CHAPTER III
COLOMBO MEDIATION

The future of nonalignment is at stake ... because ours will be the first attempt to approach this problem in the spirit of nonalignment. Our Conference will go down to history as a landmark in the overall endeavour of nations to achieve a lasting peace.

- Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1962)

The Colombo Powers proved the ability of the non-aligned countries to defuse a major crisis. They made it possible for India and China to return to the negotiating table whenever they felt that the time is opportune. Today Colombo solution is generally forgotten, but it did provide a basis, however, flimsy, for this disengagement.


The convening of the six-nation Colombo Conference in December 1962 and the mediation offered by its participants to resolve the Sino-Indian boundary dispute around a few agreed proposals assume a unique significance in the hindsight of Third World history. It was, indeed, the first ever institutionalized nonaligned attempt to secure group rather than individual action to defuse a conflict situation outside the pale of East-West struggle.\(^1\) It not only highlighted the

initial peace keeping concerns of the nonaligned group but also revealed its limitations vis-a-vis regional and sub-regional conflicts.

Nevertheless, it is surprising that the Colombo mediation being such an important nonaligned endeavour has not received the kind of attention it deserves.² Even now when there is a renewed interest in the nonaligned world regarding the management of regional crises, one hardly finds any reference to this unique nonaligned peace-initiative. There exists an overwhelming, and yet erroneous impression that the Colombo mediation was an exclusive outcome of the last phase of Afro-Asian solidarity, and as such did not relate much to the dynamics of the nonaligned movement.

All this necessitates an examination of the intent and content of Colombo mediatory intervention, norms and methods employed during the protracted negotiation, and the causes and compulsions that eventually stultified the nonaligned endeavour.

The idea of a collective nonaligned mediation came in as the Sino-Indian conflict grew in magnitude. The leading nonaligned countries rightly felt that "no other nation or group of nations was in a position to extinguish a blaze that might

---

² The two studies which have analysed the Colombo mediation in some detail are, G. H. Jansen, Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment (London, 1964), pp. 330-51, and Jayantha Dhanpala, China and the Third World (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 66-81.
well ignite a world conflagration". After the failure of individual nonaligned attempts to get the approval of the disputing parties, opinion in the nonaligned Afro-Asian arena crystallized in favour of making a concerted effort in this direction.

Wresting initiative from President Nasser of the UAR who had earlier tried in vain to convene a joint meeting of the ten nonaligned Afro-Asian countries to explore the possibilities of mediation between the two disputants, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike held out a proposal to convene a six nation conference in Colombo in December, 1962.

In her massage sent to five nonaligned countries on 21 November 1962, Mrs Bandaranaike outlined the need of securing group rather than individual action to defuse the crisis. She


4 Apart from Sri Lanka the other nonaligned which had made concrete mediation offers were the UAR, Guinea and Ghana see Sudhakar Bhat, India and China, (New Delhi, 1967), pp. 178-81 and also D.C. Watt, ed., Survey of International Affairs 1962 (London, 1970) pp. 433-35.

5 Most of the invitees did not respond to President Nasser's offer of mediation based on his four-point proposals. See H.S.S. Nissanka, Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy: A Study in Nonalignment, (New Delhi, 1984), p. 148.
noted that;

Several other Prime Ministers of non-aligned states have made similar approaches, but... individual approaches have not met with much success. A further deterioration in the situation could lead to the outbreak of war, which strike at the very roots of non-alignment. It is, therefore, extremely urgent that Heads of State Prime Ministers of such nonaligned as may be able to assist in influencing India and China should, if possible meet and consult one another and decide upon an immediate joint approach to India and China. 6

While suggesting an informal meeting of statesmen of the UAR, Indonesia, Ghana, Kampuchea, Burma and Sri Lanka at the Capitals of any of these countries, Mrs Bandaranaike sought opinions of these statesmen, "If these are the nonaligned states who,... in your view, should be invited to such a meeting". 7

It is clear that the main criterion of selecting the participants was their nonaligned status and not their merely being an Afro-Asian state. And the tentative selection proposed by Sri Lanka was also from the list of countries which attended the Belgrade Conference of Nonaligned States. The nonaligned status of the proposed conference in Colombo was further confirmed when it was officially designated as "The Conference of Non-aligned Countries Colombo, December 1962". 8

6 Watt, n.4, p.435.
7 Ibid.
8 Jansen, n.2, pp.335-36.
However, China as well as some of the participants of the Conference were particularly keen to highlight the exclusive Afro-Asian composition of the Colombo Conference and did not pay any credence to its nomenclature. This gained easy currency as none of the nonaligned countries outside the Afro-Asian arena could be invited for one or the other reason.

COMPOSITION OF THE CONFERENCE

The composition of the Colombo Conference was not an easy task. To begin with the way Mrs Bandaranaike selected the invitees for attending the Conference raised a few doubts. While she excluded six nonaligned from the list of ten-nations that were proposed to be invited by President Nasser, the two Asians, Burma and Kampuchea, were included despite their known proximity to the Chinese position. According to some observers, it was done to prevent the UAR from influencing the Colombo deliberations in favour of India. However, this argument does not hold good in view of the fact that none of the six nonaligned excluded from the UAR's list eventually came out in support of India nor for that matter the UAR with its secular image was in a position to invoke Islamic solidarity in favour of India as it was made out to be. Yet, it may be conceded that a larger participation of African countries, not being so vulnerable to Chinese influence, might have gone in India's favour especially if President Nasser had also

9 Ibid., p. 333.
done so openly.

Although Sri Lanka remained ambiguous about how it had made up the list of invitees, there seemed an unspoken criterion underlying its policy: it was the nonpartisan attitude of the participants and their acceptability to the disputants. If the UAR had to be invited, Burma and Kampuchea also found place to countervail the UAR's pro-Indian stance. In any case, it turned out to be a clever move to ensure the approval of both the disputants and Sri Lankan leaders claimed to have obtained an encouraging response from them even before the concrete mediation proposals were sent. ¹⁰

Positive Beginning

The Sri Lankan offer of mediation found ready acceptance of China. Despite openly rebuffing a similar offer of President Nasser, China was still keen to enlist diplomatic support of the Afro-Asian countries for the furtherance of its claims to leadership in this region. In fact, Zhou Enlai saw in this a viable opportunity of forcing India to open the boundary question a fresh - something which Nehru had been resisting.

It is significant that the Sri Lankan communication with the Chinese Premier almost coincided with the Chinese declaration of cease-fire. A copy of Mrs Bandaranaike's letter sent

to the Colombo Powers' reached Zhou Enlai on 21 November 1962 and it was at midnight following this that China announced its cease-fire and withdrawal. However, while hailing the Sri Lankan proposal as a "constructive initiative step", Zhou cautioned the Colombo Powers not to be misled by Indian propaganda regarding China's aggression. In a lengthy letter, he strove to present the boundary dispute as the "legacy of British imperialism" and stated that:

... in dealing with such boundary questions we should clearly discern that there are issues between Asian and African countries which are not the same as between Asian-African countries and imperialist powers. We should be on guard lest we be taken in by the imperialist attempts to sow a discord amongst us.

