Nehru himself wondered if he had placed too much faith in the goodwill of others. He must have hated himself for having to approach America for urgent military help, but brought himself to do so, since he was above all a patriot and had to worry about india's territorial integrity. But he realized the dilemma this posed for the policy of nonalignment. He agreed that acceptance of American military assistance introduced an element of 'confusion into india's policy of nonalignment'. He resorted to verbal jugglery and consoled, basically himself, that the essence of nonalignment was refusal to join any military bloc and this India had not done! Fortunately for him and for india, the question whether nonalignment could survive a long-term war with china fought with American military assistance remained hypothetical since china announced unilateral ceasefire on 21 November.

Thus, it seems to me that the choice of the term 'nonalignment' to describe India's foreign policy was not a happy one. In practice, Nehru abided by his own view of foreign policy as independent. He thought of 'nonalignment' because he was a thinker, a strategist in his own way and wanted to clothe his policy with a geopolitical, original and impressive term. But this only led to confusion at times

and invited criticism from abroad. However much we tried to explain that nonalignment was not a negative concept, the prefix 'non' inevitable gave rise to such interpretation. At the same time, I have no doubt whatsoever that Nehru would not have approved or even allowed nonalignment deteriorating into a bloc or a structured movement with nonaligned bureau, regular meetings at foreign minister level, three yearly summits, etc. He knew that such rigid structures would destroy the essence of nonalignment. He did not wish to become aligned even with the nonaligned!

Nehru was right in his basic approach, namely, India needed a peaceful environment for her to devote her energy and resources to the task of economic and social development, particularly of the weaker sections of the society. This demanded that we kept the cold war and its attendant tensions away from our neighbourhood. In practice, however, this did not work because Pakistan joined west-sponsored military alliances and willy nilly we were dragged into cold war polemics.

There is yet another aspect to nonalignment. Nonalignment, or neutrality for that matter, can be successfully practiced and defended only by strong countries, as we discovered in 1962 after the china war. Nehru, I think, was conscious of this fact and repeatedly stated that India had to develop its industry and infrastructure in order to be able to defend its territorial integrity, but he could not bring it about during his lifetime. A weak country feels the need to seek help or even protection from a powerful country to defend itself against what it might regard a hostile neighbour. Some of you might recall that I and an eminent Indian scholar had suggested that Afghanistan should declare itself a neutral state if it wished to keep away external interference and intervention. During the course of several months and discussions with various Afghan leaders, I was told that Afghanistan could not afford to become neutral since it was too weak to defend by itself against foreign interference and needed external, basically American umbrella to feel safe. It is entirely possible that Pakistan felt then exactly the same way about India. We had no hostile intentions towards Pakistan, but they had a different perception, perhaps genuinely so. Hence their decision to join

Seato and Cento. They had their own agenda, no doubt, but as analysts, we should not dismiss the other possibility.

Let me now deal with three specific cases of Nehru's handling of foreign policy- Kashmir, Tibet /china and disarmament. But before I do that, I would like to bring in the concept of 'national efficacy' elaborated by an Australian academic, Andrew Kennedy who teaches at the Australian National University. In an interesting book titled 'International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru', Kennedy says that leaders usually take decisions of war and peace based on their understanding of their country's capabilities and resources. However, often the leaders previous experience and convictions influence their judgments. He offers two categories of efficacy: martial efficacy and moral efficacy. If the sense of one or the other is predominant in a leader, that will influence his decision. Citing newly available source material, he comes to the conclusion that the sense of martial efficacy was highly developed in the case of Mao whereas the sense of moral efficacy influenced Nehru's decisions.

