

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

Golden Research Thoughts Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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ZIGS AND ZAGS IN INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS, 1950s-1960s



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ABSTRACT

During 1950s and 1960s , it was a truism that Indo-USSR relations had been marked by ups and downs or by alternating periods of warmth and coolness .Perhaps it is more correct to say that some sort of duality had existed at the core of this relationship. It can be remarked as “half full of cold , half full of fire”. The task of diplomacy , or other relationship , was to mix the hot and cold and to generate a health-giving even temperature in their relationship that was neither frigid nor feverish. What ever be the ups and downs, and zigs and zags in Indo-US relations, certain common things stand like stone-durable and fundamental. Socialist principles with the

attendant urge for the equality for all was one of the inherent characteristics of both Russians and Indians. The reciprocal visits and the Indian and Russian leaders strengthened their political and strategic relations. This paper attempts to highlights the relations between Russia and India, the two biggest countries in the World during the Post Second World War especially from 1950 to 1960s.

KEYWORDS : *USSR, US, India, Pakistan, China, Afghanisatan.*

INTRODUCTION :

In the Post-Stalin Era , a significant change , in essence, in Soviet perceptions of India was revealed. In was obviously brought out in the the address delivered by G.M. Malenkov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers to the USSR Supreme Soviet, in August 1953. In it, he appreciated India's role in ending the Korean War and of the impact of its peace efforts on the “peace loving countries” and hoped that “relations between India and the Soviet Union will continue to develop and grow, with friendly cooperation as the key note.”¹ Regarding this , K.P.S. Menon , the Indian Ambassador in Moscow, noted this as the first occasion on which so friendly a reference to India or indeed to any non-communist state had come from “so important a personage in the Soviet Union.”²

RECIPROCAL VISITS OF NEHRU AND KHRUSHCHEV

The first Indo-Soviet Trade Agreement was signed in December 1953. In June 1955, Nehru visited Moscow, his gesture was reciprocated by the visit of Nikita Khrushchev and Bulganin to India in

November 1955. Nevertheless, the shifts and adjustments in Soviet perceptions of India must be noted in the context of a larger process of change in Soviet foreign policy. In the arena of the Third World alone, the Soviet leaders had concluded that the West seemed particularly vulnerable. The nationalist movements in the Afro-Asian countries were potentially positioned against western imperialism and neocolonialism, against their countries' economic dependence on the West and would be equally responsive to the Soviet appeal for Peace and Peaceful Coexistence - which they would need most for their countries' reconstruction. All this, expectedly, in conformity with Soviet goals, might be achieved through a pragmatic and flexible Soviet foreign policy, attuned to the emerging aspirations and inherited susceptibilities of the Third World, significantly with little risk. The West had already started the game through military pacts in the Middle East, in South and South-East Asia.

ASSURANCE OF KHRUSHCHEV

Nikita Khrushchev's Report of the Central Committee to the Twentieth Party Congress (1956) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was a milestone in Soviet foreign and domestic policy. The report expressed the changing policy of Soviet. The report came in the context of the accelerated pace of disintegration of the world colonial system, upon "peaceful coexistence" of both socialist and non-socialist states in Europe and the East to establish a vast "zone of peace". He assured Soviet cooperation to those countries which "refused to be involved in military pacts" and also assured the under-developed countries of Soviet readiness to help with its "industrial development on terms of equality and mutual benefit", to neutralize economic pressure of the West.³

RUSSIA'S QUALIFIED SUPPORT TO INDIA

The change of Soviet policy towards India was in the wake of US intervention in the Third World and India's reaction against US imperialism. The US formed the anti-communist Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation and the Baghdad Pact in 1954 and 1955 respectively and US-armed Pakistan was taken in both as a member. India resented the initiative, as the Cold War was being brought into South Asia, military blocs were being formed and Pakistan being armed vis-à-vis India, the ultimate victim to the influx of US military aid to Pakistan. In spite of President Eisenhower's assurances to Nehru to the contrary in 1954, the Eisenhower administration by 1957, openly acknowledged that Pakistan wanted American weaponry for use against India, rather than against the Communist powers.

USSR openly supported in the UN the Indian demand to recall Americans from the group supervising the Indo-Pak ceasefire line in Kashmir in March 1954.⁴ In February 1957, the USSR used its first veto to defeat a Security Council Resolution recommending the use of a temporary UN force to facilitate demilitarization in Kashinir. Consequent on India's liberation of Goa in December 1961, Soviet support for India including a Security Council veto at the UN, contrasted markedly with western hostility because of Portugal's status in NATO. In January 1962, the USSR vetoed the UN Security Council Resolution that called for a plebiscite in Kashmir.

