CHAPTER 6

THE INDO-SOVIET TREATY OF PEACE FRIENDSHIP
AND CO-OPERATION 1971

The seventies opened with two main trends; while in Europe the efforts towards peace and detente made headway, in the East the US and China entered into an alliance against the Soviet Union. Pakistan became a very obliging ally for Beijing and Washington in South Asia. In Vietnam, the war was reaching its climax.

It is against this background that the South Asian situation should be analysed. The elections of 1971 pointed to political stability in India as Indira Gandhi had won a decisive victory over her rivals. The "Grand Alliance" of the so-called rightist forces bit the dust. The Indian developments immensely pleased the Soviet Union as it always desired stability in the region. On the other hand, Pakistan presented a rather complex scenario.

1. The Nixon Administration, in its bid to bring about a rapprochement with China, sought to use Pakistan as a channel. In fact, Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1970, was arranged by Pakistan. A grateful Nixon in October 1970 made the so-called "one time exception" to facilitate arms transfer to Pakistan. The package amounted to $40-50 million.

and the policies of the military government seemed to spell disaster for the country.²

The developments in the Indian sub-continent dictated a new orientation to Soviet policy. Under the altered circumstances, the Soviet approach to South Asia underwent a reversion to the decidedly Indo-centric orientation which had marked its policy prior to the 1965 conflict.³

2. General Ayub Khan stepped down on 25 March 1969, giving way to another spell of military government headed by Army Chief, Yahya Khan. While leaving, Ayub confessed that the situation in the country had deteriorated and its economy had also been shattered. The differences between the eastern and western wings of Pakistan had, by this time, grown to alarming proportions. See New York Times (ed.), 22 February 1969.

3. In 1970, the uncertainties regarding Pakistan became acute and when the repression in East Bengal started in March 1971, there was little doubt that the brittle state structure of Pakistan had at last broken down. Yahya Khan’s refusal, with the connivance of Z. A. Bhutto, to transfer power to the Awami League which secured majority in the elections to the National Assembly (The party led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman bagged 167 seats in a house of 313 members) brought about a serious political crisis. In utter disregard of the will of the people, expressed through the elections, Yahya Khan resorted to guns and unleashed a reign of terror. Military crackdown led to a refugee influx into the neighbouring states of India. The consequent socio-economic and political convulsions arising out of the brutal repression of the martial law regime, the denial of democratic rights and the refugee problem turned this purely internal affair of Pakistan into an unprecedented crisis of great magnitude for India. Jagjivan Ram, the Defence Minister of India, described it as a unique type of aggression.

The Soviet Union was also heartened by the process of consolidation of central authority in India. The grave uncertainties regarding the future of Indian political system, which were expressed in many quarters during the mid 1960s, were yielding place to a new confidence about the country's stability and progress. The Soviet Union took note of these developments and placed itself, cautiously and gradually, on the side of India, even at the risk of antagonising Pakistan. 4

The Soviet Union shared India's concern about the developments in East Pakistan. In a letter sent on 3 April 1971, President Podgorny urged President Yahya Khan to end the "bloodshed" and "repression" and to arrive at a political settlement with M. Rahman and other politicians who have received such convincing support by the overwhelming majority of the people of East Pakistan at the recent General Elections. 5 In the joint statement issued at the end of External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh's visit to Moscow in June, Pakistan Government was asked to take "immediate measures" to end "the continued


flood of refugees into India".6 India had appealed to several world leaders to bring about a political settlement in Bangladesh so that the refugees might go back to their homes.7 Though there was widespread sympathy for the Bangladesh people in the West, there was no concrete response from the political leaderships. Only the Soviet Union responded in a positive way. It was also the first clear demonstration of a shift in Soviet policy towards South Asia.

Talks were now held for putting Indo-Soviet relations on a firmer basis of a treaty. Indira Gandhi had taken the decision that, for safeguarding India's security and peace in the sub-continent, it was desirable to forge still closer ties with the Soviet Union. Indian Prime Minister's Special Emissary, D. P. Dhar was sent to Moscow to finalise the projected treaty and to invite the Soviet Foreign Minister to India. Gromyko arrived in New Delhi on 8 August 1971. He announced the purpose of his visit as prompting "the cause of further developing and deepening the friendly co-operation between India and the Soviet Union, which would end in "the consolidation of

7. The Government of India sent 13 ministerial delegations to visit 70 countries.
peace in India and throughout the world. On 9 August 1971, the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation was signed.