In contrast to China's immediate acceptance to the Sri Lankan proposal, India's initial responses were rather lukewarm and it was only at the last minute that it decided to send a diplomatic mission to Colombo for consultation. Observers, in fact, found correlation between this Indian attitude and that of the UAR, which even till 6 December was undecided whether to attend the Conference or not. But, despite the Sri Lankan claims to have obtained India's advance approval of the

11 See Nissanka, n. 5, p. 148.
13 *China Disregards the Colombo Proposals*, India, Publication Division, (New Delhi, 1963) p. 9.
14 It was reported that India first tried to scuttle and then to delay the Conference with the help of the UAR from 1 December to 10 December 1962, see Jansen, n. 2, pp. 334-35.
mediation conference, Nehru is on record to have expressed his nonchalance when he stated before the Lok Sabha that "... we were not even informed of it. Afterwards, once the invitations were sent, we heard about it."\textsuperscript{15}

Obviously India did not hope to gain much from this "agendaless" conference having a majority of such participants who had already shown their "predisposition" towards the Chinese position. This was not the case when President Nasser had proposed to convene a ten-nation conference to discuss his four-point proposal which were essentially very near to the Indian demand.

This explains why India kept on bargaining with China with the help of the UAR till the last moment.\textsuperscript{16} Subsequently, as the Conference was about to be declared open, Nehru made it very clear that unless China vacates the Indian territory by withdrawing to the position prior to 8 September 1962 there can be no talks. Referring to the mediation efforts of the Colombo Powers, he asserted before the Lok Sabha:

> We recognize their friendly feelings and their well-meant attempts to solve, at any rate, to lessen this crisis. I trust, however, that there can be no compromise with aggression and an expanding imperialism, and that the gains of aggression must be given up before both the parties try to resolve their dispute.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} India, Lok Sabha Debates, series 3, vol.10, 1962 col.3331-32.

\textsuperscript{16} Just before the Colombo Conference was declared open President Nasser at the behest of Nehru tried to negotiate with the visiting Chinese mission on the basis of a "revised four-point proposal" which allowed certain concessions to the Chinese, see Jansen, n. 2, p.535.

\textsuperscript{17} Indian Fight for Territorial Integrity, India, Publication Division, (New Delhi, 1963), pp.26-27 and also India Lok Sabha Debates vol.11, 1962, col.5089.
Clearly then, the Colombo Conference was being held amidst intense diplomatic moves by both China and India to win over the Afro-Asian countries to their respective positions. While Nehru stuck to his demand of withdrawal of forces to the 8 September 1962 line, China insisted on the 7 November 1959 position as the line of actual control. While India was trying to mobilize public opinion against aggression by the Chinese "expanding imperialism", China was determined to project an image of a "peace-loving Afro-Asian country" trying to negotiate with a recalcitrant neighbour.

Against such a setting, the six nations met at Colombo with the onerous task of mediating between the two Asian giants which had earlier failed to come to any agreement due to their mutually exclusive approach to the boundary dispute. Obviously the Conference had much at stake. As Mrs Bandaranaike asserted:

"Much will depend on the success and failure of our efforts. The future of nonalignment... is at stake. The eyes of... the entire world will be on us at this moment, because ours will be the first attempt to approach this problem in the spirit of nonalignment. Let it not be said that non-alignment was unequal to the challenge.... Our Conference will go down to history as a landmark in the overall endeavour of nations to achieve a lasting peace".18

Apart from Mrs Bandaranaike, the Conference was attended by two Heads of State - Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Kampuchea

and General Ne Win of Burma, while the UAR sent its Prime Minister Ali Sabry, Indonesia, its Foreign Minister R. Subandrio and Ghana its Minister of Justice K.K. Ofori Atta. India and China too sent their diplomatic missions to apprise these participants of the rightfulness of their respective claims. While Madame Zhou Enlai led the Chinese delegation, the Indian delegation was led by Laxmi Menon, Minister of State in External Affairs Ministry, accompanied by S. Gopal, Director of Historical Division of the External Affairs Ministry.

**NATURE AND SCOPE**

No sooner was the Conference inaugurated on 10 December 1962, it became evident that the participants were determined not to allow it to be used as a platform for mobilizing propaganda for or against any of the two contestants. There was an instant unanimity among them not to pass judgement on the merit of the dispute and to act exclusively as a "friendly third party".

Setting the tone and temper of the Conference, Mrs Bandaranaike in her opening speech made a conscious effort to

---

19 It was reported that President Nasser decided against going to Colombo because of a promised visit to Morocco, but oddly enough the postponement of his North African tour was announced at the same time, as his inability to attend the Conference. See Jansen, n. 2, p. 335. Opinion in Colombo was inclined to the view that UAR was belittling Colombo in order to have a larger Conference in Cairo where Nasser could invite Tito and some of the Belgrade Powers. See Mahinda Wizeratne, "The Colombo Conference" The Radical Humanist (Calcutta), vol. 27, 6 January 1963, p. 3.
project a complete nonpartisan attitude towards what she described as a "family quarrel". While she conceded that the conflict had posed "the greatest challenge which the nonalignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity has had to face", she did not seem to share India's contention that this challenge had come on account of "nonaligned India" being a victim of Chinese aggression. On the contrary, she referred to the Western arms aid to India being the source of threat to nonaligned Asia:

We have seen how India has been obliged to seek arms assistance from Western Powers and the eagerness with which this has been given. This kind of entanglement with Power Blocs would be contrary to the cardinal principle of non-alignment.20

Mrs Bandaranaike also remained uncommitted to the Indian complaint of a Chinese aggression when she stated that, "India ... would like to be satisfied of China's intention because she says she is the aggrieved party". Similarly, after referring to Nehru's contribution to world peace and nonalignment, she made it a point to express satisfaction over the Chinese decision of cease-fire and withdrawal of forces as an earnest indication of its "intention to settle this matter in a peaceful manner". 21

It was clear that the Conference would not differentiate between a nonaligned India and an Afro-Asian China. Being

21 Ibid.
the convener Mrs Bandaranaike also underlined the limited scope of the Conference when she stated:

Our Conferences is of course not going to provide an overnight solution to a problem which will require much arduous and painstaking negotiations before it is finally settled. This is not our intention and we have no authority to adjudicate on the disputes of others. 22

The UAR, despite its known sympathies for India, also fell in line with Sri Lanka when Ali Sabry referred to the role of participants "as friends in creating the atmosphere suitable for India and China to meet". He further endorsed Mrs Bandaranaike's views about the limited scope of the Conference when he reiterated that, "we have not come to seek a final solution that we would proclaim here and have it imposed on both parties". 23

However, Ali Sabry outlined two basic principles to create the right atmosphere for further negotiations, i.e. peaceful solution to the problem and that there must not be any territorial gain on account of military operations. Evidently these principles, especially the latter one met India's precondition of a Chinese withdrawal from Indian


The Principle that "neither side would be in a position to derive benefit from military operations" was incorportated later in the two-page document entitled "Principles underlying the proposals of the Six", and handed over by Mrs Bandaranaike and Dr Subandrio to Zhou Enlai in Beijing in January 1963. Korany, n.1, p.391. Also see B.N. Mullick, My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal (Delhi, 1971), p.465.