AGGRESSION OF CHINA IN INDIA AND STAND OF USSR

Strained Sino-Indian relations developed in the Sino-Indian border clashes at the end of 1959 summer. It coincided with escalation of the Sino-Soviet antagonisms by the summer of 1959. The Soviet leaders announced a position of neutrality on the clash and called for talks between New Delhi and Beijing. The Soviet stance pleased the Indian leaders but infuriated the Chinese. The Sino-Indian border war of 1962 started on 20th October at the height of the Cuban missile confrontation between the superpowers. Nehru wanted "to avoid irritating the Soviets as much as possible."⁵ On 27th October

, Nehru sent an urgent appeal to all Heads of State requesting diplomatic and material support in the campaign against China. Two days after Nehru's appeal, J.K. Galbraith, the US Ambassador to New Delhi, met Nehru to find out what kind of foreign assistance India needed. American arms supplies, however, started arriving in India on 3rd November. At this juncture, the Indo-US relations were closer than ever before but it was short-lived for other foreign policy objectives of both. The US considered the USSR as its main contender and Pakistan its close ally. India, for its part, was anxious to preserve its non-aligned status and an amicable relationship with the USSR. Beijing declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrawal of force on 20th November.

In September 1963, the Soviet Union endorsed the Colombo Plan of December 1962 for the settlement of the Sino-Indian conflict, questioned the validity of the Chinese leaders' saying that "the Nehru government is an imperialist and expansionist government" and forwarded a question: "Did they perhaps wish to settle the border quarrel with India by military means and hope to obtain support from the Soviet Union?".⁶ It was a clear statement of support for India that posed the Sino-Soviet breach and warded off a certain degree of temporary coolness in Indo-Soviet relations. Interestingly, Nikhil Chakravarty the founder editor of "Mainstream" reminisced. '...on the 23rd, Pravda came out with an editorial, 'Brothers and Friends, they are brothers, India is a friend',... So I wrote an open letter to Pravda by an "Indian Marxist" in Mainstream criticising that position quite strongly. . . on the sixth or seventh of November. Pravda came out with another editorial criticizing the Chinese position and supporting the Indian position. In the December meeting of the Supreme Soviet, Khrushchev in typical style abused the Chinese for committing aggression against India; that was the dividing line in the Sino-Soviet conflict over India'.⁷

The primary aim of the Soviet was to reduce and eliminate western influence in the Third World. The second one was emerged into Soviet perception since 1959 in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split. It was to reduce or contain China's involvement in the Third World particularly in South Asia. The Soviet assistance to India in both military and economic spheres was to continue significantly.

TEMPORARY SHIFT IN SOVIET STANCE

The Sino-Soviet-Indian relationship as well as the Soviet-US-Indian one developed into a pattern to play a crucial role in 1969 and throughout 1960s. In the 1960s there were perceptible shifts, though of a temporary nature, in Soviet stance towards India and in US stance towards Pakistan. In May 1964, during the Kashmir debate in the Security Council, there came a perceptible shift in Soviet stance that stated that the "dispute" between India and Pakistan were to be resolved by 'the two interested parties by peaceful means'⁸ from its earlier position in 1962 that condemned Pakistan's "armed aggression" in Kashmir and the "continued occupation of one third of the territory of Kashmir by Pakistan troops".⁹ On the other hand, the refusal by the US and Britain to link military assistance to India to a settlement of the Kashmir dispute in John F. Kennedy - Harold Macmillan's joint statement on 30 June 1963, weakened substantially the US-Pak "alliance" - a significant development for the USSR and China.

INDO-PAK WAR OF 1965 AND MEDIATION OF USSR

USSR wanted to solve the Indo-Pak dispute in Kashmir. Indeed, Moscow took a neutral stance towards the Indo-Pak armed clash in the Rann of Kutch in April 1965. Pakistan's infiltration of guerilla forces into Kashmir in August led step by step, to the second Indo-Pak war in September. Backed by the US military aid relationship, Pakistan was emboldened to launch a war against India with overall qualitative superiority. In the view of Indian decision makers, Nehru's reservations about Eisenhower's

decision for arms aid to Pakistan were thus confirmed. The US came to be seen as a tacit supporter of Pakistan's interests. The American unwillingness to criticize Pakistan and its apparent stance to equate the aggressor with the victim by clamping an embargo on arms sales to South Asia strengthened India's apprehensions about US intentions. This distrust widened into more generalized versions of misgivings about US interests and intentions regarding India. Deep-seated distrust between India and Pakistan blocked America's long-term security hopes for the sub-continent. Contradictory pulls of the US policy to perceive India and Pakistan as countervailing powers at the same time and compulsions to improve relations with one at the cost of the other led it to a dilemma that persisted till the end of the Cold War. The Soviet leaders stood for neutrality and they worked for a ceasefire in the UN. A ceasefire was finally agreed to on 22nd September. When no progress towards disengagement was noticed, the Soviet offer was repeated in November and was accepted by both the parties. Kosygin stuck to the letter and spirit of the offer of good offices at Tashkent during 4th -11th January 1966. He used his powers of persuasion with much finesse and skill, while maintaining a low profile, to make the two leaders see each other's point of view in the interest of peace in the subcontinent.¹⁰ Lack of US concern about South Asia, with its preoccupations in Southeast Asia, provided the rationale behind the US acquiescence to the Soviet role and growing influence in the region.