Gromyko said during the signing ceremony that it "is a document of great international importance contributing to the consolidation of peace in Asia and elsewhere". In the same speech, he said: "There are momentous events in relations between states which come as fruits of years prepared by the previous development of these relations. The Treaty is one such most important landmark for the Soviet Union and India." He also hoped that "in this noble work of defence of peace in Asia, India and the Soviet Union are acting hand in hand and we are convinced that this will continue in future." India’s External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh, presenting the text of the Treaty to the Parliament reciprocated the view that the Treaty provided "a stabilising factor in favour of peace,


security and development not only of our two countries, but the region as a whole . . . . In fact, we hope that this treaty will provide a pattern for similar treaties between India and other countries in this region. Such treaties between countries of this region would stabilise peace and strengthen their independence and sovereignty. It is . . . in essence a treaty of peace against war".  

The External Affairs Minister expressed his appreciation of the Soviet understanding of the difficulties created by the East Pakistan situation as disclosed in President Podgorny's letter of 2 April to the Pakistan President. Considering the seriousness of the situation, it was agreed to keep each other in continuous touch.  

The Implications of the Treaty

Besides the pressure on India, of the conflict in Bangladesh, another major factor prompting India to seek further consolidation of relations with the Soviet Union by entering into a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, was the dramatic initiation of a Sino-American dialogue in July 1971 and its perceived implications for  

11. Ibid., pp. 396-397.  

South Asia. Soviet Union and India knew very well that the United States was no longer opposed to diversification in Pakistan's foreign policy, which meant closer relationship with China and that Pakistan was privy to all the Sino-US machinations. When Henry Kissinger met him in July Chinese Premier Chou En-lai told him that in the event of an Indo-Pakistan war over East Bengal, Peking would militarily intervene on behalf of Islamabad. The

13. US policies in 1971 pushed the Soviet Union and India closer together. The Nixon administration continued supplying arms to Pakistan and placed the onus for the tensions in South Asia squarely on India. During his stop-over in New Delhi in July, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger demurred on questions of attack by China. On his return to Washington, he disabused New Delhi of expectations of assistance. Meanwhile, he had made his celebrated secret trip to Beijing. The US played its 'China Card' in the hope of winning the hand against the Soviet Union. China, similarly motivated, played its 'American card.' Both the US and China were indebted to Yahya Khan: both feared on increase in Soviet influence in South Asia. But Nixon's partiality for Pakistan, combined with his successful approach to China, exacerbated the sense of insecurity and isolation prevailing in India during the summer of 1971. For details, see Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy 1966-1982* (New Delhi, 1984), p. 143.

14. In his address to the nation on 25 February 1971, President Nixon commended Pakistan's foreign policy and pointed out that Pakistan had gradually moved from its position of "close associations" with the United States "to a complete triangular relationship balancing her contacts with China, USSR and ourselves". See *The Times of India*, 26 February 1971.

treaty was aimed at removing any Chinese illusions in this regard. The point was brought home to China that India would not be alone. That China fully grasped the implications of the treaty was evident from Chou En-lai's statement that he was "satisfied" with the assurances given by the Soviet and Indian leaders that the treaty was not directed against his country.\textsuperscript{16} It was clear that the treaty acted as a very effective check on Chinese behaviour during the Bangladesh crisis. The Chinese read that the Soviet Union guaranteed India's security in the South Asian crisis and a Chinese intervention on Pakistan's behalf would certainly invite Soviet retaliation. In this connection, a detailed analysis of the security aspects of the treaty would be appropriate.