122

territories before negotiations are held.24

Ofori Atta of Ghana also echoed the general view that the Conference ought to refrain from passing any judgement on the merit and demerit of the case. Instead, he was for "creating necessary conditions" which will enable the two contestants to begin direct negotiations. For this purpose and for making cease-fire more effective, he suggested the creation of an area of disengagement between the two forces on mutually acceptable terms. This area should be neutralized and maintained, if necessary only by unarmed police on both sides till the final demarcation of boundaries.25

In contrast to the active enthusiasm of Sri Lanka, Ghana and the UAR to evolve some acceptable formula to bring India and China to the negotiating table, the other three participants - Indonesia, Burma and Kampuchea were far more pessimistic about their role as peace makers. While agreeing with other participants that the Conference is not going to intervene in the substance of the conflict, the Indonesian delegate Subandrio found it "a matter of face saving ... if we cannot find a solution through this conference ... We will be able later to judge without touching on the substance of the conflict who is the aggressor and who is the expansionist".26

24 The Principle that "neither side would be in a position to derive benefit from military operations" was incorporated later in the two-page document entitled "Principles underlying the proposals of the Six", and handed over by Mrs Bandaranaike and Dr Subandrio to Zhou Enlai in Beijing in January 1963. Korany, n.1, p.391. Also see B.N. Mullick, My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal (Delhi, 1971), p.465.
26 Ibid., p.4079-80 also see Tribune Ceylon News Review, 15 December 1962, p.16.
Similarly, Prince Sihanouk expressed his scepticism about the ability of the Conference to provide a formula which would be acceptable to both sides. He stated, "We are unable to conceal our pessimism in regard to the reception which would be reserved by India and China to any proposal of technical nature even if such a proposal were considered reasonable by our Conference." General Ne Win of Burma also felt that the Sino-Indian border dispute was too intricate to be solved by the efforts of the Conference, "No matter how ardently we, the third parties, may wish to find such a solution, there is little or nothing that we can usefully do in that direction." He was emphatic about the role of participants as that of "friendly and impartial neutrals" and cautioned them to refrain from passing judgement as to who is right and who wrong "lest we compromise our position as the friendly and impartial neutrals. We are seeking to mediate not arbitrate and these two functions do not go together."

It was clear that the Colombo participants were quite conscious of their limited role as mediators and fully knew that their peace proposals would not be acceptable unless they display certain amount of non-partisanship and fairness. All of them refused to pass judgement on the merit of the dispute.

29 Guardian (Rangoon), 12 December 1962.
and apparently revealed no intentions of acting as a mouth-piece of either of the two contestants. However, as the deliberations progressed, significant convergence and divergence of opinion among the participants began to surface.

CONFERENCE DIPLOMACY

To begin with Burma and Kampuchea, instead of offering proposals as to how the cease-fire could be regularized and the area of disengagement established, wanted only to confirm the existing cease-fire. However, the consensus in the Conference ruled out such negativism and set aside the suggestion that it should not make a detailed study of the issue. It did apply itself to the study of the maps of the disputed border.30

An important feature of the Colombo Conference was that it was supposedly held in camera; discussions and reactions were to be kept secret and agreed principles were to be unanimous.31 This demand, though supported by all the participants, was initially raised by General Ne Win of Burma and Ali Sabry of the UAR, who, by eventually taking exclusive positions respectively in favour of China and India, were to polarize opinions in the conference. However, in practice, secrecy could hardly be maintained as all leading Sri Lankan newspapers reported verbatim all that transpired in the course of the secret

30 See Times of Ceylon (Colombo), 13 December 1962.
sessions. 32

When the first session opened on the evening of 10 December, the UAR reportedly took the initiative by presenting a proposal for a demilitarized zone on the western sector of the frontier. This proposal was based on the principle of "no territorial gains through military operations" and was generally seen as pro-Indian. It met with strong opposition from Burma which found it "unrealistic" as China had already rejected it. 33 In turn, the UAR opposed the pro-China suggestion mooted by Burma and Kampuchea to confirm the Chinese terms of ceasefire as contained in Zhou's Three-Point Formula. All Sabry strongly insisted that "the conference must feel free to make suggestion ab initio irrespective of the positions that the two parties might have taken earlier". 34

The mutually opposed view of the UAR and Burma led many observers to remark that the nonaligned are getting aligned vis-a-vis India and China. It was believed that while the UAR

32 To maintain secrecy "... even the shorthand reporters were excluded from the discussion". But these security precautions were in vain; the first item on the second day of the conference was an apology from the Ceylonese delegate that the substance of the previous evening's 'secret' session should have been spread across the front pages of Colombo newspapers. Jansen, n. 2, pp. 339-40.

33 The Times of Ceylon, 11 December, 1962.

was maintaining a pro-Indian stance. Burma and Kampuchea were closer to China. However, from a different angle, it was suggested that while the UAR was "extremely anxious' that India's bitterness regarding the armed attack be taken note of; Burma and Kampuchea wanted proposals not to be much as would be rejected out of hand by China.36

This stalemate continued on the second day especially regarding the UAR's proposal of creating a demilitarized zone in Ladakh having its northern and eastern boundaries on the 8 September line where China mounted its aggression. Against this Burma supported China's cease-fire condition that northern-eastern boundaries of the demilitarized zone should be the one to which China promised to withdraw.37

This impasse was eventually eased by Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Ghana on the last day of the Conference when they jointly devised a formula which was in substance what the UAR suggested but could be defined in a way that could accord with Burma's viewpoint.38 Subandrio played a vital role in this by presiding over a "little committee" of three comprising of the UAR, Burma and Indonesia, and succeeded in arriving at a compromise formula

36 Ibid., p.2.
37 For details see Ceylon News Daily, 14 December 1962.
38 Pertinek, n.35, p.2.
to reconcile both the stands. 39 Thus emerged a set of agreed principles which were subsequently known as the Colombo Proposals.

In such a short span of time, it was surely a unique achievement on the part of the six participants to come to grips with various intricate aspects of the dispute and to evolve a "remarkably realistic formula regarding the disposition of forces along the whole length of Sino-Indian border". 40 It was for this reason that the Colombo Conference-called the "Little Summit" was hailed as a major landmark of nonaligned diplomacy.

It was remarkable that despite having divergent views on the conflict the Six Colombo Powers were able to achieve a commendable degree of unity not only regarding the scope of the Conference but also in securing unanimity in regard to principles and proposals which were to serve as a basis of negotiation between the two disputants. Thus remarked an editorial of a leading Sri Lankan newspaper:

The fact that the non-aligned countries have different attitudes to different individual problems shows that each country tends to judge every question by the yardstick of their self interest; but in a matter which affects all non-aligned countries they tend to get together. 41

39 Wizeratne, n.19,p.3.
Colombo Proposals

As per the mandate of the Conference, the Colombo Proposals were kept a secret till they were communicated to the two disputing parties by Mrs Bandaranaike. They were officially published on 19 January, 1963, only after she had explained their contents personally both in Beijing and New Delhi. The six-point Colombo Proposals were:

1. The Conference considers that the existing de-facto cease-fire is a good starting point for a peaceful settlement of the Indian Chinese conflict.

2. (A) With regard to western sector, the Conference would like to make an appeal to the Chinese government to carry out 20 kilometres withdrawal of their military posts as has been proposed in the letter of Prime Minister Chou Enlai to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on November 21 and November 28, 1962.

(B) The conference would make an appeal to the Indian government to keep their existing military positions.

(C) Pending a final solution of the border dispute the area vacated by Chinese military withdrawal will be demilitarized zone to be administered by civilian posts of both sides to be agreed upon without prejudice to the rights of previous presence of both India and China in that area.

3. With regard to the eastern sector, the Conference considers that the line of actual control in the areas recognized by both the governments could serve as a cease-fire line to their respective positions. Remaining areas in this sector can be settled in their future discussion.

4. With regard to the problems of the middle sector, the conference suggests that they will be solved by peaceful means, without resorting to force.

5. The Conference believes that these proposals which could help in consolidating the cease-fire,
once implemented should pave way for
discussion between representatives of
both parties for the purpose of solving
problems entailed in the cease-fire
position.

(6) The Conference would like to make it clear
that a positive response for the proposed
appeal will not prejudice the position of
either of the two governments as regards
its conception of the final alignment of
the boundaries.  

A look at these proposals makes it evident that they
were aimed at consolidating the cease-fire until direct talks
could be arranged between the two parties and provided a
tentative guideline regarding the disposition of antagonistic
troops on the ground till the final solution of the border
dispute is arrived at. To this end, a few specific proposals
were also offered. But in no case the Colombo proposals had
the pretension of offering a final solution to the dispute
nor were they conceived as some kind of award or verdict.