Take Kashmir first. There is hardly a dissenting voice to the general conclusion that taking the matter to the United Nations was a big mistake. But before that, Nehru had made another mistake, namely, offering, suo moto, to consult the people of the state before treating the accession as final. Even if he thought that if a referendum had been held then the kashmiris would have ratified the accession, there was no need to make such an offer. Further, there is some doubt that the people of the state would have voted in favour of India even at that stage. Perry Anderson, in his much discussed book "Indian Ideology" suggests that early intelligence reports from Kashmir conveyed to Delhi that the people might not vote in favour of accession. To quote him: "India's intelligence agencies had reported by the summer of 1949 after a tour of the Indian-held territory that it was 'midsummer madness to believe that we can win the plebiscite.'" Within another year, again to quote from the Anderson article, " Patel was writing to Nehru: it appears that both the National Conference and Shaikh sahib are losing their hold on the people of the valley and becoming somewhat unpopular. In such circumstances, I agree with you that a plebiscite is unreal". If this is so, Mr.

Nehru ought to have been apprised of it. The mistake was compounded when he accepted UNCIP resolutions on Kashmir, which called for ascertaining the wishes of the people. It is true that the holding of the referendum was subject to prior implementation by Pakistan of Part B of the resolution which asked it to withdraw all its forces, regular as well as irregular, from the state before Part C dealing with plebiscite could be taken up. Since Pakistan never fulfilled its obligation under Part B, the question of ascertaining the wishes of the people became moot. While we have this strong legal argument in our favour, we lost the propaganda battle. The world only remembers the pledge of plebiscite given by us, not only in the UN resolution, but also unilaterally by Nehru. He ought to have known that the UN would never be in a position to enforce Part B of the resolution. He had, by that time, enough experience of the political machinations that went on in the security council and realized that it was futile to expect justice or fair play from it. For Nehru to have acquiesced in the UN resolution in spite of all this was, to say the least, not wise.

This episode brings another aspect of the way we conduct foreign relations. We have always believed that if we are right, if we have a strong legal and moral case, we do not need to do anything more to convince others. We expect foreign governments and media to study the case on merits and by doing so to support our case or appreciate our position. We felt that since we were right, the world would automatically support us. This is a nehruvian tradition. Now, we know better.

Another interesting fact about the handling of the Kashmir question is the amount of time that Mr. Nehru devoted to it. He was terribly preoccupied with extremely weighty issues at that time, what with Partition having played havoc in the subcontinent, and all the responsibilities of holding the country together and developing governing institutions to guide the young nation. Yet, he found time to draft and send detailed telegrams to our representatives in New York and write letters to British prime minister as well as to many others. He kept the brief to himself and decided on the instructions for our delegates by himself. The mantra at that time was: Leave it to Panditji, he knows best. I think that was not

wise. Even on the question of reference to the Security Council, it appears that Sardar Patel had reservation. He expressed it somewhat mildly at the cabinet meeting held a week before the letter was sent. A few months later, Patel publicly aired his doubts. Andrew Kennedy asked the question to himself: why did Patel not press his point of view at the December meeting of the cabinet? His own answer is that Patel, like everyone else, genuinely believed that Nehru, with his enormous experience in such matters, must be right.

Having made the initial mistake, Nehru proceeded to compound it, according to all the military experts who served in the armed forces at the time. They believe that India should have physically thrown the invaders, regular and irregular, out of the entire state. They maintain resolutely that India had the capability to do so; all that was needed was a political decision which the armed forces did not get. I am not going to sit in judgment on this conviction. But I would like to mention two or three concerns which Prof Kennedy brings out in his study. Firstly, according to him, Nehru did not have a high martial efficacy belief about Indian army. He was in any case disinclined to run risks; he weighed the relative balance of the armed forces of the two sides and did not authorize military operation unless he thought the balance was clearly in favour of India. In the case of Kashmir, Nehru was far from convinced about such superiority. Secondly, Nehru was concerned that in case India embarked on a military campaign, Pakistan would receive significant military assistance from others, especially England. This was not an unnatural assumption, given England's hostile attitude in the security council.

Was there yet another explanation? Nehru was convinced that partition would be a short term phenomenon and that the two countries would unite before too long. He told K.P.S. Menon in a note dated 29 April, 1947, 3 ½ months before independence: I have no doubt whatever that sooner or later India will have to function as a unified country. Perhaps the best way to reach that stage is to go through some kind of partition now". Again: "but on one thing I am convinced that ultimately there will be a united and strong India. We have often to go through the valley of the shadow before we reach the sun-lit mountain top". Note the definite terms used by him: 'convinced', 'I have no doubt'. Is it possible that

Nehru might have thought that it made little difference whether or not he took the matter to the security council since the twins would have come together 'sooner or later'.