NIXON DOCTRINE: US DISENGAGEMENT FROM ASIA

Nixon Doctrine insisted the US to withdraw from the Vietnam issue. President Richard Nixon was anxious to find a way to disentangle the US from the Third World issue of Vietnam "with honor" and this was the foundation of the so-called "Nixon Doctrine." The USSR came to a near effective parity with the US in the strategic area and challenged the exclusive capabilities for distant operations through its own development of intercontinental ballistic missiles at this time. The deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations offered a potential opening for the US strategy in the three-sided conflictive relationship. Nixon and Henry Kissinger envisaged a restructuring of the international order it would create a balance of competition and interdependence among the five major powers: the US, Western Europe, Japan, the Soviet Union and China. The US interest in Asia was restricted to nations possessing power: China, presumably in politico-military and Japan, assuredly, in the economic sphere. The Asian agenda in the US foreign policy had a new and compelling focus — the opening to China.

HURDLES IN INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS

There were three reasons for the development for the strained Indo-Soviet relations at this time. They were NPT issue, Soviet arms aid to Pakistan and the idea of Collective Security. The clear requirement by those who signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of July 1968 that non-nuclear states should sign and confine themselves to their prevailing status, might have posed a strained relation in Indo-Soviet relations. India objected to the Treaty being implemented as it sought to discriminate against the "have nots" in the nuclear weapons field, while permitting the five so-called "haves" -- to develop and stockpile more weapons. However, as Arkadii Shevchenko has pointed out, the USSR was remarkably flexible at this time in its concerns with the Treaty and other similar ones. Unlike the United States, NPT seldom formed a cardinal preoccupation of Soviet policy.

The second reason for the strained relation between India and USSR was the Soviet's decision to supply arms to Pakistan in 1968, following the US cutoff of aid in 1965. This arms deal of July 1968 was a one shot agreement and was never repeated. Significantly, in May 1968, Pakistan served the notice for the US to close down its surveillance station at Badaber near Peshawar that "proved to be a catalytic element in the Kremlin's policy review, leading it to recognize Pakistan's legitimate needs for

Soviet arms assistance.”¹¹

The third reason was concerning the collective security issue. On 7th June 1969, Leonid Brezhnev advocated, at the Moscow International Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties, a “system of Collective Security in Asia” in the context of a probable power vacuum consequent on the proposed withdrawal of Britain from the East of Suez by 1971. But Indira Gandhi’s response to the Brezhnev proposal was cautious, as she objected to its “military implications” and disagreed with its assumptions of a “power vacuum” in Asia, following the British withdrawal by 1971. She mooted a proposal, while on a visit to Tokyo and Jakarta in June, that envisaged mutual guarantees from both the US and the USSR for peace in Asia for an interim period following a Vietnam settlement.¹²

But, the tense Sino-Soviet relations in the post-Ussuri river conflict, the potential Sino-US rapprochement in the offing (as President Nixon secretly asked President Yahya “to explore the possibility of providing links between Washington and Peking”¹³ during Nixon visit to Pakistan in mid 1969), the unreceptive stance of Pakistan towards Soviet overtures and growing closeness of Sino-Pak relations in view of their respective foreign policy goals in the region, necessitated a revision of Soviet policy of equidistance.

To conclude, historically the USSR under Stalin was suspicious of the geniuses of India’s independence and non-alignment. Indo-Soviet bonhomie started with Jawaharlal Nehru’s visit to the USSR in June 1955 and the Nikita Khrushchev / Nikoli Bulganin visit to India in December 1955. This was also the time when the Congress Party in India was affirming its belief in state planning and a ‘socialistic pattern of society’ and Nehru was playing a leading role in the Bandung conference (1955) of 29 Afro-Asian nations. During the same period, the USSR began to use the instruments of aid, trade and diplomacy in developing countries, to limit Western influence. Subsequently, Indo-Soviet relations flourished over the decades. During the Chinese aggression in India in 1962, the USSR tried to be neutral between what is called ‘brother China’ and ‘frined India’, with the People’s Republic of China seeing this as a betrayal of international communist solidarity on the part of the USSR. In the mean while, three factors paved the way for the strained relations between India and China. They were NPT issue, Soviet aid to Pakistan issue and Collective Security issue. In spite of these issues, the US- Chinese rapprochement and Sino-Soviet split seemed a serious threat to USSR which made USSR to move closer to India in Asia. In the Indo-Pak War of 1965 Russia played a role of mediator and Tashkent Agreement was signed between Indian and Pakistan.

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