The realistic temper of the Colombo proposals were mani-
fest from the fact that they "sought to give China what she
wanted in the western sector - what she considered important
- and to satisfy India in the east, which was the vital area

42 Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged and
Agreements signed between the Governments of
India and China. White Papers IX, (New Delhi),
pp.184-6. Also see Ceylon News Letter,
Government of Ceylon (Colombo), no.4, 24 January,
The six nonaligned had indeed worked hard to accommodate as nearly as possible the viewpoints of both in order to make it possible for them to come to the negotiating table in an "honourable way". All in all, these proposals represented a workable compromise between the Indian and the Chinese demand.

**Initial Breakthrough**

Although Mrs Bandaranaike was authorized to convey these proposals to Beijing and New Delhi, the remaining statesmen with the exception of General Ne Win visited the two capitals as a group or singly in January 1963 to assist her. While Subandrio assisted her at Beijing during her visit there between 31 December 1962 and 7 January 1963, the other two Colombo participants from Africa, Ofori Atta and Ali Sabry accompanied her to New Delhi from 10 to 17 January. The starting of Colombo mediation was thus marked by a well coordinated and intense group activity of the participants.

The initial response of both Beijing and New Delhi was indeed positive. During her visit to Beijing, Mrs Bandar-

43 Korany, n.1, p.391.
45 Colombo proposals had already been handed over to the Chinese and Indian Prime Minister by G.S. Pieries, Sri Lanka's Ambassador in Burma, *Ceylon Today*, Government of Ceylon, (Colombo), vol.12, January 1963, pp.29-30.
46 Mrs Bandaranaike's party which arrived in Beijing on 31 December 1962 consisted of R.D. Bandaranaike, Minister without Portfolio, and other government officials. Ibid., pp.1-2.
anaike successfully obtained China's acceptance albeit "in principle". She later described Chinese attitude as "positive". Similarly at New Delhi she clarified these proposals much to India's satisfaction and elicited an informal acceptance of Nehru even before the matter was presented to the Indian Parliament. It was a good beginning and after her sojourn in Beijing and New Delhi, Mrs Bandaranaike shared her optimism with other nonaligned statesmen when she asserted that, "these proposals would ultimately prove to be an acceptable basis for direct negotiations as both India and China have responded positively to them".

Stalemate

However despite this early breakthrough, the nonaligned initiative soon got bogged down. It is contended, and perhaps

47 In the joint communique issued at the end of the eight day visit of Mrs Bandaranaike it was mentioned that "The Chinese Government gave a positive response to the proposals of Colombo Conference" Ceylon News Letter no. 2, 10 January 1963, p.1. See summary of the communique in Peking Review, no.2, 11 January 1963, p.16.


rightly so, that the deadlock was the result of China's unwillingness to accept the clarifications offered at New Delhi on 13 January 1963.\textsuperscript{51} This is obvious from the fact that it raised the "two points of interpretation" on 19 January 1963 only after hearing about these clarifications.\textsuperscript{52} Later Zhou Enlai described them as alien to the original proposals framed at Colombo and alleged they were due to India's manipulation.\textsuperscript{53} It is imperative, therefore, to look into the circumstances in which these clarifications were drafted and whether they were as blatantly pro-Indian as China claimed.

**New Delhi Clarifications**

The contentious clarifications sought\textsuperscript{54} and obtained by Nehru on 13 January 1963 were jointly offered by Sri Lanka,

---


\textsuperscript{52} In this letter of 19 January 1963 Zhou had accepted Colombo proposals only "as a preliminary basis for meeting of Chinese and Indian officials". For details see China Disregards the Colombo Proposals, n.13, pp.14-17.

\textsuperscript{53} On 12 February 1963, President Liu Shao Qui blamed India for making use of the Colombo proposals to block the road to direct negotiations, and to place Colombo countries in the difficult position of arbitrators, *Peking Review*, no.8, 22 February 1963, p.6.

\textsuperscript{54} In a confidential letter to Chief Ministers on 22 December 1962, Nehru stated that, "Their (Colombo Powers') recommendations are by no means clear in every respect and are liable to varying interpretations. We must know exactly what their meaning and implications are before we can decide what our line of action will be" Sunday (Calcutta), 10 Jan.1962, p.25.
the UAR and Ghana and related to paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the original proposals. The most crucial were those concerning the demilitarized zone of 20 kilometres in the western sector wherein India was allowed to move up to the line of actual control on 7 November 1959. As against this, the earlier proposal had only appealed to India to "keep their existing military position". Thus a new element was introduced by the clarifications which stipulated that the demilitarized zone created by Chinese withdrawal in Ladakh will be administered by civilian posts of both sides and the location, number and composition of these posts had to be agreed upon between India and China.55

Similarly on the eastern sector, India persuaded the Colombo nations to mention specifically the McMahon line which was not recognized by the Chinese and which did not find any mention in the original proposals drafted at Colombo. Further the clarification regarding the middle sector wanted the status quo to be maintained which once again suited India as it was not interested at all to negotiate this sector as per the original Colombo Proposals.

55 For a detailed analysis of these clarifications see India's Fight for Territorial Integrity, n.17, pp.27-32 and also India's Foreign Records (New Delhi), February 1963, pp.51-52.
It is difficult to ascertain the truth regarding the circumstances in which these controversial clarifications were drafted. It has been suggested that there might have been two sets of clarifications or that they were drafted by Indian government, later to be attributed to the Colombo delegates. However, the Indonesian delegate Subandrio in a Press statement controverted such allegations and asserted that they were an inseparable part of the Colombo Proposals and that the same set of clarifications were also presented to Chinese government. Sri Lanka also denied this charge.

Felix R. Dias, who had accompanied Mrs Bandaranaike on her peace

56 On 17 February 1963 Chinese Vice Premier asserted that the clarifications given to India were different from those given to China. Ceylon Daily News, 16 March 1963. Also see Mohan Ram, n. 51, p. 147, who finds that "the Ghanaian and Indonesian representatives were responsible for this muddle".

57 For instance, Maxwell has quoted a letter of Mrs Bandaranaike to Zhou Enlai of 7 March 1963 in which she wrote that "the document was prepared by the Government of India and is expressed in the language of the Indian Government". Neville Maxwell, India's China War (Harmondsworth, 1972), Pelican edition, p. 471. This letter was made public by M.R. Masani, the Swatantra M.P., See Opinion (Bombay), 11 February 1964.