Andrew Kennedy repeatedly describes Nehru's decision to take the matter to UN as 'bold', showing moral courage, etc. But his final word on the subject is: "Actually it was a disastrous decision. Involving the UN offered Pakistan a chance to compensate for its material weakness, and Pakistan's leaders proceeded to make the most of the opportunity. UN resolutions served as a precedent for external supervision that India would struggle to escape subsequently. In short, as a preeminent military and economic power in South Asia, India would have been better served by dealing with Pakistan bilaterally."

The Kashmir episode was extremely important not only because we failed to retain the whole state with us and has soured relations with Pakistan forever, but because it has hobbled our diplomacy ever since. It forced Nehru to shift his initially preferred tilt from the West to the East, which might have cost us dearly in terms of our economic and technological development. It pushed us into Soviet side because in addition to becoming dependent on soviet defence equipment, we could not afford to lose its veto in the security council. As the Indian Ambassador to Washington told President Kennedy in 1962, a few months before the Chinese attack: India needs Soviet veto. We could not afford to alienate Soviet Union, as at the time of Hungarian crisis.

On Tibet and china, I think Nehru is being subjected to unfair criticism. He was utterly realistic. He had realized by September 1949 that Tibet was likely to be invaded by communist china. In a note to John Mathai in September 1949, he said: the result of all this is that we may have the Chinese or Tibetan communists right up to our Asian, Bhutan and Sikkim borders. This fact it itself does not frighten me'. He was convinced or had convinced himself that India simply did not have the material and military resources to take on China. 'To take up an attitude of resistance without the strength to follow up would have been political folly of the first magnitude'. Mistakes were no doubt made. Appreciating China's

assurance that Tibet would be 'liberated' by peaceful and friendly means, India's response used the word 'sovereignty', expressing the hope that negotiations on Tibetan autonomy will be achieved within the framework of Chinese 'sovereignty'. This was a serious oversight. Ambassador Panikkar was asked to correct this mistake in an official note, but he never did. When India started using 'suzerainty' instead of 'sovereignty', China believed that India had shifted its policy under western pressure. The government in Delhi was clearly dissatisfied with Panikkar's performance. Mr. Bajpai, Secretary General in Foreign Office, observed that Panikkar's protests on Tibet compared closely with Chamberlain's protests to Nazi Germany on behalf of Czechoslovakia . "what interest does the ambassador think he is serving by showing so much solitude for the Chinese policy of false excuses and wanton high-handedness towards Tibet... the ambassador has allowed himself to be influenced more by Chinese point of view , by Chinese claims than by his instructions or by India's interests'. Nehru himself cabled Panikkar on 27 October 1950:"we cannot help thinking that your representation to the Chinese government was weak and apologetic. .. our views regarding threatened invasion of Tibet should have been conveyed clearly and unequivocally.. this has evidently not been done...we have not had any information from you regarding Chinese government's directive to the 'liberation army' to advance into Tibet..It was embarrassing for us not to have received intimation from our own ambassador regarding such serious developments...'

But on the substance of the Tibet question, Nehru was basically right. "We cannot save Tibet as we should have liked to do, and our very attempts to save it might well bring greater trouble to it. It would be unfair to Tibet for us to bring this trouble upon her without having the capacity to help her effectively", note 18 November, 1950. Again, in April 1950, "let us face facts. The whole world cannot bring freedom to Tibet unless the whole fabric of the Chinese state is destroyed. Only a world war, an atomic war, could perhaps make that possible".

Incidentally, Ambassador G. Parthasarathi, in whose memory we are having this lecture, who was in China later, said in a cable to Delhi: "there was no meeting

ground between the two countries on the Tibetan issue and India-China relations should be viewed no longer as an emotional matter”.

