CHAPTER FOUR
Crisis in Indo-China

Before the Indo-China question could assume/proporions of a global conflict in which the two Power blocs got involved, India viewed it as a struggle for independence by the oppressed people against imperialism and colonialism, even though she was not oblivious of the fact that the indigenous Communists were spearheading the movement organized by a national coalition. Having herself been recently freed from colonial domination, India naturally extended her sympathies to the freedom struggle in Indo-China. (1) However, the Government of India did not like to interfere in Indo-China in any way. It was thought that interference would not be advantageous either to India or to world peace. On the contrary, it could be construed as a 'foreign interference' which in its turn would have evoked great deal of resentment in the area concerned. (2) This policy, more or less, continued till the situation in Indo-China deteriorated rapidly early in 1954. In the intervening period (i.e. 1950-3), both the sides, i.e., the Bao Dai Government and the Viet Minhs started receiving "material aid and equipment" from the United States and military supplies

(1) Welcoming the delegates from Indo-China to the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947 Nehru warmly referred to the close historical and cultural bonds between the two countries and described their struggle as the "battle of freedom", Asian Relations (New Delhi, 1948) 22.

(2) See Nehru's speech on 17 March 1950 in the Parliament of India, Parliamentary Debates, 3 (1950) pp. 1698-9. Hence forward quoted as Lok Sabha Deb. (The House of the People Debates) or Rajya Sabha Deb. (The Council of States Debates), as the case may be.
from Red China respectively. India was, on the other hand, preoccupied with domestic problems, such as Kashmir, Hyderabad, refugee rehabilitation. But India was worried about the continued warfare there. Therefore, the Government of India made an appeal to the belligerent Powers in Indo-China to agree to some kind of cease fire before the Geneva Conference met. (3)

But the statement made by the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on 29 March 1954 advocating a collective action in Indo-China by Western Powers, (4) aroused deep suspicion in the minds of influential Indian quarters. It has been even interpreted as "an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to Asia". (5) Although the Indian mind had been free from considerations that could possibly be termed as pro-communist, its reaction to Dulles proposal had been in the background of Western dominance in an area fighting for its liberation. Past history, out of which India had recently emerged, made her consider it as "a disguised attempt to reimpose foreign influence on newly free countries". (6) Moreover, the Prime Minister felt that the statements made by Dulles might not be useful for a successful outcome of the forthcoming Geneva Conference. (7)

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(3) See Nehru's speech in Lok Sabha on 22 February 1954 in India's Foreign Policy, selected speeches of Nehru, September 1946-April 1961 (New Delhi, 1961) 396.


(5) See Prime Minister Nehru's speech in the Lok Sabha on 24 April 1954, Lok Sabha Deb., 4 (1954) col. 5579.


Government of India always held the view that "negotiations under threat or by military activities being stepped up preceding negotiations... are not helpful". (8) In a statement Nehru laid blame both at the doors of the Western Powers and the Vietminh. By "threats" Nehru is said to have referred to the call given for united action by the US Secretary of State and by "military activities" to the intensified attacks by the Vietminh on Dien Bien Phu. (9)

**India's Six-Point Peace Plan**

Any effective military confrontation between the two blocs in Indo-China, could have triggered off a world conflagration in an 'area of peace' which India sought to create and enlarge. In such an eventuality, it would have been almost impossible to escape involvement in the fray. Hence, she threw her entire weight in favour of peaceful settlement of the whole dispute and in this regard welcomed the decision of the 'Berlin Powers' to convene the Geneva Conference, although she, along with other Colombo Powers, vitally concerned with the area, were kept out of the conference. Failure on the part of the Western Powers to recognise the realities of the situation, did not provoke any of these Powers to frustrate the

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(8) Statement read in the Lok Sabha by Anil K. Chanda on behalf of the Prime Minister Nehru on 17 April 1954, *Lok Sabha Deb.*, 4 (1954) col. 4922.

peace efforts at Geneva. On the contrary, in an "earnest desire to assist to resolve some of the difficulties and deadlocks and to bring about a peaceful settlement" Nehru outlined a six-point peace plan for Indo-China. (10) The plan was a genuine effort at peace making. It was described by the official opinion in Colombo as a "reasonable approach" (11) and as

(10) The six-point peace plan for Indo-China put forward by Nehru:

1. Climate of Peace: World Powers to desist from threats and the combatants to restrain from stepping up the tempo of the war;

2. Cease-fire: to be brought about by the combatants;

3. Independence: After the cessation of hostilities the Geneva Conference to proclaim that for a solution of the conflict, the complete independence of Indo-China is essential. The unequivocal commitment by France to terminate her sovereignty over the area is commended;

4. Negotiations: Direct negotiation between the principal parties connected "to hammer out settlements", such procedure would limit the issue to Indo-China and free them from extraneous influences;

5. Non-intervention: Solemn agreement on 'non-intervention denying all aid' to which the United States, Britain, Russia and China will be the primary parties. The United Nations would formulate a non-intervention convention and evolve provisions for its enforcement;

6. The good offices of the United Nations for the purpose of conciliation under the appropriate articles of the Charter, and not for invoking sanctions, should be sought.