The Security Dimensions of the Treaty

The first four articles of the Indo-Soviet Treaty and the preamble dealt with general matters of mutual and international importance. Article VI referred to economic co-operation and Article VII was related to the expansion of cultural ties between the two signatories. Articles XI-XII were related to procedural matters.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{The Statesman}, 7 October 1971.
It was stated in the Preamble that "both the countries are desirous of expanding and consolidating the existing relations of sincere friendship between them. They believe that further development of friendship and co-operation meets the basic national interests of both the states, as well as the interests of lasting peace in Asia and the world. They are determined to promote the consolidation of universal peace and security and to make constant efforts for the relaxation of international tensions and the final elimination of remnants of colonialism. They uphold their firm faith in the principles of peaceful coexistence and co-operation between the states with different political and social systems. They are convinced that in the world of today, international problems can only be solved by co-operation and not by conflict. They reaffirm their determination to abide by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. The introductory part and the first seven articles are in line with the Indo-Soviet relations that had developed over the years".17

Each party pledged to "refrain from interfering in the other's internal affairs" (Article 1). There was no clause resembling Article 2 of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty

of May 1971, which described Egypt as having "set itself the aim of reconstructing society along socialist lines".\textsuperscript{18} The next three articles highlighted mutual co-operation in economic, scientific and technological fields.\textsuperscript{19}

The security provisions of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty were much stronger than those of the Indo-Soviet Treaty. Article 7 of the former provided immediate and close military co-operation for 'removing the threat' to peace or re-establishing peace. Article 8 of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty specifically promised Soviet assistance in training Egyptian forces and supplying them with 'armaments and equipment . . . in order to strengthen their capacity'. The Indo-Soviet Treaty, by remaining silent on these points, did not prevent India from purchasing defence equipment from the Soviet Union or elsewhere.\textsuperscript{20}

Articles VIII, IX and X of the Indo-Soviet Treaty were related to security-cum-military matters. The two parties agreed not to "enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party". Each

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} See Appendix 2 for full text of the treaty.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Surjit Mansingh, n. 13, p. 145.
\end{itemize}
promised also to "abstain from aggression" against the other and "to prevent the use of its territory for the commission of any act which might inflict military damage on the other" (Article 8). These provisions were virtually repeated in Article 10.21

Article IX was the most important from the security point of view. It committed the parties to abstain from providing any assistance to any third party that engaged in armed conflict with the other. This cut off all possible Soviet arms aid to Pakistan. Further, Article IX stated:

In the event of either party being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate measures to ensure peace and security of their countries.[22]

"By confining themselves only to consultations, Soviet Union and India kept their options open. No sequence of obligatory actions was laid down: so there was little scope for bitterness or disappointment at their non-fulfilment. The provisions of these Articles had, however, only been tested in 1971 when they worked to India's advantage during the Bangladesh crisis". 23

21. Ibid.


There was no doubt in anybody's mind that it was a security treaty. The pith and substance of it was Article IX. It was clear from a reading of the Indo-Soviet Treaty that its main purpose was, especially in India's case, to get defence assistance from the Soviet Union when India needed it. How far the Soviet Union would go in this regard, was, of course, a million dollar question.\(^{24}\)

From India's point of view the help and support of the Soviet Union was very useful for a range of objectives of immediate interest to her. These interests mainly concerned the civil war in Bangladesh and the refugee problem. India's object was to strengthen her and to tell Communist China to keep herself hands off the Indian subcontinent. The Indo-Soviet Treaty met these limited objectives.

Soviet objectives were wider than those of India. Soviet Union was a global power. Her relations with China were far from cordial. So long as China and the US were hostile to each other, she could feel reasonably safe.

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24. Swaran Singh told the Lok Sabha on the day the treaty was signed, that the treaty should act as a deterrent to any powers that might have aggressive designs on our territorial integrity and sovereignty". Quoted by Surjit Mansingh, n. 13, p. 144.
But the prospects of a Sino-US rapprochement compelled her to have a new look at the Asian situation. The treaty with India, from the security angle, could be viewed as a Soviet counteraction.\textsuperscript{25}

Reactions to the Treaty

No other event in the post-independence period in India was hailed with such great enthusiasm by the Indian people as the signing of the Treaty with the Soviet Union. There was an almost audible sigh of relief when the news was announced in Parliament. For one brief moment, the opposition in Parliament forgot that it was its business to oppose. The Prime Minister was praised for her sense of timing even by the opposition parties.\textsuperscript{26} In the Lok

\textsuperscript{25} Faced with the possibility of parallel Chinese and US moves to curb Soviet influence in the world, Soviet Union could not but seek new friends and allies to protect her interests. Naturally she found India as most useful and reliable. In trying to improve their relations, two limited adversaries like China and the US had not only to discover a common threat but also to devise areas of agreement to sustain a fairly high level of relationship. To the extent that US interest in South Asia was waning, its capacity to treat it as the area where Chinese aspirations could be encouraged also increased. And Pakistan, in the hour of crisis, became the obvious area of agreement between the two powers. Thus, whatever might have been Soviet and Indian intentions, when the idea of treaty originated, the immediate context in which it was signed was that of the convergence of interests in regard to a number of specific issues and problems facing them.

