



HECKLING ATTITUDE OF INDIA'S SOUTH ASIAN NEIGHBOURS

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ABSTRACT

Strictly speaking, China is a northern rather than a southern neighbour of India. But the relations between the two countries figure prominently in this enquiry, because China has been a very important factor in determining India's relations with other countries of the world in general and the South Asian nations in particular. The attitude of India's small neighbours towards India has depended very much upon their relations with China, and their assessment of India-China relations.

The attitude of some of the South Asian countries to India was highly disparaging. Sri Lanka sided with China and openly criticized India for having accepted aid from the West. Sri Lanka contended that receiving aid either from the West or the East ran counter to the concept of non-alignment. It even refused to remit the amount collected in Sri Lanka towards India's defense fund. Nepal and Bhutan remained neutral. Pakistan's joy knew no bounds as its arch rival was being mauled and humiliated. Soviet Russia, on whose support India relied heavily, was also reluctant to help India. Krishna Menon had cherished the illusion that India's friendship with Moscow was insurance against the Chinese hostility. Probably he hoped that the Soviet Union would not allow China to wage a war against India. But Russia vacillated. The Cuban crisis had erupted just before the Sino-Indian war and the two super powers were on a collision course. This critical situation had forced Moscow to side with China lest it should alienate as usually. Russia had promised earlier to provide India with MIG 21 jet fighter aircraft. But in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis and also with a view to keeping China on its side, it withdrew its promise. The Indian armed forces had to fight with their backs to the wall. And the Soviet MIGs, had they been sent, would have given a boost to the demoralized forces. Further, such a gesture from the USSR might have forced China to halt its offensive. But by the time Russia reversed its pro-Chinese stance and agreed to deliver the promised fighter aircraft to India, the Chinese had stopped their offensive, having done enough damage to India, psychologically, morally and materially.

Surprising and gratifying was the decision by the US, the UK, and Canada to extend moral, material and military help to India during this crisis, even though Nehru had been severely critical of their policy of collective security and military alliances. He had attacked Western hegemony in various international fora. He had stood by China in all crucial international issues and thereby rubbed the West on the wrong side. But yet, the Western countries came to India's rescue in its hour of crisis. The US, in particular, was very generous in its assistance. It promised to help India unconditionally with aircraft, mortars, automatic rifles and mountain artillery.

The Indian policy-makers had to wake up, though belatedly, and realize that, by adopting policies that would not serve the national interest, they had fooled themselves. Jawaharlal Nehru said in this context. *"We are getting out of touch with realities in a modern world; We are living in our own creation and, we have been shaken out of it."* Nehru's utterances testify to the helplessness and bewilderment of the political leaders of the country, consequent upon the Chinese aggression.

India's humiliating defeat in its war with China lowered its international standing and damaged its prestige. But more galling was the undeserved death of a very large number of Indian soldiers, many being taken prisoners, several wounded; and some thousands found missing. The first political casualty of the war was the Defense Minister, Krishna Menon who had a large share in shaping India's policy towards China, which had failed. He was made to resign. He had neither anticipated a conflict nor prepared the Indian forces for a major campaign in the Himalayan passes in spite of having been warned of it. But more fundamentally, his defense policy had proved not only wrong but disastrous. Nehru also was attacked by the press and Parliament for failing them. He had assured earlier that the country's armed forces would meet any challenge from any quarter. He had also asserted confidently that the Chinese would be driven out from the Indian soil, totally ignorant of the equipment and capability of the army.

He was mainly responsible for formulating the country's China policy. Hence, it was but natural that he was blamed for India's defeat. Even his own party men criticized many of his policies, particularly his support for China's claim for the recognition of the UN. His admiration for the resurgent-China made him oblivious of its follies and blind to its ambitions. He sincerely believed that China was India's reliable friend, little realizing that it was a one sided belief, and it required border

war to shake him rudely out of it. Nehru had failed to correctly assess the true nature of the communist leaders of China. India's policies, domestic as well as external, were formulated on the basis of certain naive though idealistic notions and erroneous assumptions, particularly regarding defense requirements. Warning from the army were ignored and requests for increased allocation of funds were turned down time and again. For this neglect the nation has had to pay a heavy price. Moreover, it is caught up in an almost irresolvable problem.