Sunday Times (London), 25 April 1954. For the full text, see also Nehru's statement on Indo-China in the Lok Sabha on 24 April 1954, n. 5, cols. 5581-3.

"the most constructive piece of thinking so far" by a Western paper. (12) Even a Conservative Daily had to concede that the "proposals could not be ignored" and that Nehru's "attitude would be of importance to procure a cease-fire". (13) However, Indian enthusiasm for a peaceful settlement did not obscure her anxiety for security if the Communists over-ran the whole of Indo-China. Although the plan asked for cease-fire, it did not call for immediate withdrawal of French troops from Indo-China.

Participating in a debate on foreign affairs in the Rajya Sabha on 18 May 1954, Krishna Menon, an able interpreter of India foreign policy, declared that "while it may be a piece of agreeable rhetoric to talk about the withdrawal of French troops from Indo-China first, it is not practical politics". (14)

It is of interest to note that in his six-point peace plan for Indo-China the Prime Minister Nehru pleaded for direct negotiations between France and the Governments of the Associated States of Indo-China. There was a lurking suspicion in his mind, it appears, that at the Geneva Conference the dispute might acquire the over-tones of cold war and negotiations might not be fruitful. Nehru got further support to his plea in the Colombo Conference of the Prime Ministers of Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, Pakistan and India, held on 28 April 1954. There had been, however, slight modification in words in the final communique of the conference. Instead of using the word

(14) Rajya Sabha Deb., 6 (1954) col. 6751.
"non-intervention" by other Powers, it said that "the success of direct negotiations will be greatly helped by an agreement on the part of all countries concerned, particularly China, UK, USA, and USSR, on steps necessary to prevent recurrence and resumption of hostilities". (15) Later on, in his speech on foreign affairs in the Rajya Sabha on 18 May 1954, Nehru described this change as a welcome improvement upon his own phrase "non-intervention". (16)

The Colombo Conference was in no sense a rival to the Geneva Conference, and the fact remained, that "it is still the West which holds the fate of Asia in its guns...." (17) Neither in the confabulations that took place in London between the USA and the UK on the proposed security agreement for the defence of South East Asia, nor in the peace efforts at Geneva was India or any other Colombo Power invited to participate. This created great deal of concern in India. (18) Nevertheless, India evinced keen interest in Geneva peace negotiations and let her good offices to be used to iron out differences through the "unofficial emissary", Krishna Menon. It is believed, that at some point when the negotiations were on the verge of breaking down, "India's friendly advice to

China" saved the situation. (19)

Peace Negotiations in Geneva

The Geneva peace talks were interrupted by the simultaneous trips on 25 June 1954 of the Chinese Premier to New Delhi and of the British Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to Washington. The talks at Washington took note of both the eventualities of "the conclusion of an agreement on Indo-China" and the "failure to reach such an agreement" and in that light, suggested pressing forward with "collective defence" efforts in South East Asia. (20) On the other hand, the joint communique issued in New Delhi by the Prime Ministers of India and China at the end of their three-day talks emphasised a "political settlement" which should "aim at the creation of free, democratic, unified and independent States, which should not be used for aggressive purposes or be subjected to foreign intervention". The communique envisaged the creation and enlargement of the "area of peace" and thus "lessening the chances of war and strengthening the cause of peace". (21) It appears, the Indian Prime Minister could sell his ideas well to his Chinese

(19) See V.P. Dutt and V. Singh's Indian Policy and Attitudes Towards Indo-China and SEATO (New Delhi, 1954) 13.


(21) See the joint statement by the Prime Ministers of India and China issued in New Delhi on 28 June 1954, Foreign Policy of India: Text of Documents 1947-59 (New Delhi, 1959) 111-4.
counterpart. Thus, Asian neutralism strengthened immeasurably and correspondingly, the Washington plans for a South East Asia defence pact received a major setback. (22) The Delhi talks were an additional feather in Nehru's cap. According to one commentator, Nehru had been able to wrest certain concessions from the Chinese Prime Minister. (23) Chou en Lai too was anxious to prevent free Asia from entering into SEATO, or failing that, to keep the number of countries joining SEATO as low as possible. Indeed, with this idea in mind, the Chinese Prime Minister went to Burma from New Delhi, "to reassure Thakin Nu of his friendly intentions". (24) There had been ample evidence of Burmese fear of Chinese intransigence. Rangoon was supposed to be considering it advisable not to oppose military measures for stepping the Communist advance in Indo-China. (25) Therefore, when the Geneva Agreement was reached on 21 July after intensive negotiations, India hailed the accord. Prime Minister Nehru described it as "one of the outstanding achievements of the post-war era". (26) There was a great sigh of relief that peace returned at last to the strife-torn land of Indo-China. There was jubilation, for yet another pocket in Asia was freed from the yoke of colonialism.