\textsuperscript{26} Surjit Mansingh, n. 13, p. 143.
Sabha, Atal Behari Vajpayee, a sworn critic of Indira Gandhi's foreign policy, welcomed the Indo-Soviet Treaty with a Hindi colloquialism *Islamabad Ke gulam par Nai Dilli Ki Begum hai* (The trick has been won by New Delhi's queen over Islamabad's jack).²⁷

Indira Gandhi strongly repudiated the charge that the treaty represented a reversal of India's policy of nonalignment. She claimed that the treaty was 'an important step' and that there was no shift in India's policy towards the superpowers.²⁸ The Communist Party of India and the Praja Socialist Party were also enthusiastic in their support to the treaty.²⁹ Jayaprakash Narayan congratulated the Prime Minister and her Government on signing the treaty and considered it as a good act of statesmanship.³⁰


²⁹. The CPI National Council resolution said that the growing rapprochement between the US and China, vividly expressed in Nixon's proposed visit to Peking presaging on opportunistic relationship of great power politics at the cost of weaker nations, has caused great concern not only to India but to a number of countries in Asia and Africa. This gives added significance and urgency to the treaty. The Government of India has taken a bold and welcome step. See, N. M. Ghatate, n. 27, pp. 38-40.

Almost all the political parties, except of course, the Swatantra Party, welcomed the treaty. Piloo Mody, the irrepressible Swatantra leader, 'recalled' that the Soviet Union was 'pressurising' India from 1969 onwards for a treaty like this and this Soviet anxiety stemmed from her own isolation as a result of the Washington-Beijing axis. Mody brought to light the 'fate' of countries like Hungary, Czechoslovakia, United Arab Republic (UAR), etc., having concluded 'identical' treaties with the Soviet Union. He saw the treaty as more beneficial to the Soviet Union which wanted to end its isolation in Asia and was in need of bases and refuelling places in the Indian Ocean.\(^31\)

Some leaders and political parties, preferred a cautious approach. To K. P. S. Menon's question that "if India could count on Soviet support in any case, what harm was there in formalising that support,\(^32\)\) Samar Guha, the veteran socialist MP had this to say: "I am all for friendship with the Soviet Union, but not for codifying this friendship".\(^33\) The Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) while welcoming the treaty, expressed the 'firm' opinion that in order to

\(^{31}\) The Hindu, 10 August 1971.


\(^{33}\) Quoted by N. M. Ghatate, n. 27, p. 53.
consolidate the gains of the treaty, it was urgently necessary to take all required steps to improve relations with the People's Republic of China. So it was clear that the CPM did not want it to be directed against China. The party also stressed the need for internal reforms in tune with the alliance with a socialist power.

With the initial euphoria over, the political parties, especially of the right, unleashed scathing attacks on the treaty. Piloo Mody told the Parliament that, from the treaty, India could expect "many dangers" and "no benefits". Vajpayee clarified his earlier support of the treaty on the ground that his party had been more anxious to judge the treaty "by its working than its wording". The party would have been pleased, he said if the treaty had ended Soviet 'equidistance' between India and Pakistan, it "allowed India to acquire its rightful place as an important 'power nucleus' in South East Asia, and helped establish an independent Bangladesh, to cut Pakistan down to size none of which it immediately did".

34. Ibid., pp. 31-35.
36. Vajpayee, in A. P. Jain, *Shadow of the Bear: Indo-Soviet Treaty* (New Delhi, 1971), pp. 157-158. By the end of the year, all Vajpayee wanted had come to pass which may have helped the Jan Sangh leader to change his mind about the treaty.
The Indian and foreign press also engaged in a penetrating analysis of the implications of the treaty. 