58 India's Fight for Territorial Integrity, n. 17, p. 33.
mission to Beijing and New Delhi, told the House of Represen-
tatives on 5 April 1963, "It was incorrect to say that there
was any difference in the explanation of the Colombo Proposals
that were given in both countries to their Prime Ministers". 59

Be that as it may, at least one thing is obvious and that
if these clarifications had not been offered India would surely
have refused to accept these proposals. As pointed out in a
recent study made by a Sri Lankan diplomat, "It may have been
a concession to India to persuade her to accept the proposals
in the confidence that Mrs Bandaranaike could prevail on
China to do so too". 60

Indian Perspective

In any case, proposals along with the clarifications not
only satisfied most of India's claims on the Sino-Indian
boundary but in certain respects were an improvement. As openly
acknowledged by Nehru on 23 January before the Lok Sabha:

... the Colombo Conference proposals (along with
clarifications) have certain advantages over the
one which we had previously indicated ... In
September 8 position the Chinese were there (in
western sector) in very large strength.
... much to the advantage of China. If the Colombo
conference proposals (along with the clarifications)
are accepted ... It will remove the Chinese strength
from the western sector and there will be our posts
as well as Chinese posts by agreement in equal numbers
with equal number of people and similarity of arms. 61

60 Dhanpala, n.2, p.77.
61 For the full text of the speech see India Lok Sabha
However, despite Nehru's espousal the public opinion in India remained highly critical of the Colombo proposals. Almost all the Opposition Parties, with the exception of Communists, opposed them within and outside the Parliament. While the Bharatiya Jana Sangh felt that "The Colombo Conference has totally bypassed the aggression issue,"62 Swatantra and Praja Socialist Party in a joint meeting asserted that "... the so-called non-aligned Powers are not really non-aligned".62

The Press too reacted sharply against the Colombo Proposals. Only a few were willing to see them in a proper perspective as did the Economic Weekly:

The objective of the Colombo Conference of the six non-aligned Afro-Asian nations was neither that of airing lofty sentiments about peace and friendship nor that of passing judgement on the rights and wrongs in the Sino-Indian conflict; it was to create conditions in which it would become possible for India and China to start negotiations for settling the border question.64

So overcharged was public opinion that it did not care much for Nehru's plea to accept these proposals even as a tactical move to gain diplomatic advantage vis-a-vis China. "A rigid posture by us (India) while the aggressor makes a show of

62 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 21 January 1963.
64 The Economic Weekly, (Bombay) 15 December 1962.
flexibility may land us in a diplomatic lapse". The public did not trust the government on this count even when it was argued that, "If the time taken for negotiations is utilized for all-round preparations for war purposes, there is everything to gain and nothing to lose". 

Against such hostile public opinion, Nehru could somehow get the parliamentary approval to clarified version of the Colombo proposals, but not before he assured the Lok Sabha that he would not agree to any Chinese amendments to the Colombo proposals. Clearly Nehru was not left with much leeway to bargain on this issue and had to take a rigid attitude of insisting on a prior Chinese acceptance of the Colombo proposals in toto, before holding any talks with China.

**Chinese Dilemma**

On the other hand, the Chinese were just not willing to accept these proposals in toto, especially after India succeeded in obtaining a favourable interpretation of some of its crucial aspects. In fact the Chinese, after accepting

---

65 See *The Eastern Economist* (New Delhi), 14 December 1962.

66 K.K. Shah, Congress General Secretary in the AICC quoted in *Indian Affairs Records* (New Delhi), vol. 9, no. 2, p. 58.

67 Lok Sabha accepted the Colombo proposals on 24 January 1963 after a five-days contentious debate by rejecting a Socialist amendments by 349 to 59 votes. For details see Jetley, n. 49, pp. 200-23.
these proposals "in principle" on 9 January found themselves in a quandary when the details of the New Delhi clarifications were made known to them. An unconditional acceptance of these would have nullified the advantage which it had gained after the incursion on India. But by refusing them out of hand, especially after accepting them 'in principle', China had to suffer a loss of face before the Afro-Asian comity and it would have certainly undermined its quest for leadership in this region.

However, Zhou Enlai through a skilful diplomatic move did try to wriggle out of this dilemma. By sticking to his acceptance of the Colombo proposals 'in principle', Zhou in his letter to Mrs Bandaranaike on 19 January proposed two amendments or points of interpretation which he wanted to discuss "if and when they and India meet on Conference table". Thus China considered these proposals only as a preliminary basis for negotiation while reserving its right to discuss the amendments about certain ambiguities which according to it were created by the New Delhi clarifications.

The two points of interpretation which China wanted to raise were: the stipulation regarding Indian troops keeping their existing military positions should not only apply to the western sector, but to the entire border; and in the

---

eastern sector India will continue to refrain from re-entering the areas of south of the actual line of control on 7 November 1959, vacated by the Chinese frontier guards and will send there only civilian personnel carrying arms of self defence as India had done so far. Subject to the fulfilment of above conditions, China would not set up civilian posts in the twenty kilometres zone of its side of actual line of control.\textsuperscript{69}

Evidently, China was not willing to grant any more concessions than what had already been promised in its three-point proposal. Nevertheless it attributed them to the "peace call of Colombo Conference nations".\textsuperscript{70} India could, however, see through this cleverly disguised Chinese move to wrest advantage by offering to hold direct talks without involving any commitment on its side. Not surprisingly, Nehru categorically rejected the Chinese offer of such conditional talks and insisted on a prior implementation of all the provisions of the Colombo proposals. "Delhi, mindful of such talks in 1960, preferred the participation of a third party, and certainly Mrs Bandaranaike and her colleagues were close to finding an acceptable formula".\textsuperscript{71}

Diplomatic Jostling

It is interesting to note that as soon as Nehru was

\textsuperscript{69} See \textit{Peking Review}, no.5, 1 February 1963, p.10-12.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p.11.

\textsuperscript{71} Woodman, n.44, p.297.
informed by Mrs Bandaranaike on 23 January of China's reservations regarding some aspects of these proposals, he not only persuaded the Parliament to accept them in toto but also put a condition of similar acceptance on the part of China. He declared before the Lok Sabha that "these proposals have either to be accepted as a whole or rejected ... to accept them in part will mean rejection of them as a whole". 72 When China refused to accede to this Indian demand, Nehru emphatically declared in the Lok Sabha that "the proposals fall to the ground, if Chinese did not accept them in toto".

China, on the other hand, was just not willing to concede to this as it found this demand "hypocritical and an attempt to impose its own interpretation of the Colombo proposals on China". The Chinese further argued, "The task of Colombo conference was to mediate and not to arbitrate. These proposals were only recommendations and not a verdict or award which Chinese must accept in toto". 73 Clearly China had agreed to open negotiations on the basis of clarified proposals, it was only not to appear intransigent before the Afro-Asian group of nations. 74

---

73 Ibid., p. 147.
74 See Dhanpal, n. 2, p. 77.
But the Indian attitude according to some observers was now to belittle China before the Afro-Asian countries for not responding to the Colombo proposals in the same manner as India had done.

'Politically India's attitude was one of heads I win, tails you lose'. If Peking accepted the proposals as clarified it would be the loser. If it did not, it would be putting itself at odds with the Colombo Powers and appear beligerent and unwilling to negotiate on reasonable terms.\(^75\)

Nehru admitted of such a strategy in explicit terms when he contended in the Rajya Sabha:

If the Chinese refuse to accept them (Colombo Proposals), they are in the wrong, we remain where we are. If they accept them, it is to their disadvantage and to our advantage. We are happy either way.\(^76\)

However, India could not succeed much in mobilizing the support of Colombo Conference nations in favour of its stand. In fact, it almost failed to convince them of China's default in not accepting these proposals \textit{in toto}. Nehru's rigid posture was fully exploited by the Chinese who successfully attributed it to India's domestic problems. As remarked by Dorothy Woodman, "... Chou Enlai's astuteness lent flexible appearance to Chinese propaganda as contrasted with Nehru's rigidity which was, in part, imposed on him by pressure in Parliament and Press".\(^77\)

\(^{75}\) Mohan Ram, n.51, p.143.

\(^{76}\) Statesman, 13 January, 1963.