(22) Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 28 June 1954.
(23) Manchester Guardian, 2 July 1954.
(24) Ibid., 3 July 1954.
(26) Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 22 July 1954.
With the attainment of peace in Indo-China the Western Powers became more active in the formation of a collective defence treaty for South East Asia. There had been already an Anglo-American accord in this respect. (27) But India held fast to the belief that "collective security...can only come by resolving world tensions and developing a pattern of collective peace". (28) With this end in view, she accepted the Chairmanship of the Indo-China Supervisory Commissions, but rejected the invitation from the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden to attend a conference of the South East Asian countries, intended to discuss participation in a defence organization for the region. (29) Apart from other reasons that weighed with the Government of India, the fact that she was the Chairman of the Indo-China Commissions called for steadfast adherence to proclaimed policies. (30) However, in some Western quarters there was a hope that India might join an Asian alliance system, if "Asian countries themselves take the lead" and decisions are not made elsewhere leaving Asian people only "to tag along behind Western leadership". (31) Although, this was not a completely correct assessment of the Indian point of view, yet any serious attempt in this direction would not have gone totally unrewarded.

(27) See n. 20.


One thing is obvious from this statement, however, that the authorities in Washington did not pay enough heed to Asian opinion, even when conveyed through their own representative.

Formation of SEATO

India had been opposed to what she called a "military approach" to international problems, more particularly to problems concerning Asia. Nehru forcefully voiced India's concern at the proposed US military aid to Pakistan in 1953. (32) These were looked upon as attempts to drag in some Asian nations into the vortex of the 'cold war'. Describing this as a reversal of history, Prime Minister Nehru said:

When I think of any military aid freely given from a country of the West or any country, to a country of the East, the past history of Asia comes up before me, the history of the last three or four hundred years, the history of colonial domination gradually creeping in here and establishing itself.... I see some development being thought of which seems to me to reverse this process of liberation and freedom of Asia, which again brings to my mind that period when foreign armies came to Asia. (33)

Consistent with her earlier stand of opposition to militarist attitude to world problems, (34) India made active efforts to prevent "interlocking" of states in this region for defence purposes. The mood of relief and the sense of fulfilment


(33) Ibid., cols. 2976-7.

(34) In 1950 too India refused to join any Pacific Pact when approached by Britain. See Warner Levi's Free India in Asia (Minneapolis, 1952) 57.
(of her peace efforts at Geneva) that had pervaded New Delhi, was soon replaced by anxiety and exasperation due to the Western decision to form an alliance of South East Asian states. Coming as it did in the wake of Geneva agreement, the decision was regarded as an "infringement of the arrangements arrived at in Geneva in regard to Indo-China". (35) It was feared, that the favourable atmosphere created by the Geneva agreement would be spoiled and the parties involved would adopt rigid postures.

Before the Geneva agreement was signed, the British Foreign Secretary, Eden, suggested the idea of a Locarno Pact for South East Asia which could guarantee the settlements arrived at in Geneva by the belligerent Powers and by the Colombo Powers. (36) This proposal was received favourably in India. (37) The Locarno Pact was supposed to be "more in accord with the Asian point of view, as expounded by Nehru". (38) However, in view of the cease-fire in Indo-China the proposal was opposed by the Indian Prime Minister. (39) Because of stiff opposition from the US and discouraging official response from India the idea was still born.


(38) The Times of India (Delhi), 26 June 1954.

Press and Party on SEATO

The official attitude towards SEATO received universal support in India. There was hardly any dissenting opinion. All the influential dailies viewed the formation of SEATO with deep concern and misgivings. The Hindu of Madras in an editorial on 3 July 1954 wrote that "every effort must be made to achieve peace by negotiation: military organization is a bad substitute.... SEATO envisaged as a cordon sanitaire around China will not rouse great enthusiasm in Asian countries". The Amrita Bazar Patrika of Calcutta (5 August 1954) felt that "the defensive organisation...may not turn out to be defensive in practice, as Nehru rightly doubts, but may be used for offensive purposes". While The Times of India (Delhi, 6 August 1954) opined that "alignments and defence organisations tend to generate the very tensions and suspicions, to safeguard against which, they are devised". The Hindustan Times (New Delhi, 8 September 1954) warned that American policy if it were successful would spell ruin to the Indo-China agreements.