The Hindustan Times observed:

We would welcome a strengthening of the close and cordial economic and political ties that subsist between the two countries. But we do regard India as a potentially great power and certainly a major factor in Asia which is neither so weak nor even so lonely as to accept any arrangement that might reduce it to the status of being anything less than equal in its relations with any other country. The Soviet Union needs India as much as India needs the Soviet Union. There is also no reason to suppose that this country cannot secure an honourable resolution of its differences with China or place its relations with US on a more rational and mature footing. These objectives must still be pursued so that India's foreign and domestic policies remain completely independent and are guided by the national interest and not overshadowed by the global interests of howsoever friendly a super power.[37]

The Statesman was strongly critical of the treaty. It was of the view that there was no compelling reason for New Delhi to accept commitments that could have far reaching consequences in the future. It was pointed out that the Soviet veto in the Security Council and Soviet aid in a crisis could surely have been ensured without the cost of so comprehensive a treaty.38

The Motherland did not consider it as a treaty between a Big Power and a client state. According to the paper the treaty was also in keeping with India's

37. The Hindustan Times, 10 August 1971.
policy of non-alignment, because, the Soviet Union has specifically affirmed that it respects this policy which "constitutes an important factor in the maintenance of international peace and security".\footnote{The Motherland, 11 August 1971.} \footnote{The New York Times, 12 August 1971.} \footnote{The Christian Science Monitor, 11 August 1971.} \footnote{The Washington Post, 12 August 1971.}

The New York Times described the treaty as a "Major Foreign Policy Coup". It said: "The Soviet-Indian friendship accord signed in New Delhi yesterday strengthens the Soviet influence in the second most populous nation in Asia and the world at the expense of the US".\footnote{The New York Times, 12 August 1971.}

The Christian Science Monitor saw the treaty as marking a major turn in Soviet diplomacy on the sub-continent since its successful mediation of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War at Tashkent when the Soviet Union had sought to maintain neutrality in its dealings with New Delhi and Islamabad.\footnote{The Christian Science Monitor, 11 August 1971.}

The Washington Post warned that, in the context of the new polarisation of forces in Asia as a result of the Indo-Soviet Treaty, the US attempt to move toward coexistence with China could produce unintended consequences.\footnote{The Washington Post, 12 August 1971.}
The Treaty and Non-Alignment

Much of the public criticism of the Indo-Soviet Treaty had been concerned with the problem of its consistency with nonalignment. Much confusion was made in public minds by this controversy. According to a well-known political analyst, this was an irrelevant controversy. It was observed that we have attributed to nonalignment qualities that it did not possess and committed the mistake of making it a measure of the country's independence. We have also ignored the very important changes that Nehru himself had often made in his policies to adapt them to changing conditions.43

The policy of non-alignment was evolved at a time when the world was getting divided into two powerful military blocs each headed by a super power, with the dangerous possibility that they might collide and land the world again into a war. That situation was no longer there. "Basically", observed K.P.S. Menon, "non-alignment means the will and the determination of a nation to ask, whenever it is confronted with a major international problem the question not who is right, but what is right".44

44. See K. P. S. Menon, n. 32, p. 52.
As a matter of fact, the Indo-Soviet Treaty was a most 'interpretible' document.\textsuperscript{45} It could be given different interpretations even by contracting parties. There was, however, great relief in India owing to the general feeling that the treaty guaranteed India's security. It was felt that India had at last found a reliable and powerful friend. It was, as if one had been walking alone through a dark forest infested with snakes and robbers and suddenly emerged into a sunlit glade.\textsuperscript{46}

In essence, the treaty provided India with a Soviet umbrella against China for as long as India chose to stay out of the nuclear club. There was sufficient guarantee of security in Articles 8 and 9. The message to China was clear enough.\textsuperscript{47}

Subsequent Indian actions proved that the Soviet security guarantee had not considerably curtailed India's freedom of action. Various foreign policy decisions of the Government of India in the post-treaty period spoke eloquently of its independent course.\textsuperscript{48} India never gave

\begin{itemize}
\item[45.] See Surjit Mansingh, n. 13, p. 144.
\item[46.] See K. P. S. Menon, n. 32, p. 57.
\end{itemize}
the Soviet Union base facilities, as alleged by the critics of the treaty. Much against Soviet wishes, India had refused to sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. The Indo-Soviet Treaty also did not stand in the way of India’s nuclear programme. The first acid test, however, of the security guarantees of the treaty was the Bangladesh crisis and the India-Pakistan war of December 1971.