To be fair to Nehru, it may be said that, by 1962, he was an aged and tried man having borne very heavy burdens. Those on whose advice he relied, those like Krishna Menon and Kaul, could not always be relied upon. His faith in Shaikh Adbulla is yet another instance of his misplaced faith for which the nation has had to pay a heavy penalty. Nehru's international concerns and statesmanship, along with his idealism and love of universal peace made him a world leader *Par-excellence*. But, ironically enough, the same traits, enviable as they are, also undermined his efficacy as a national leader and administrator.

Not content with what it had already accomplished in the war, China, which had been befriending for sometime Nepal, the traditional buffer on India's northern border, now began to use it openly against India. Nepal was not averse to playing into the hands of China since it had never willingly accepted India's paramount position in the subcontinent. Besides, it was fearful of the Chinese menace to itself. The ease with which the Chinese over-ran the Indian army further unnerved Nepal and raised serious doubts about India's ability to protect it from possible Chinese threats.

Simultaneous with threats and intimidations, the Chinese offered Nepal generous economic aid without any strings. This offer attracted Nepal as it not only would help in its economic development but also exert pressure on India to be more generous. Further it would also reduce its dependence on India.

China also proposed the formation of the Greater Nepal, a pan-Himalayan Federation embracing Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, together with India's Darjeeling. This proposal appealed to Nepal's royal region. But it had sinister implications for India's defense. If realized, the entire Gangetic plain would be vulnerable since China would be in control of the federation. Though India was keenly aware of this growing Sino-Nepalese nexus, there was precious little that India could do to prevent it.

Having succeeded in weaning Nepal away from India's fold, China turned its attention to Bhutan, another strategic link in the Indian defense strategy. Bhutan had been loyal to India and had treaty relation with it. China used every possible trick to spoil the friendly relation between the two: Several of China's earlier attempts in this direction had failed. Intimidations had not borne fruit. However, the 1962 India China War and India's ignominious debacle could not but scare Bhutan. It too realized that India lacked the strength necessary to protect it from China. In April 1964, Mr. Jigme Dorje, Bhutan's pro-Indian Prime Minister, was assassinated by some rebel elements opposed to the monarchical system of Bhutan. In July 1965, an attempt was made on the life of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Much to India's discomfiture, the Chinese blamed it all on India and painted India as villain of the piece. They evidently wanted to sow the seeds of discord between Bhutan and India. Such propaganda, though false, gained credence in Bhutan as a large number of the Bhutanese were opposed to their country's Indian ties. China used it to its best advantage. And it stepped up its clandestine support to the subversive elements within Bhutan with a view to toppling the royal regime, as it had remained steadfast in its loyalty to India even in the face of intimidations. The Chinese strategy, apparently, was to create circumstances which would make it possible for the anti-Indian cabal to forcibly seize power from the royal dynasty. India could only be a helpless spectator to the Chinese subversive moves in Bhutan.

China had no qualms about developing rapport even with its worst enemies, if it helped in achieving its own political and strategic goals. Its move to befriend Pakistan was one such Machiavellian step, to cause further discomfiture to India. In fact, China and Pakistan had been at loggerheads since the early fifties. The 1954 Chinese maps incorporated within China parts of Hunza and Gilgit, two Pakistani territories near the Sinkiang border. Further, 4000 to 6000 sq. miles of Pak-occupied Kashmir were also shown as within the bounds of China. Threatened by the Chinese expansionist designs, Pakistan joined the US-sponsored defense pacts like CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) and SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization) which were designed to contain the spread of Communism. China resented Pakistan's anti-Communist stance and considered it a tool of the Western imperialists.