The major political parties of India held views broadly similar to the Government's stand-point. However the ruling party, the Indian National Congress, gave a call for "united front" to the people of India, to face the "grave situation" arising out of the decision of the United States Government to give military aid to Pakistan. (40) But it only regretted the

(40) See the Resolution on US Military Aid to Pakistan at the Congress Session held at Kalyani, 20-9 January 1954, Resolutions on Foreign Policy 1947-57 (New Delhi, 1957) 29-30.
establishment of SEATO by some great Powers of the West and some States in South East Asia and recommended the Five Principles, as enunciated in the joint statements of India and China, to govern international relations. (41) Although the Praja Socialist Party condemned the Western decision to form a military alliance, it urged upon the states of South and South East Asia, who were outside the two Power blocs "to come closer together and devise measures of mutual assistance". (42) One important spokesman of the party Madhu Limaye observed,

an objective assessment of the recent India-China parleys is beset with two difficulties. First, there is the tendency to indulge in sentimental, wishful thinking and to believe that a grand India-China entente is round the corner. Second, there is the alarmist view of the Chou-Nehru talks that they are but the first step towards India's surrender to international communism. The truth is that both are exaggerated notions. A solid basis for a lasting India-China understanding has not been discovered and the indications are that it will not be discovered for some time yet.

While rejecting the Chinese proposals to mobilize Asia against the West, the Western idea of creation of the South East Asian defence organisation, and also Anthony Eden's idea of a Locarno treaty for Asia, he suggested that India should take the initiative to form "non-aggression and mutual assistance pacts between the neutral South East Asian states". (43)

(41) Ibid., Resolution on International Affairs, Congress Session, Avadi (21-3 January 1955) 33-5.

(42) Resolution of the PSP, National General Council held at Indore, 6-8 June 1954, Janata (Bombay), 13 June 1954.

(43) Madhu Limaye's article on "Indo-Chinese Relations" Ibid, 11 July 1954.
But the Communist Party of India while approving the Government's policy regarding SEATO pleaded for full support to Chou en-Lai's proposal made in Geneva that "the Asian countries should consult among themselves with a view to seeking common measures to safeguard peace and security in Asia by assuming obligations mutually and respectively". (44) To this end, it instructed its units all over India to launch a full campaign for mobilising public opinion. (45)

Thus, it appears that there was a broad consensus of public opinion in India, very congenial to the policy pursued by her Government with regard to SEATO. While there were differences in emphasis and also in methods to achieve security in the region, opposition to the formation of SEATO had been the common denominator.

Reasons for Opposition: (a) Political

The guiding principle behind Indian foreign policy, as it appears from the statement of Prime Minister Nehru, had been that, "when there is substantial difference in the strength of the two opposing forces, we in Asia, with our limitations, will not be able to influence the issue. But when the two opposing forces are fairly evenly matched, then it is possible to make our weight felt in the balance". (46) This policy of "making


(45) The Hindu, 14 September 1954.

(46) Nehru's interview to the roving correspondent of the Ceylon Daily News as cited in The Hindu, 1 April 1954.
the weight felt in the balance" had been, at different times termed as the policy of positive neutrality, independent foreign policy, or policy of non-alignment. India feared that joining SEATO would seriously jeopardise this policy. It would mean, going counter to the basic tenets of Indian foreign policy. (47) Another vital reason for keeping out of the Manila Pact was, that India's membership of the SEATO would have compromised her position as the Chairman of the Supervisory Commissions in Indo-China. (48) It was more than obvious, that India's name was proposed for the chairmanship of the Commissions simply because she had been un-aligned with either of the two Power blocs. Had she joined SEATO it would have been difficult for India to function with that impartiality with which she was expected to function in the Commissions. Although, India appreciated the fear in Australia and in New Zealand, yet to her, the treaty seemed to have only increased tension in the area and not added to the strength of the joining parties. (49) India considered the extension of the defence area of the treaty beyond the territory of the member countries as a "dangerous extension of the idea of defence". (50) The arbitrary manner of describing the treaty area had resemblance to the old days when the Great Powers used to divide the countries

(47) See Nehru's speech in Lok Sabha on 29 September 1954, Lok Sabha Deb., 7 (1954) col. 3677.

(48) Ibid.

(49) Ibid., col. 3678.