\(^{77}\) Woodman, n.44, p.300.
In fact, barring the UAR none of the Colombo Powers approved of India's stand of treating Colombo proposals as some kind of final verdict. Sri Lanka felt that "whether it was open to one side or the other to raise certain proposals at the negotiating table, if and when they meet, is something outside the scope of Colombo proposals, in such matters, Colombo conference left decisions to be taken by mutual agreement". They obviously did not consider the Chinese request to discuss a few amendments as something contrary to the Colombo proposals, and the Indian contention of China rejecting Colombo proposals was officially countered by the Sri Lankan Government. Similarly Ofori Atta of Ghana stated on 23 January 1963 in Hongkong that, "there was no need for China and India to agree to all the Colombo Proposals before getting to the conference table..." In line with this Prince Sihanouk reportedly said in Phnom Penh that "the technical problems involved in the border dispute were for China and India

---


80 Asian Recorder, vol. 9, no. 5, 1963, p. 5053. About the same time, President Nkrumah wrote to Nehru urging him not to insist on clarifications of the Colombo Proposals and to accept China's unreserved attitude as good enough and begin direct negotiations. See Mohan Ram, n. 51, p. 145.
to solve and that if the Conference intervened it could only aggravate the crisis. Indonesia, too, decided not to insist on China accepting the proposals in toto.

The UAR was, of course, willing to oblige India by influencing the public opinion in the larger Afro-Asian arena by highlighting China's unwillingness to accept these proposals. It reportedly canvassed among the Colombo powers to issue an appeal to China to accept the proposals in toto and as per clarifications given at New Delhi. However, Nasser assumed a low profile soon as he did not find any support from the other participants.

In all, it was largely felt in nonaligned Afro-Asian circles that India by its conditional acceptance of the Colombo proposals had undesirably confirmed the Colombo Powers as arbitrators and their proposals as a verdict. Therefore, China despite its reservations to certain aspects of the Colombo proposals could successfully project itself as being far more amenable to negotiations than India. In fact, "both countries gave the impression of using the proposals as part of their own struggle to win over non-aligned nations to their side in the broader field of struggle for the leadership of the Afro-Asian World."

83 See Kuldip Nayar, Between the Lines, (Delhi, 1971), pp.252-53.
84 Woodman, n.44, p.300.
Continuing Mediation (1963-64)

Despite this setback, the Colombo Powers persisted with their mediation efforts throughout 1963-64. Not only did Mrs Bandaranaike retain a strong personal interest in the Colombo Proposals, but the other nonaligned sponsors also did their utmost to provide communication channels to the two disputants. Nasser, Sinnouk and Nkrumah all these statesmen made individual and group efforts to assist Mrs Bandaranaike in her pursuit to revive the Colombo proposals.

Prince Sinnouk and Ofori Atta during their visit to Beijing and New Delhi in January/February 1963 acted as coordinators of expectations between the two protagonists. Sinnouk communicated to New Delhi after his visit to Beijing, the Chinese willingness to negotiate the boundary in the eastern sector, if India does not object to the setting up of its checkposts in the demilitarized zone of the western sector. He further offered to act as a "go-between" in order to resolve their mutual difficulties regarding technicalities of the Colombo proposals.

86 On 16 February 1963 Prince Sinnouk while conveying the intent of Chinese reservations to Indian charge'd Affaires proposed that "the leaders of Asian countries would meet periodically, not with the spotlight of publicity on them as was the case at the Bandung Conference but privately to discuss common problems". Nayar, n. 83, pp. 251-52.
Similarly, encouraged by the mediation trip of Ofori Atta, President Nkrumah of Ghana proposed to convene a "Second Meeting of Colombo Powers" at the foreign ministers level in October 1963 with representatives of India and China as observers "to resolve the stalemate between the two disputants". 87 Invitations were sent to the other five participants on 23 September 1963. However, Nkrumah's proposal did not get a positive response. This was apparent when during Mrs Bandaranaike's visit to Cairo in October 1963 both she and Nasser "turned a Nelson's eye on the Ghanaian proposal and expressed their determination to continue mediation within the framework of their earlier proposals initiated at Colombo". 88

Similarly, President Sukarno suggested in November 1963 to hold a "Second Bandung" to facilitate India-China settlement as "the Colombo proposals have failed". 89 But this proposal was also not accepted by the nonaligned countries at large as perhaps this had clear implication of transferring the mediation from a nonaligned framework to an Afro-Asian one. 90

88 Ibid., p.5 and Hindustan Times, 15 October 1963.
89 Times of India, 3 November 1963.
90 For a detailed discussion on "Bandung Versus Belgrade" see Jansen, n. 2, pp.363-83 and also Ide Anak Agung Gde Augung, Twenty Years of Indonesian Foreign Policy 1945-1955 (The Hague, 1973), pp.507-41.
About the same time, Premier Ali Sabry of the UAR visited Beijing to explore the possibilities of resolving the deadlock over the Chinese withdrawal of seven posts on the boundary. Although he could not persuade China to accept the Indian precondition of a prior withdrawal of these posts before holding talks, he did obtain an assurance from the Chinese that they would not launch any aggressive action on the border and that, "even if India offered provocation China would allow itself to be provoked only after informing the six-nonaligned countries and giving them adequate time to try their hand at mediation". 91

Sri Lankan Initiative of 1964

Despite the continuing nonaligned mediatory efforts, the possibility of India and China resuming direct negotiations was becoming increasingly difficult. However, Mrs Bandaranaike did not lose hope. Through her low-key diplomacy, she succeeded in persuading India to give an informal assurance that its troops would not go right up to McMahon line even though the Colombo proposals allowed this. 92 However, before she could

---

92 See Nayar, n. 83, p. 250.
convey India's informal assurance to China, came the Chinese announcement of establishing seven check posts in Ladakh region. For India it was a severe blow since the New Delhi clarifications had clearly stipulated that the setting up of check posts in the demilitarized sector would be a subject matter of mutual discussion. Consequently, India withdrew the informal assurance which had been earlier conveyed to Mrs Bandaranaike.\textsuperscript{93}

Undeterred, Mrs Bandaranaike made a fresh approach during Zhou Enlai's visit to Sri Lanka in February 1964. She reportedly persuaded Zhou to consider the withdrawal of the seven posts in the Ladakh region to prepare grounds for India-China dialogue within the frame of Colombo proposals.\textsuperscript{94} Zhou gave clear hints of Chinese willingness to do so when he referred in remarkably positive terms the mediation efforts of the Colombo powers and expressed his keenness to co-operate in this venture.\textsuperscript{95}

Encouraged by the Chinese response, Mrs Bandaranaike approached Nehru who responded positively by making a statement in the

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p.257.
\textsuperscript{94} Lall, n.40, pp.191-92.
\textsuperscript{95} See the Joint Communique of 29 February 1964 after the conclusion of Zhou's visit to Sri Lanka, \textit{Afro-Asian Solidarity Against Imperialism: A Collection of Documents, Speeches and Press Interviews from visit of Chinese leaders to Thirteen African and Asian Countries}, Foreign Language Press (Beijing, 1964), p.421.
Lok Sabha on 12 April 1964 that he would consider an arrangement whereby neither side would maintain any posts in the 20 kilometre zone on the Chinese side of line of actual control.\textsuperscript{96} Spelling it out more clearly, Nehru stated at the All India Congress Committee meeting on 17 May 1964 that "India had taken lead in accepting the ... suggestion of considering the vacation of the posts as a basis of starting negotiation and it was now up to China to take further initiative for direct talks with India".\textsuperscript{97} Again on 22 May 1964, five days before his death, in reply to a question from the press he accepted that there was a change in the government's policy regarding its earlier stand that unless China accepts the Colombo proposals in full India will not enter into negotiation. He clearly suggested that "there could be an agreement on the interpretation of the Colombo proposals on the basis of both sides agreeing to keep no posts on either side".\textsuperscript{98}

However, with the sudden passing away of Nehru the possibility of the Colombo proposals providing a framework for a negotiated settlement of the Sino-Indian dispute once again became remote. If he had been alive a little longer,

\textsuperscript{96} See Woodman, n.44, p.301 and Jetley n.49, p.233.