Was Nehru influenced at least partly by the apprehension that India might have to face war on two fronts at the same time, with Pakistan and China? Could be. The Chinese ambassador in Delhi told Foreign secretary in May 1959:” China disliked having to concern itself with both united states and India. Friends! It seems to us that you too cannot have two fronts. Is it not so? If it is therein lies the meeting point of our two sides... will you please think it over?”.

On the border problem with china, Nehru is criticized on two counts: lack of preparedness to face Chinese attacks and failure to seize the offer made by Zhou en Lai in 1960 on the ‘as is ‘basis, the so-called status quo or practical solution.

Nehru was , typically, quite candid in respect of inadequate defence preparedness to meet the Chinese challenge. He repeatedly said that to be militarily strong the country had to develop its economy, especially industry. However, that was necessarily going to be a longer term solution; in the immediate term, the defence forces were woefully ill prepared to face the Chinese assault. I shall not go into the details. But it may be appropriate to quote Nehru himself on the subject. “ I do not know how I shall explain to parliament why we have been found lacking in equipment. It is not much good shifting blame. The fact remains that we have been found lacking and there is an impression that we have approached these things in an amateurish way’. He publicly acknowledged that he did not have an adequate answer to the legitimate question why India had not been prepared for a border war’. It seems that India was willing to obtain arms even from Israel but did not under pressure from Nasser.

As for Nehru having missed the opportunity to permanently settle the border by refusing Zhou en Lai’s offer in 1960, the situation is not clear. There is no unanimity even whether Zhou made such an offer. Gopal, Nehru’s biographer, says categorically:” In the talks, there was not even a distant approach to a solution. ‘contrary to persistent rumour then and later, at no time during the talks

did Zhou offer explicitly to recognize the McMahon line in the east in return for the secession of Aksai Chin in the west”. Here, the word ‘explicitly’ is important. Is Gopal suggesting that Zhou might have made the offer ‘implicitly’?

There is reason to believe that this was so. According to Ambassadors Ranganathan and Khanna, who authored an excellent book on China and India suggest that from most accounts of the Delhi summit, Zhou en Lai hinted that Chinese claims to Arunachal Pradesh would not be pressed in return for India foregoing any claims to the entire Western sector. He said at a press conference: “we have asked the Indian government to adopt an attitude towards the western area similar to the attitude of the Chinese government towards the area of Eastern sector; that is it may keep its own stand, while agreeing to conduct negotiations and not to cross the line of china’s administrative jurisdiction as shown on Chinese maps”. Nehru rejected this categorically since it was feared that Chinese may demand a high price in Ladakh in return for suspension of their claim in the east where there was no Chinese presence at that time. Experts believe that Nehru missed the opportunity to settle the question once and for all, leaving future generations to deal with the consequences of his decision. Messrs Ranganathan and Khanna argue that had some of the proposals of the Chinese side been accepted when they were first made, there might have emerged some confidence building measures on the border which could have prevented the armed conflict of 1962. Personally, I think the two ambassadors are somewhat on thin ground in making this assertion.

Let us go back to Mr. Dutt who, as foreign secretary, was intimately involved in this matter. He reports that Nehru took his senior colleagues into the fullest confidence. He asked Swaran Singh, and not Krishna Menon, to carry on simultaneous talks with vice premier and foreign minister Chen Yi. The latter was more direct and forthright and told Swaran Singh clearly that his country could never accept the Simla Convention and the McMahon line. “There would be an explosion in china. The Chinese people would never agree. Premier Zhou en Lai had no right to do so”. Mr. Dutt’s categorical view was that the ‘assumption that the Chinese would have agreed to accept the McMahon line in exchange for

agreement by India to let them retain Aksai Chin is entirely wrong. At no time did the Chinese give any indication that they would forego any part of their map claim in the west.”