(50) Ibid., col. 3679.
of Asia into areas of influence. (51) India took strong objection to the "subversion" clause of the treaty. She felt that any internal development in the area might also call for external intervention. (52) These "interlocking in international affairs" as Nehru described it, helped directly or indirectly in maintaining the status quo. "Because of these new series of alliances and interlocking arrangements, the people who live in those colonies, who are under somebody else's domination, have to deal not with one colonial Power but this mighty concourse of Powers...." (53)

(b) Strategic

Strategic considerations also influenced India in opting out of SEATO. In a nuclear defence system, the role of military alliances had tremendously shrunk. Rather, it had rendered such alliances obsolete. In the bi-polar world as it existed then, only two Powers mattered and military alliances "between a huge giant of a Power and a little pigmy of a country were meaningless". (54) Introduction of hydrogen bombs in the weaponry system, with their tremendous destructibility, had vitally altered the military situation. There was no real

(51) Ibid., col. 3680.
(52) Ibid.
(53) Prime Minister Nehru's address to the Delhi Press Association, The Hindu, 10 September 1954.
(54) See Nehru's speech in the Lok Sabha on 25 February 1955, Lok Sabha Deb., 1 (1955) col. 513.
defence against nuclear weapons. When the "saturation point" is arrived at, that is, the point when a country "has enough to cause infinite damage", "the stage of mutual extermination is reached". To let war take place, therefore, would mean total destruction of mankind. Therefore militarily, the alliances had no value. For, there was some kind of a balance, however unstable, between the two warring blocs, "when any aggression could have resulted into a world war". This balance of terror, as it were, came out of the threat of total destruction, that one big Power posed for the other. But a big Power could hardly be threatened and only the small countries who could be coerced. Because of the small countries being linked up with some big Power even a clash between small countries, could escalate into a nuclear holocaust. Therefore, it was argued, that the only alternative to such a possibility, was "to accept things more or less as they are" and "by enlarging the area of peace" to reduce the chances of war. (55)

Even according to the norms of conventional warfare, as an Indian observer put it,

SEATO means nothing as a military alliance against China. To frighten the Chinese you must be prepared to fight them on the land. The recruitment of Siam and Philippines as allies will not help... to do this. Pakistan has made it plain that it is not interested in fighting China, but would like to invoke the treaties against quite a different country. Thus in making the SEATO alliance the Western countries have been merely pulling faces at China, nothing more. (56)

(55) Ibid., cols. 515-7.
(56) See Manchester Guardian, 23 September 1954.
The Chinese army was basically a land-based army trained in guerrilla warfare. Therefore, for SEATO to be effective against China, it was necessary that countries adjacent to China recruited in the organization, so that a strong land army could be raised to counteract Chinese pressures. Western experiences in the long-drawn Korean war, as well as in Indo-China, bear out the soundness of this argument.

Nevertheless, the Western Powers pursued with the idea to its logical end. Hence, in some quarters, it was held that formation of SEATO was really a diplomatic move and not a military alliance. Its aim probably was to break the unity of the South Asian countries with India. (57) However, according to Prime Minister Nehru, the Manila Treaty did come in the way of that "area of peace". It converted that area into an area of potential war. (58)

**Attitude Towards China**

India upheld the view, almost as an article of faith, that peace could not be achieved and maintained in this area until and unless the Western Powers reconsidered their attitude towards the People's Republic of China. It had been the constant endeavour of India to bring this point home to the Western Powers at various international gatherings and through her foreign policy pronouncements. The Indian Prime Minister asserted that,

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(58) See n. 47, col. 3681.
there would be no settlement in the Far East, or South East Asia till this major fact of People's Republic of China is recognised.... One of the biggest factors towards ensuring security in South East Asia and in the Far East is the recognition of China by those countries and China coming to the United Nations. There would be far greater assurance of security that way than through South East Asia Treaty Organisation and the rest. (59)

This assertion of the Prime Minister was based on the assumption that China would not be aggressive towards her neighbours.

Elucidating this point in an interview he said:

I do not think China has any appetite for adventures beyond her border. If the People's Republic of China had any expansionist schemes it could easily use the pretext provided by the Kuomintang troops and invade Burma. No, I think the Chinese want to consolidate, not expand, and I see no reason why they should not accept a peaceable compromise. (60)

However, it is discernible, that the policy framers in New Delhi were not completely oblivious of the possibilities of China behaving contrary to their expectations. They had, on the other hand, the faith that a situation could be so created as to render it difficult for an errant China to break the civilised norms of international behaviour. Alluding to this, Nehru said in the Lok Sabha:

In the final analysis, no country can trust another country.... No country should rely 100 per cent on trust alone. We need not live in a fairy world where nothing wrong happens. But we can create an environment wherein it becomes a little more dangerous to the other party to

(59) Ibid., col. 3690.