\textsuperscript{97} See W.F. Van Eekelen, \textit{Indian Foreign Policy and Border Dispute with China}, (The Hague, 1964), p.223.

perhaps, the peace-making credentials of the Colombo Powers would have been made. The subsequent change in leadership in India saw an overwhelmingly hostile public opinion opposing any talk with China.\textsuperscript{99} The new Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri proved to be far less adept in controlling the militants who viewed the Colombo proposals only as a means to denigrate China rather than a viable way of peaceful negotiation. Current thinking was that "the war with China would be fought in the diplomatic arena\textsuperscript{100}" and the incoming Cairo Summit of Nonaligned Countries was viewed as a good opportunity to obtain a nonaligned mandate against China.\textsuperscript{101} Press too echoed this view when leading newspapers raised such questions as, "Are the nonaligned nations are to remain nonaligned even as between the aggressor and the victim of his aggression?"\textsuperscript{102}

On the other hand, China was also losing its interest in

\textsuperscript{99} According to observers, "The strongest reaction of all was provoked in India by Chou Enlai's support of Pakistan's claims to Kashmir and his vindication of Pakistan's being in SEATO and CENTO" Yuri Nasenko, Jawaharlal Nehru and India's Foreign Policy (New Delhi 1977), p.321, Zhou had visited Pakistan immediately after his sojourn to Sri Lanka in February 1964.

\textsuperscript{100} See The Patriot (New Delhi), 19 October 1964.

\textsuperscript{101} In September 1964, just a month before the Cairo Summit, Dinesh Singh, Deputy Foreign Minister of India, blamed China for discrediting nonalignment and exhorted the nonaligned to stand against the Chinese threat. He said that "when the 50 or 55 countries meet at Cairo later this year, the problem they will have to study will include... above all the new threat that is being posed by China". India and Foreign Review, 1 September 1964, p.15.

\textsuperscript{102} Indian Express (New Delhi), 16 October 1964.
the mediation overtures of the Colombo Powers. This was due to its increasing involvement with the crisis in the international communist movement which was threatening to split. This was evident when Zhou, after completing his visit to thirteen Afro-Asian states, retracted his offer of vacating seven posts in the western sector and insisted that "New Delhi must come to negotiating table first, only then would China consider the announcement of vacation of seven posts." 103

The increasingly hardening attitude of the two disputants, however, did not discourage Sri Lanka in its effort to try and persuade them to come to the negotiating table on the basis of a "slightly revised version of Colombo proposals". Felix D. Bandaranaike in a statement on Sri Lankan foreign policy in August 1964 stated that "the last two statements made by the Prime Minister Nehru in the Lok Sabha have certainly shown a somewhat different approach and willingness towards accepting a slightly modified, slightly softer approach to the whole question". Highlighting the overall efforts of the Colombo nations he said:

The Colombo Proposals have prevented an immediate outbreak of conflict again. To that extent, they have made a contribution and what remains in the ultimate negotiation of a boundary and, if both sides are aggreable to that, I rather think that it is possible that Government of China may agree to remove the last one obstacle standing in the

103 Nayar, n.83, p.261.
way, namely, the withdrawal of seven posts in the controversial demilitarized sector on the Ladakh side. And I think Indian Government might be agreeable to settling larger questions than the consolidation of a cease fire and towards, agreeing to meet to settle the final alignment of the boundary on definite principle.104

However, before these mediatory efforts could bear any fruit a small technical issue regarding the modalities of Chinese withdrawal from seven check posts in Ladakh became a bone of contention and stalled further progress in this regard. Now India insisted on a prior Chinese withdrawal as a precondition for further talks. Swaran Singh, India's Foreign Minister stated in the Lok Sabha on 25 September 1964, "We are willing to regard the vacation of seven Chinese posts ... should China undertake it to be the substantial compliance with the conditions set forth in the Colombo Proposals".105 Referring to the official Chinese Press report which considered the setting up of civilian posts as their internal affair, he categorically stated that "We shall not go to the conference table on Chinese terms".106 Clearly India, still inhibited by the Chinese incursion almost two years ago, was not willing to take any chances with the Chinese.

105 See Jain, n. 72, p. 315.
106 Ibid., p. 316.
Thus whatever was left of the Colombo proposals was lost amid a continuing diplomatic struggle of the two disputants to turn these proposals in their favour. Finally, the communication channels established so painstakingly by the Colombo Powers broke down irrevocably when on the eve of the Cairo Non-aligned Summit the two parties launched a bitter attack on each other for not responding to the peace initiative of the Colombo Powers.

On 7 September 1964 speaking on the platform of the Cairo Summit Lal Bahadur Shastri categorically stated that "... despite our acceptance of the proposals made by the nonaligned powers assembled at Colombo, we have been unable to get a friendly response from China". He also made indirect reference to the merit of India's case when he urged:

> Quite often the commencement of negotiation is hampered by one party or the other seeking to impose certain conditions. Negotiations to be real must be free from all preconditions. Their basis must be customary or traditional boundaries which may be in existence and not any new boundaries which may have been created by force. The nonaligned should declare their strong opposition to any change brought about by the open use of force.107

Shastri was obviously not content with the non-partisan attitude of the nonaligned countries vis a vis the Sino-Indian

---

107 For Shastri's full speech, see India and Foreign Review, 1 November 1964 pp.9-10.
dispute. Therefore, in the same address, he quoted Jawaharlal Nehru's famous statement on nonalignment which stated, "Where freedom is menaced or justice threatened or where aggression takes place we cannot and shall not be neutral". 108

The Final Declaration of the Cairo Summit showed that India had made "some modest gains" in obtaining a nonaligned mandate against China. 109 There were several references to the sanctity of frontiers, especially in the paragraph on "Respect for the Sovereignty of States and their Territorial Integrity: Problems of Divided Nations". 110 This paragraph was later

108 Ibid.


110 The said paragraph was not favourable to India in all respects. For instance while pledging "to respect frontiers as they existed when the States gained independence" the paragraph also added that "nevertheless, part of the territories taken away by occupying powers or converted into autonomous bases for their own benefit at the time of independence must be given back to the latter country concerned". The latter part of the paragraph obviously put doubts on India's claims vis-a-vis Sino-Indian boundary. It is also relevant to note that some of the nonaligned-Afghanistan, Somalia, Morocco, Syria, Kampuchea, Saudi Arabia and Jordan-expressed reservations about this paragraph. See Two Decades of the Non-Aligned Documents of the Gathering of the Non-Aligned States, 1961-82, Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, (New Delhi, 1983), pp. 21 and The Cairo Conference of Non-Aligned Nations, Information Service of India, New Delhi, 1965, n. 74.
employed by India to decry the Chinese aggression at the United Nations.\footnote{111}

On the eve of the Cairo Summit, the Chinese government had expressed its "readiness to negotiate anytime anywhere with the Colombo proposals as the basis" while welcoming the efforts of Colombo Powers.\footnote{112} But in a statement, coinciding with the concluding session of the Summit on 9 October 1964, China charged India with making anti-Chinese clamour and found its demand of prior withdrawal of seven posts most unreasonable. It further stated:

At present exploiting the opportunity of his participation in the conference of nonaligned countries in Cairo, the Indian Prime Minister is making distortions and slanders about China over the Sino-Indian boundary question and is doing his utmost to make use of Colombo Conference nations to bring pressure to bear upon China. Moreover the Indian P.M. is in Cairo while the Chinese Premier is not. To motivate consultations among the Colombo Conference nations behind China's back is unfair ... making it more difficult for the six Colombo Conference nations to conduct mediations in future.\footnote{113}

\footnote{111} Swaran Singh, India's Foreign Minister, specifically mentioned this very aspect of Cairo Declaration at the UN when he stated that "Despite the sincere efforts made by six nonaligned countries, the Chinese forces continue to be in constant occupation of 14,500 miles of Indian territory ... while the Cairo Declaration had laid down that the established frontiers of the state shall be inviolable". \textit{Indian and Foreign Review}, vol. 2, no. 6, January 1965, p. 9.