The Sino-Soviet differences which emerged at about the same time as the souring of India-China relations provide a useful backdrop to the evolution of the border dispute with China. Nehru was among the first to anticipate the growing gap between the two communist giants. He carefully planned his strategy and decided to develop relations with Soviet Union. Messrs. Bulganin and Khrushchev paid a highly successful visit to India in December 1955. His strategy paid off when the Soviets refused to stand unequivocally on China’s side on the Longju incident in August 1959 and called on both sides to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. This infuriated Mao who regarded the Tass statement as a great betrayal of socialist solidarity and no doubt strengthened his determination to teach India a lesson. There is evidence enough to argue that Mao, whose sense of martial efficacy was hugely inflated especially after the Korean war, had been temporarily weakened in the party after the Great Leap Forward debacle and used the border dispute with India as a useful tool to reassert his authority. In other words, China would have embarked on the war irrespective of what India did or did not do.

But Nehru made a huge miscalculation. His consistent endeavour to cultivate friendly relations with china was not to be faulted. It fell neatly in his vision of Asia emerging as the dominating force for peace in the world for which India-china friendship was indispensable. He slipped up in his assessment that china too reciprocated his vision and kept up his friendship campaign despite signals to the contrary. His major lapse was in his assessment that china will not attack India because it will lead to world war. He could not believe that china sought armed confrontation with India. “It seems so foolish for anybody, including China, to function that way and I do not give them the credit, or, rather, discredit, for folly”. Nehru was convinced that any major Chinese aggression would spark off a world war which would not be fought only on India’s frontiers. Was he influenced in this assessment by Krishna Menon who did not expect China to go to war with India.

Menon even denied, as late as September 1961, that China occupied large portion of Indian territory. 'I am not aware of any aggression, incursion, encroachment or intrusion by China in any part of Indian territory. India would never have to engage in serious fighting with any country other than Pakistan'.

Yes, Nehru made mistakes in his China policy, but some have argued that the war was inevitable given internal situation in China particularly among the high echelons of the Communist Party. Did Nehru genuinely believe that China would not attack India in any major way? Or, was it wishful thinking on his part? He so ardently wanted to develop and maintain good relations with China that he might have persuaded himself that the worst would never come to pass. Such things happen in personal relationships as well as in international relations as we know from our experience with our other neighbours.

Ananya Bajpayee has an interesting take on Nehru's China policy in her major work 'The Righteous Republic' and I quote: Nehru wanted friendly relations between India and China. He tried to support fleeing Tibetan refugees even as he struggled not to allow matters to come to head in India's growing distance and discomfort with Mao's China. Nehru was unsuccessful in juggling these contradictory impulses to keep peace with both the Chinese aggressors and their Tibetan victims'.

My last point has to do with United Nations and disarmament. As Andrew Kennedy has observed, Nehru developed a zeal for diplomacy that would be difficult to overstate. He was convinced that India would be a catalyst for international cooperation. Nehru: 'India's powerful influence will make a difference...India is bound to play an increasing part in world affairs'. His decision to convene the Asian Relations Conference in March-April 1947, before even India became independent, is a good example of his intense desire to play a role on the world stage. In the event, nothing came of the Asian Relations Conference; there was not even a second follow up conference and no country set up national units or academies of Asian studies.

Nehru instructed that the Indian delegation at the United Nations should function as peacemakers between US and Soviet Union. In 1948, he declared “ India had already become the fourth or fifth most influential country in the United Nations.” This was a strange claim to make. In September 1947, India’s ambassador to the UN, Mr. Samar Sen, complained to the American delegation that they had not included a single Indian in the American slate for any office. Indian delegation had thought at one time that Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit could emerge as a consensus candidate for president of the General Assembly since there was a bitter contest for the honour between Brazil and Australia. More significantly, India put forward its candidature for election to the Security Council in 1947. At that time, the present system of defined geographical regions was not in place. India and Ukraine contested one seat. The vote went through as many as seven ballots in one single day and Ukraine did better than India on every one of them, but fell short of the 2/3rd majority. Eventually India was forced to withdraw. The Latin Americans supported Ukraine since they were miffed by Mrs. Pandit’s criticism of Argentina on the question of Spain. Obviously, other delegations did not share Nehru’s claim of India being one of the few most influential countries. In fact, my limited experience in the UN and nonaligned conferences has shown clearly that India always had to struggle to obtain any seat at the conference high table.

