

BREZHNEV CAME, HE SAW, BUT DID HE CONQUER ?

by

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Now that the euphoria in New Delhi of Mr. Brezhnev's visit has subsided and the dust is beginning to settle, people are asking what the net upshot of Mr. Brezhnev's visit to India has been.

While it is too early to judge the long-term effects of the visit, the rather lukewarm popular response to the officially organised demonstrations of welcomes gives rise to doubts about the success of the Soviet objective. Though Mr. Brezhnev arrived accompanied by three hundred Soviet officials and newsmen, observers report that there was nothing to greet him even remotely akin to the almost frenzied greetings that huge crowds gave to President Eisenhower in Delhi in 1958 or the affectionate popular welcome given in 1961 to Queen Elizabeth, the Head of the Commonwealth, or even to Nikita Khrushchev when he visited India in 1955. It would not, however, be wise to give too much weight to the lukewarm character of the popular response in Delhi because the Government controlled TV and Radio gave an entirely different picture of the visit and the Indian press, on its part, discreetly did nothing to correct it.

In order to assess the overall picture, it is worthwhile first to cast a glance backwards to the backdrop to the Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 9, 1971.

Such a long term view is called for by the fact that the authors of the Treaty have, contrary to popular impressions, publicly declared that the Treaty had nothing to do with the developments at that time in East Bengal, now known as Bangla Desh. Thus, T.N. Kaul, then India's Foreign Secretary and now Ambassador in Washington, on the very day of the signing the Treaty, said: "We have been working for this Treaty for over two years. It has nothing to do with the developments in East Bengal or the attitude of the United States."

So too, speaking in the Indian Parliament a day later on 10th August, Mr. Swaran Singh, the Minister of External Affairs, told the Lok Sabha: "This Treaty has nothing to do with Dr. Kissinger's visit to Peking, but the timing of it has been such that it was very well received by practically all sections of the people". This undoubtedly was a reference to the general expectation that the Treaty was primarily linked with the popular slogan of the liberation of Bangla Desh. There is no reason to doubt the basic honesty of these two statements which appear to reflect reality.

That reality is that work on the project had been proceeding from some time in the middle of 1969. This would mean that the Soviet project was an effort to implement the Brezhnev Plan for collective security in Asia, which was publicised around that time in June 1969.

Pravda, on its part, corroborated all this on November 25, 1973, on the eve of Mr. Brezhnev's visit to Delhi, when it wrote: "This Treaty not only recorded the achieved level of our relations but put them on a long term basis."

It is thus correct to say that the Indo-Soviet Treaty is nothing but a legitimisation of a liaison that had existed for several years and which could now be publicly admitted.

The signing of the Treaty marks the end of the era of India's non-alignment and in that sense it represents a break with the past. Notwithstanding the fact that Prime Minister Nehru's non-alignment had always been a loaded one, with a double standard of morality - a very strict and censorious one for the US and the West and a lax and easy one for the Soviet regime - the giving of juridical recognition even to an existing relationship marks a point of no return.

The prestigious Buddeutsche Zeitung was not wrong when it wrote: "More than ever before India's resolves, moves and non-moves will reflect those of the Soviet Union. It will come as a sad blow to many that this is what has come of India's proved policy of non-alignment."

The question has been asked: Is there an Indo-Soviet alliance? In order to be able to answer this question, it becomes necessary to examine the terms of the treaty.

It is true that Article IV of the Treaty gives expression on the view that India on the one side respects the peace-loving policy of the USSR and, as part of the deal, records that the USSR "respects India's policy of non-alignment."

This verbal reciprocity is, however, more apparent than real since the Soviet understanding of non-alignment has always been quite different from what is understood by it elsewhere. According to a Soviet document:

" The Soviet Union and socialist countries support the non-alignment policy of the developing countries. But the success of this policy depends on the unity of thought and action of the developing countries and the socialist countries in international affairs in the anti-imperialist struggle.

" Washington's call to non-aligned countries to keep at an equal distance from military-political blocs, from Moscow and Washington, fit in with the theory of 'pure non-alignment'. But this is part of Washington's strategy to detach the non-aligned world from their principal ally - the socialist countries. Non-alignment can rest only on anti-imperialist foundations, because objectively the interests of the third world as a whole and of separate developing states basically run counter to the policy of the imperialist powers. "

More recently, as reported in the Swiss paper Neue Zurcher Zeitung on November 23, 1973, the official ~~central~~ organ of the Communist Party in Moscow, Problems of Peace and Socialism, commented critically on the non-aligned conference in Algiers. They were accused among other things of ignoring the "peace offensive of the communist countries." The article went on to say that the non-aligned countries ought to redefine their role and take up a clear position in the conflict between the world's two social systems: capitalism and communism. The Soviet writer ended with an example: Castro's Cuba !