However, after the 1962 Indo-China War there appeared a perceptible change in their attitude towards each other for obvious reasons. China needed allies whom it could use not only against India but also the US and the USSR. Therefore, it initiated a series of moves for securing the support of Asian countries in general and India's South Asian neighbors in particular. Making friends with Nepal and Bhutan did not prove difficult. Next China offered friendship to Pakistan, which gladly accepted it. For one thing, Pakistan's ruling elite, by 1959, had veered round to the view that Pakistan had been let down by the US for good. The growing economic and military relationship between the US and India, particularly after the Sino-Indian border clashes of 1959, strengthened this perception. Pakistan was also alarmed by the increased arms flow to India from the West and chose to believe that India was augmenting its military strength only for obliterating Pakistan from the globe, and not to strengthen its defense potential against China.

The Russian support for India's stand in the Kashmir dispute was another alarming factor to Pakistan. Earlier, the Soviet policy on Kashmir had been one of strict neutrality. This switch of its position alarmed Pakistan. It needed an ally who could save it from India and its friends, and was only too willing to accept China's offer of friendship. Thus the two countries decided to forge an alliance against India, their common enemy. And the Sino-Pak Border Agreement of 1963 was the first step in their joint strategy. Pakistan agreed to hand over to China nearly 2100 square miles of Indian territory from the part of Kashmir which it had occupied. The ceded territory lies in a strategically important area close to the USSR, Afghanistan and China. The Chinese subsequently built a network of roads in this area linking China and Pakistan. As a *quid pro quo* China promised its unstinted and continued support to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. By this agreement, China gained territory of great strategic importance and Pakistan gained China's friendship. Incidentally, by giving away a part of the Pak-occupied Kashmir to China, Pakistan probably hoped to ward off the threat of its reoccupation by India. It may not be fanciful to suppose that by this arrangement the true beneficiary was China and not Pakistan. Because, any day China could go back upon its offered friendship and still retain intact the territory gifted to it by Pakistan.

As good as its word, China gave vocal and strident support to Pakistan's stand on Kashmir; gave liberal aid and helped in strengthening and modernizing Pakistan's War machine. During the Indo-Pak war of 1965, China gave moral, political, psychological and military support to Pakistan and made an attempt to increase tensions along the Sino-Indian borders by massing its troops at several points, and threatened India with grave consequences. This was done only to strike terror and demoralize India. Lal Bahadur Shastri who was the Prime Minister then managed the situation skillfully and pre-empted the Chinese threat. After 1965, both China and Pakistan engaged themselves in strengthening the anti-India axis in South Asia. Unmindful of the US warnings, China continued to increase tensions in the South Asian region, to keep India troubled with the petty affairs of its South Asian backyard and, thereby, retard its progress. In forging links with Pakistan and supporting it, China must also have intended to wean Pakistan away from the United States, and thereby minimize the potential dangers to itself from the US-Pak axis.

By extending clandestine support and help to anti-national and militant insurgent groups such as the extremist Mizos and Nagas in the North-eastern part of India, and the Naxalites in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala., China threatened India's unity and integrity. The menace of insurgency in the Northeastern states persists to this day, thanks to China's secret support to it. Whatever might be China's ideological views regarding such subversive activities, there is no doubt that supporting them morally and materially amounts to interfering in India's internal affairs, and therefore cannot be winked at.

The initial successes of the Naxalites in Naxalbari (West Bengal) and elsewhere, reinforced the Chinese belief in India's internal vulnerability and made them assume that the fall of democratic India was imminent and certain. The Indian Communists who had accepted parliamentarianism were scoffed at as sham revolutionaries and "pseudo-Communists" who loafed about with briefcases under their arms. While democratic India could accept Communist China's right to exist as a nation and seek its destiny in its own way, China, blinded by its dogmatic ideology, is yet to learn to accommodate gracefully other forms of Government and ways of life.

The Chinese faith in Indian revolution underlined the fact that the Chinese leadership did not understand the ruling elite in India and misjudged its

nature and character. Further, their notion that the revolutionary strategies which had been useful in China of the Thirties would suit the Indian conditions was misconceived. It was one of several instances of the wish fathering the thought.

The insurgency movements, predictably, failed in achieving anything substantial except causing annoyance from time to time to the Indian Government. China's support to the insurgents and Naxalites was partly a retaliatory measure against India for supporting the Dalai Lama and giving him asylum.

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