\footnote{112} \textit{Peking Review}, 16 October 1964.

\footnote{113} Jain, n. 72, p. 318.
In view of Chinese reservations about taking the Colombo proposals to the Cairo Summit in its absence, and India's reluctance to raise bilateral disputes at the Conference, the six nonaligned preferred not to discuss this matter at the Conference. They, however, held informal discussions on the prospects of further negotiations with the two disputants on the basis of the Colombo Proposals and also about bilateral disputes in general. According to Mrs Bandaranaike, "... these exchange of views were most useful and we agreed that we should persevere in our common effort to bring about peaceful negotiation towards the settlement of dispute in our region of the world".

114 Nehru had taken a principled stand to oppose raising of bi-lateral disputes at the nonaligned conferences see his statements, *Times of India* 23 December 1963 and *India and Foreign Review*, vol.1, n.10, 1 March 1964. Also see Dinesh Singh's categoric statement in this regard, *Times of India*, 11 February 1964.

115 Sri Lanka had initially planned to suggest the inclusion of a proposal in the agenda for the Cairo Summit regarding "a permanent committee of the Conference to mediate in disputes between nations if the consent of the contending parties to a dispute is forthcoming". S. Nihal Singh, "Delicate Task for India at the Colombo Meeting," *Statesman*, 23 March, 1964.

116 *Ceylon News Letter*, no.47, 12 November 1964. Ali Sabry also promised to revive the proposals during the Cairo Summit. It is doubtful whether the attempt was ever really made. See Jansen, n. 2, pp. 389-90.
However, this was perhaps the last occasion when the Colombo Conference nations held informal discussions regarding the Colombo proposals. The acrimony at the Cairo Summit had clearly blocked all chances of further mediation. In the meantime, both the contestants had launched a full-fledged propaganda war against each other and, "in the course of an irate correspondence between the two sides, the reasonable line achieved with so much of diplomacy by the six-nonaligned powers had drifted out of reach." 117

Finally on 21-22 December 1964 Zhou Enlai closed all avenues for negotiations within the frame of Colombo proposals by making a statement before the first session of the Third National People's Congress in which he referred to the extremely "unreasonable attitude" of the Indian government demanding the withdrawal of seven civilian posts in the western sector as a precondition for talks. He said, "we will not withdraw a single one of these posts ... if India is determined not to have negotiations, no matter we can wait". 118

After this neither China nor India tried to revive the Colombo proposals. Referring to the efforts made by Mrs Bandaranaike, Shastri categorically stated before the Lok Sabha on 24 December that, "... the question of any negotiation does

117 Woodman, n.44, p. 300.
118 Peking Review, 1 January 1965, pp.18-19.
not arise at present". Further, a spokesman of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs reacting to Zhou's speech at the National People's Congress imputed the failure of Colombo efforts to China, when he stated:

suggestion about the withdrawal of posts was not made by India but by an impartial third party.
... Mr Chou Enlai has finally killed this constructive suggestion and turned his back upon the Colombo Proposals. His speech seems to be Peking's coup de grace to the Colombo proposals formulated by the Six Non-aligned nations.

Evidently by the end of 1964 both India and China became tired of maintaining the facade of being amenable to the Colombo mediation proposals. After its abortive effort to emerge as an undisputed leader of Afro-Asian countries, China's attention was now increasingly drawn towards its own domestic contradictions which later paved the way for the Cultural Revolution. India too diverted its diplomatic efforts to cope with ever increasing possibility of a war with Pakistan, which eventually broke out in September 1965.

The Colombo Powers which had persisted with mediation for about two years also lost interest in the Sino-Indian dispute with the sudden change of leadership in most of these six countries. With Mrs Bandaranaike going out of Power in the

119 Times of India, 25 December 1964.
120 Foreign Affairs Record, December, 1964, p. 325.
March 1965 election and President Sukarno and President Nkrumah being ousted, the Colombo initiative all of a sudden became effete. The new leadership in these countries did not see much advantage in even referring to these efforts. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Afro-Asian nonaligned mediation with such a rich diplomatic context was forgotten so fast.

In retrospect the Colombo efforts signified a unique and rather bold experiment in conflict resolution. By acting as the "communication channel and coordinator of expectations" between the two protagonists, the six nonaligned powers not only stabilized the cease-fire of November 1962 but made it possible for India and China "to return to negotiating table whenever they felt that the time was opportune".

As highlighted earlier, the protracted mediations conducted by the six nonaligned did embody certain norms and methods for defusing international conflicts. To begin with, the mediatory intervention was marked by intense group activity with Mrs Bandaranaike taking an active lead in coordinating the individual and collective efforts in this direction. Secondly, the Colombo Powers by and large displayed impartiality and refused to take

121 See Korany, n. 1, p.392.

sides in this dispute, though, of course, the level of their impartiality was not identical. Small states like Burma and Cambodia had to take into account their vulnerability to China while UAR was under tremendous pressure to take a pro-Indian line. Yet there was an absolute consensus among the participants regarding their role as that of "friendly third parties". It was indeed a great effort on the part of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Ghana to exercise their moderating influence to bring unanimity of opinion within the Conference on a set of mediation proposals.

In order to have unhindered communication with the disputants, it was decided at the Conference not to make public its proposals till Mrs Bandaranaike had conveyed them to Beijing and New Delhi. The discussions were also held in camera and there was no weightage for individual opinion as the final decision had to be unanimous. This was an as effective means of avoiding undue controversies and acrimony.

Finally, a remarkable feature of the Colombo mediation which continued despite many set backs till almost the end of 1964, was its informal and rather flexible temper. The Conference did not have an agenda as such, unlike the ten-nation conference proposed by President Nasser meant to discuss his four-point proposal. Even after the initial rebuff, the Colombo Powers pursued their mediation efforts making some adjustments here and there around what they called 'slightly modified version of Colombo proposals'.
Thus the Colombo mediation was a remarkable instance of conflict management through negotiation, good offices, conciliation, mediation and enquiry. Its eventual failure, therefore, does not mitigate the earnest efforts made by the six nonaligned collectively to defuse a major regional crisis. As has been correctly pointed out by a Sri Lankan diplomat recently:

The failure of the Colombo proposals to find acceptance with both parties to the dispute... does not diminish the importance of the attempt and an examination of the events and an analysis of the methods used are of value today when similar nonaligned initiatives are in progress.123

After all disputes are not always settled with such a degree of finality that the cause is completely eliminated. In particular the Sino-Indian border dispute having its origin in colonial legacy involved vexed issues which defied easy solution. Also embodied in this dispute were wider issues relating to the struggle for leadership in the emerging new world of Afro-Asian countries which made things all the more difficult. Against such high politicization of the dispute it was rather doubtful whether any other set of mediators would have been even as successful as the Colombo Powers.124

123 Dhanpala, n.2, p.80.

124 Although, it is argued that the Colombo Powers had the misfortune of trying to tackle a problem which essentially fell within the scope of bigger powers Watt n.2, p.437.
The Colombo mediation has largely been forgotten now for one reason or the other. But, as one of the earliest nonaligned endeavour to defuse a major regional conflict, and representing their genuine concern for preserving Afro-Asian and nonaligned solidarity, it should be considered an important milestone in the annals of Third World Diplomacy.