(60) See Nehru's exclusive interview to Philip Deane, The Observer (London), 21 March 1954.
break away from the pledges given. (61)

That the South East Asian countries were faced with the difficult problems created by the overseas Chinese, was also taken note of by the Government of India. The presence of these Chinese generated a certain amount of fear of China in these countries. There was another cause of fear too. The fear "not of what Governments do officially, but what they might do sub rosa through the activities of the Communist Party". (62) These groups, which although functioned as national parties, were psychologically, emotionally and intellectually tied up with another nation's national group, subserv­ing its interest. Such parties, which worked through Comintern and later on Cominform, created a great deal of apprehension in the minds of certain nations. As a result of this, other forms of international interference in national affairs grew up. (63) These factors also contributed to the increase of tension in this region. Although, awareness of the realities as they

(61) See n. 47, col. 3683. See also Nehru's letter dated 4 July 1954 sent to the Presidents of the Provincial Congress Committees in which he cautioned against putting complete reliance on his joint declarations with Chinese Premier and advised that though they should hope for the best, they should "at the same time be prepared for any eventuality". Nehru: Letters to the PCC Presidents, Indian National Congress (New Delhi, 1955) 10-11.


(63) Ibid., col. 3693. See also Nehru's speech in Political Committee of the Asian-African Conference (Bandung) on 22 April 1955, where he put both Cominform and the SEATO in the same category; George Mc Turnan Kahin: The Asian-African Conference (New York, 1956) 30. Also The Hindu, 24 April 1955.
existed then, could have as well prompted India to act in a manner not very dissimilar to the West, the very fact of "awareness" should convince any critic of New Delhi's policies, that it was not anti-Westernism or for that matter, anti-Americanism or racialism of any kind, that influenced her attitude towards the SEATO. Rather, one could trace similarities of objectives between India and the West. (64)

**SEATO: Kashmir: Pakistan**

The importance of SEATO to India started receding soon enough. It was being remembered more "as a symbol of Western maternalism being imposed on Asia". (65) However, when the SEATO Council at its meeting in Karachi in March 1956 discussed the question of Kashmir and included a declaration in the final

(64) Commenting on Prime Minister's speech in the Lok Sabha on 29 September 1954, The Times of India (1 October 1954) wrote: "The impression the Prime Minister has conveyed—probably with deliberate intent—is that in India's relations with the Western democracies there is no difference over objectives. These are to resist aggression wherever it occurs, curb the activities of the Communist parties wherever they serve the interests of a foreign Power, and seek...to create conditions in which any Power would find it increasingly difficult to violate peace". See also Eric Downton's despatch in Daily Telegraph (London), 13 October 1954.

(65) See Bombay correspondent's despatch in Manchester Guardian, 22 February 1955. See also Lok Sabha Debates on the Presidential address (22-5 February 1955), in which even Communist members refrain from attacking SEATO, except referring to the reported interview by Eden about the change of SEATO headquarters from Singapore to East Bengal. There was a growing lack of interest in SEATO.
communique supporting Pakistan's stand, (66) both the official and un-official opinion in India vehemently protested against what was termed as "interference" in matters totally unconcerned with SEATO. Kashmir had already bedevilled the relations between India and Pakistan. Tacit support of the West to Pakistan only worsened it further, although the West could retort that Soviet support to India on Kashmir (67) had already raised a purely local dispute to an international status. Nehru, criticising the SEATO action, declared that the "reference to Kashmir could only mean that a military alliance is backing one country, namely, Pakistan, in its disputes with India. For any organisation to function in this way to the detriment of a country which is friendly to the individual countries comprised in the organization would at any time be considered an impropriety". (68) This act had only confirmed his worst apprehensions about the organization. (69) According to some others, SEATO stood "self-exposed"; it was described by them as a


(67) Bulganin, the then Premier of the USSR and Khruschev, the First Secretary of the CPSU, during their visit of Kashmir (9-10 December 1955) declared in Srinagar that Kashmir was an integral part of India, The Hindu, 11 December 1955.

(68) See Nehru's speech in the Lok Sabha on 20 March 1956, Lok Sabha Deb., 2 (1956) col. 3042.