Nehru’s sense of moral efficacy came strongly into play on the subject of disarmament and nuclear issues. He had realized, at an early stage, the potential of nuclear energy for India’s development. As George Perkovich observes: Nehru believed that nuclear energy offered India a short cut to modernity and major power status. Hence, Nehru brought in Homi Bhabha to build and develop our atomic establishment. It was quite a spectacular achievement. In Nehru’s own lifetime, India acquired the capability to test a device within 12 to 18 months. However, no doubt influenced by his moral principles, he remained firmly opposed to testing nuclear devices. He came to the conclusion, justifiably so, that the best guarantee for India’s security lay in universal disarmament. When the US-Soviet talks collapsed consequent to the U-2 affair, Nehru personally made a

huge effort to persuade the two to resume the talks. He even drafted and piloted a resolution in the General Assembly for that, but without success.

Nehru took the initiative, as early as in 1954, to call for a complete prohibition of all nuclear tests, in all the environments. The super powers, perhaps partly as a result of Nehru's persistence, but largely to keep other countries out of the nuclear game, settled on the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1961. Nehru welcomed it enthusiastically, even though it fell short of his expectation and signed and ratified it as soon as it was opened for signature. Was it wise or calculated to advance India's security ?

By 1960, India had sufficient evidence to believe that China was heading in the direction of conducting a test. As early as 1960, Indian diplomats were worrying that China might test an atom bomb in the next few years. Nehru apparently told Bhabha in August 1961 to take "precautionary measures 'in the light of China's evident interest in the bomb. Bhabha told Nehru in 1962 that a Chinese nuclear test was only 12 to 18 months away. In July 1962, Nehru told the British High Commissioner he expected a PRC test in Xingiang. In March 1964, he told the veteran journalist Karanjia: "our information is that the Chinese might test a nuclear device any time now'. But when it was suggested that we should also get ready to test, he reacted:

"How can we, without showing the utter insincerity of what we have always said, go into doing the very thing that we have repeatedly asked other powers not to do?" (Speech to the Parliament). But when the one power of most relevance to us was going full speed ahead with its plan to build and test a bomb, Mr. Nehru ought to have ordered the nuclear establishment to proceed with at least preparations to explode a device.

In the face of such intelligence of China's preparations, Nehru ought to have kept his own principle of 'national interest first' in his calculation. By agreeing to PTBT, the other nuclear powers, especially the two major ones, did not constrain their nuclear programmes, since they had the technological capability to carry out underground tests (just as they sacrificed nothing three

decades later by concluding the CTBT). But back in 1961, India did not have and could not be confident to be able to develop the knowhow to conduct underground tests. Thus, we constrained our security. The least that Nehru and India should have done at that time was to declare that India would adhere to the PTBT only if and when China did.

Another question raises itself. Nehru died a few months before China exploded a device in the atmosphere in October 1964, almost 50 years to this day to-day! Since by that time China had already committed aggression against India, Nehru's successors could and should have invoked the clause of overriding national security and carried out a test. Would Nehru, if he was still alive, have done so? I am not willing to reject that possibility, given Nehru's strong sense of patriotism combined with realism. Nehru had had enough experience of China's duplicity not to consider the necessity to develop our own capability to deal with China's test.

It is also worth considering, not today, but in some forum, why India did not conduct a test in good time to qualify as a recognized nuclear weapon State before the NPT became operational in 1968. Our negotiators kept our nuclear option by clever argument about vertical and horizontal proliferation, mutuality of obligations, etc. It would have been far simpler, and more honest, to have conducted a test. It would have saved us the nuclear apartheid regime from which we have yet to come out fully. Nehru's successors were more Nehruvian than Nehru.