(69) Ibid. Times of India commenting on 9 March 1956 wrote: "Everything that has happened during the 3-day session of SEATO confirms the suspicion that this ill-conceived organisation is a threat to the peace and stability of South East Asia".
"new type of brigandage in international affairs". (70) The belief in India was getting more and more strengthened that whatever might be the objective of the US authorities in giving military aid to Pakistan, Pakistan's acquisition of greater military strength was "to be able to settle disputes with India from what is called a position of strength". (71) Hostility to India, had alone prompted Pakistan to join both SEATO and the Baghdad Pact. (72)

The Western Powers, however, tried to assuage these Indian feelings. There were friendly and frank talks between the Indian Prime Minister and the Foreign Ministers of the UK, US and France when they all visited the Indian capital just before or after the Karachi meeting. But the Western allies did not hold uniform views either. While the British Foreign Minister stated that Kashmir did not come within the purview of discussion by SEATO, Dulles found nothing wrong in the declaration which "did not go into the merits of the dispute". And the French Foreign Minister thought that economic aid was preferable to defense arrangements. To what extent these parleys were effective in soothing Indian opinion, it is difficult to assess. However, later on in a speech at a public meeting, Nehru said that the SEATO declaration did not go very far. Describing it as a "gesture", he pointed out, that "these SEATO Powers might

(70) The National Herald (Lucknow), 9 March 1956.
(71) See n. 68, col. 3043.
(72) See Nehru's speech in the Lok Sabha on 29 March 1956, Lok Sabha Deb., 3 (1956) col. 3735.
not have expressed their opinion about Kashmir openly, but even a gesture from them was significant as it was a gesture from strong military Powers like America and Britain". (73) Officially, the Government of India had sent protest notes and the replies received in May from the UK, USA and Australia were considered "unsatisfactory" by the spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs. (74)

Pakistan's participation in the SEATO, it was feared, would bring the 'cold war' just to the border of India. Therefore, any involvement of a neighbouring country in 'cold war' politics was looked upon with fear and suspicion in India. However, in some measure, there did exist in India an appreciation of Pakistan's position. She was not considered an outcaste in international dealings, in spite of the environment of total hostility in India. Nehru believed that "Pakistan had not necessarily put herself irrevocably out of co-operation in Asia by her military pact with the United States". He said, that "although internal forces impelled her to join up with other Asian countries with similar problems, external forces and events had caused her to look elsewhere". (75) But the situation materially altered when Pakistan joined the Baghdad Pact in 1955. So far as India's interests were concerned,

(73) The Hindu, 15 April 1956.

(74) See M.S. Rajan, India in World Affairs 1954-6 (Bombay, 1964) 89.

(75) See Nehru's exclusive interview with a roving correspondent of the Ceylon Daily News (Colombo), as reported in The Hindu, 1 April 1954.
"the Baghdad Pact had a greater relation than the SEATO Pact". (76) India was concerned largely because of Pakistan's added military strength and the consequent increase in her bargaining power in respect of the Kashmir dispute. It was held that India was being virtually dragged into a military competition with Pakistan. (77) This change in the military situation had its effect on the political situation too, "and the procedure thus far followed became out of date". (78) Therefore, India declared that while considering the question of Kashmir with Pakistan's representatives the practical aspects (i.e. accession of military strength to Pakistan by its membership of the SEATO and Baghdad Pacts) would have to be kept in mind. (79) In the context of the changed circumstances due to induction of military factors, India decided to free herself of the commitment to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir. (80)

**Disinterestedness in SEATO**

In subsequent years, India evinced almost no interest in the South East Asian Treaty Organization. Even in parliamentary debates there was hardly any reference. The ineffectiveness of SEATO might be the reason for India's disinterestedness. It


was claimed that India's stand with regard to the defence pacts had been vindicated. Tracing the events of the last few years in the Lok Sabha on 8 December 1958 Nehru observed,

In the whole of this period, the last few years when the Pacts came into existence, one can see definitely step after step how these Pacts have not brought security to any country, but have made the position more difficult and brought insecurity.... These Pacts have no reality left, but they have to be kept up more for the sake of prestige than anything else. (81)

One plausible reason for SEATO's ineffectiveness, was India's success, at least in some measures, to keep a large part of the area free from military entanglements. Holding of the Asian-African Conference in 1955 in Bandung was quite significant in this respect. The Bandung Conference appeared to be an answer to SEATO. The decision of the five sponsoring countries (Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, India and Pakistan) to call the conference "was symptomatic of their protest...against the failure of the Western Powers to consult with them and to share with them sufficiently in decisions affecting the countries of Asia". (82) Introduction of China to the outer world, which Nehru successfully did at Bandung, "laid firmer foundation for China's peaceful relations with the rest of the world" and to that extent SEATO's purpose was defeated. The Indian Prime Minister was instrumental in arranging a private meeting between the Chinese Prime Minister and the delegates of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. In this meeting Chou en-Lai and North Vietnam's Pham Van Dong had verbally assured of non-interference in

(81) Lok Sabha Deb., 23 (1958) col. 3690.
(82) See Kahin, n. 63, 4.
Cambodia and Laos. (83) As a result of these diplomatic activities, one motive of India in Bandung, namely, "that Cambodia and Laos would desist from forming closer links with either the SEATO or the United States itself and would more closely associate themselves with the uncommitted 'neutralist' group", (84) was very much helped. Bandung Conference affected a change in the power relations in the area.

Conclusion

SEATO sought to alter the power structure in the area. What could have been otherwise a regional aim, became an integral part of a global purpose, because of the existence of two conflicting power-cum-idea systems. After the departure of the colonial Powers from the area, there did exist a power vacuum. The conflict arises out of the manner in which certain Powers attempted to fill in this vacuum. The United States and the Western Powers wanted to rush in, rather in a big way. China entered the area in a very subtle and somewhat subversive way, with possible support and encouragement from the Soviet Union. India, lacking both military power and economic strength tried to play her role quietly, by mustering collective support on issues carrying maximum common agreement. Absence of power ingredients forced India to merge her power ambitions into umbrella slogans like anti-colonialism, anti-racialism and independence from Power blocs. Common historical experiences

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(83) Ibid., 26.
(84) Ibid., 5.
and a strong desire to assert independence, as against conforming to somebody's policy (which association with military pacts might involve) united the South and South East Asian countries.

(85) The Bandung Conference was a novel attempt in this direction. It amounted, according to another view, to the creation "at least for some purposes a new power bloc". (86) India and the USA came in for clash on SEATO mainly because "in the pursuit of their aims both India and the US were applying pressure in expanding spheres of interest which overlap". (87) It were these considerations which weighed with India to keep the Indian ocean region free of foreign power influence. Whether security was to be sought by armaments or non-violence India still thought in terms of the Indian ocean region. (88)

However, India failed to emerge either independently or collectively, as an effective power factor. "One generation of peace", which she wanted to build her economy, did not make her a force formidable enough by herself, to prevent domination of Asian states by one Power. Collectively, she could not communicate an urgency to coalesce to these countries, independent of global combinations, because of her wrong assessment of the


(87) See Werner Levi's "Nehru's Foreign Policy: An Estimate", The Hindu, 2 June 1954.

(88) See Charles A. Fisher's "Crisis in South East Asia: A Power Vacuum", Queen's Quarterly (Kingston), 63 (1956) 112.
Chinese threat. Apparently Bandung seemed to have strengthened the existing Sino-Indian entente to cry halt to Western advance (in terms of influence) in the area. But the Asian-African Conference of 1955, should have revealed to more discerning eyes the beginning of the breaking up of the alliance too. Forging of the Pindi-Peking axis could also be traced to the Bandung Conference. While the strategy of continuing the entente in the international context was correct, it was tactically wrong for India to let the initiative pass on to China, as it did in Bandung. It could have been envisaged that in the possible event of being faced with China, an Asian congregation, more closely knit would be a source of tangible security. In the early and mid-fifties, at least till India herself got involved with China, there was a genuine fear of China in the South and South East Asian countries. But India let the opportunity pass by. Instead of playing the role of a sentinel of peace to the region, she chose to perform the role of a mediator between China and the small countries. She was also interested in getting China accommodated to the rest of the world. Where SEATO failed, an Asian attempt at mutual assistance with Indian initiative, independent of China, could have proved more meaningful. It is not very correct to assert that it would have gone against her declared policy of non-alignment. Right in the year 1954 and only about a month earlier than SEATO, one of the pillars of the policy of non-alignment, Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia (89) entered into

(89) See President Tito's advocacy of non-alignment policy in the joint statement with Nehru on 23 December 1954, n. 21, 143-7.
a defence treaty with Greece and Turkey, who were full-fledged members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. (90) It was not only that India at no time objected to Yugoslavia's membership of the treaty, but Marshal Tito was paying a visit to India in December of that year. (91) Neither did India raise any protest against the UK-Ceylon Defence and External Affairs Agreements of 1947, nor against the Treaty of Friendship Alliance and Mutual Assistance between China and the USSR of 1950. India's vehement opposition to Pakistan's military aid pact with the USA and also to SEATO, stands in marked contrast with her silence in regard to the above mentioned Treaties. One can, perhaps, surmise that her relations with Pakistan, had lent a different complexion to her attitude towards SEATO and other military alliances. India's attitude towards SEATO reveals how an aspect of her Pakistan policy shrouded the whole gamut of India's foreign relations.

(90) See The Three Power Defence Treaty Signed at Bled, on 9 August 1954 by the Governments of Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey, Documents on American Foreign Relations (New York, 1955) 186-90.

(91) Marshal Tito visited India from 18-23 December 1954.