Ananya Vajpeyi has an interesting look at Nehru's fascination with diplomacy and India's destiny to play an influential role on world stage. "Nehru and Dr. Radhakrishnan were primarily responsible for the choice of the Ashokan imagery to occupy central stage in India's state symbols. The reason for Nehru's enthusiastic sponsorship of the Ashok's capital and the wheel was really his abiding fascination with Ashok". She quotes Nehru: I am exceedingly happy that we have associated with this flag one of the most magnificent names not only in India's history but in world history...Ashokan period in Indian history was

essentially an international period of Indian history. It was not a narrowly national period. It was a period when India's ambassadors went abroad to far countries not in the way of an empire and imperialism but as ambassadors of peace and culture and goodwill". Again, "Chanakya has been called the Indian Machiavelli... but he was a much bigger person in every way, greater in intellect and action. Long before Clausewitz, he is reported to have said that war is only a continuation of state policy by other means".

Ananya Vajpeyi asserts: 'In a way, Nehru saw himself as the new Ashok.. If India had to keep its tryst with destiny, only an ethical sovereign who was also a creative historian could be the keeper of that tryst...Nehru certainly saw himself as the new Ashok... the strong, confident sense of a historic mission, purpose and role was present in Nehru to a degree not seen in any of his contemporaries ... a leader who wanted to follow Ashok's ideals of welfare, friendship , pacifism, trust and compassion for the citizens of his country as well as for other countries...

I suppose it is time for me to offer concluding thoughts on Nehru's policy. And I would like to do so with a confession. When I accepted this invitation from the vice chancellor and suggested the topic, I had more or less convinced myself that Nehru had not remained faithful to his definition of national interest guiding his foreign policy that he was more of an idealist or dreamer and not a hard headed practitioner of foreign policy. But as I read more and more of his own writings and other sources, I came to believe that by and large he remained loyal to his concept. He made some mistakes, as I have endeavoured to point out, but on most occasions he was guided by national interests. Sometimes, the confusion arose because of two separate terms, independent policy and nonalignment. Independent policy protects our interests, but nonalignment at times drags us into uncomfortable situations where we have to compromise with the essence of nonalignment to protect our interests.

Ever since western scholars suggested few years ago that India lacked a strategic vision, that Indian establishment and analysts did not have strategic approach to the security issues, Indian experts have started offering 'strategic' analysis and

views. We have now reached a stage when everything has to be strategic: foreign policy, culture, communications, education, and so on. Our foreign policy is now supposed to be one of 'strategic autonomy'. I ask myself: why autonomy? Why not independence? Scotland wanted independence, not autonomy. By calling 'autonomy' strategic, it does not become more palatable. We are so enamoured of strategic that we have strategic relations, or strategic partnership or strategic dialogue with about three dozen countries. It would be difficult to find a country of some importance with whom we do not have strategic something or the other.

When westerners admonished us for lacking strategic depth, they were also criticizing Nehru. But there is no doubt that Nehru was capable of and did think in strategic terms. How else can one explain his anticipation of sino-soviet differences and his decision to woo the soviets when he saw trouble brewing with the Chinese. And he succeeded in that. Tass statement of 1959, issued after the Longju incident, did not, for the first time support a fellow socialist country, and that too such an important country as china in its conflict with a bourgeois country. If Mao had not timed his attack well, to coincide with the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962, the soviets would have surely supported us even more.

Talking about western superiority in matters strategic, where has their superiority to think in strategic terms taken them in West Asia and Ukraine? Just as we do not need lessons from others about democracy, we also do not need to be told how to think strategically. Nehru certainly was capable of thinking strategically.

Nehru made mistakes, as I have said before. He had human frailties like all of us. He was not impervious to flattery. He received very good welcome during his first visit to America in 1949, but when the Pakistan prime minister was also given a similar welcome, Nehru felt hurt. He got carried away with the enthusiastic welcome he received in China during his visit there in 1954 and perhaps let that affect his judgment regarding Chinese intentions towards India. The 'hindi-chini bhai bhai' syndrome, which Nehru did nothing to dampen, made the Indian public all the more feel betrayed when China attacked us. But on the whole, I conclude

that my initial bias against Nehru's conduct of our foreign relations was not justified. He stood faithful to his own principle of national interests first.