It is Articles IX and X that clinch the argument in regard to the nature of the Treaty. Article IX which, at a first glance, might be construed to be a mere commitment to mutual consultation, turns out to involve a commitment of a mere far-reaching nature. Commencing with an agreement by both states to abstain from providing any assistance to any third party that engages in armed conflict with the other Party, the Article then goes on to provide that, "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 a threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and security of their countries."

The operative words here are "in order to remove such threats and to take appropriate and effective measures." It is thus made clear that the consultations are not to be of a platonic nature, as in the case of the Franko-Soviet Protocol of October 13, 1970, but will be entered into for the specific purpose of removing the threat that might be posed to one or other party from a third quarter. This is, for all practical purposes, a commitment to go to the aid of the Party attacked and clearly savours of a defensive military alliance.

The unequal nature of this commitment is also ominous. While the Soviet commitment will be limited to the Sub-Continent, the Indian Commitment is global, since the USSR could claim to be threatened by the USA or Communist China or indeed even by Yugoslavia, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, as has actually been alleged in the past ! In all such cases, India would have to join with its Soviet ally "to remove such a threat" and the Soviets would call on India to take "appropriate effective measures" to this end.

Article X is equally relevant. It starts with a declaration that neither side shall "enter into any obligation, secret or public" with one or more states which is incompatible with this Treaty." It then goes on to commit both parties to a declaration that "no obligation exists, nor shall any obligation be entered into, between itself and any other State or States, which might cause military damage to the other party."

The wording of this article is significant. Similar articles in the Warsaw Pact and the Treaty entered by the USSR with Czechoslovakia preclude the parties from concluding "any agreement whose purposes are incompatible with the provisions of this Treaty." The Soviet-Hungarian Treaty of September 7, 1959, used the word "engagement". The use of the word "obligation" in the case of the Indo-Soviet Treaty involves a constraint which is more far-reaching and wider than an engagement, agreement or treaty, and it thus ties the hands of India more rigidly in this particular context than those of the participants to the other Treaties with the Soviet Union, including those entered into by the captive countries of Eastern Europe. ~~It is not difficult to visualise a Soviet allegation that might develop that India's relations with the United States, Communist China or any other nation involve an "obligation" incompatible with India's commitment to the USSR.~~

It is thus clear from a reading of the terms of the Indo-Soviet Treaty that it is a treaty of alliance and that, by entering into it, the Government of India accepted the position of a Soviet ally.

An alliance between two countries is of course a perfectly legitimate and honourable development. It is morally neutral and it can be a factor either for good or for ill. It can either be in a particular country's interest or it may be inimical to that country's interest. The question arises as to whether the Indo-Soviet Treaty and alliance of 1971 are good for India. There are several criteria on the basis of which this could be answered.

The first of these criteria is the character and nature of the two contracting governments. Is the ally that India has acquired one that believes in genuine co-existence and equality between States? Or does it have extra-territorial ambitions, a desire to dominate the world ideologically, and a Fifth Column operating in other countries? That apart, is it a regime that has respected other treaties and agreements and alliances made earlier by it?

critical code word
It is true that the Soviet Government talks incessantly of peaceful co-existence but, when the record is examined, it appears that what the Kremlin means by peaceful co-existence is something entirely different from what the rest of the world understands and that it is in fact only a formula for continuing the cold war and attempting world domination by other means.

Thus, PRAVDA, in a recent editorial on August 22, 1973, wrote:

"Peaceful co-existence does not at all mean an end to the struggle between the two world social systems. The struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, between world socialism and imperialism will go on until the final and complete victory of communism on world scale.... While consistently upholding the principles of peaceful co-existence, of states with the different social systems, the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist community vigorously rebuff any attempts at interference in their internal affairs."

Nikita Khrushchev had, in his time, anticipated such a formulation when in 1961 he said: "The policy of peaceful co-existence.... is a form of intense economic, political and ideological struggle of the proletariat against the aggressive forces of imperialism."

The World Marxist Review of Moscow had in 1965 written:

" The policy of peaceful co-existence.....has never been a policy based on the acceptance of the status quo in world relations. It has been and it remains a weapon of struggle - a struggle in which both hands are used - with one hand, the aggressive forces of world imperialism are held back; with the other, full support is given to the forces fighting for national independence, and to the people moving towards a socialist goal. "

Mr. G. Arbatov, Director of the Soviet Institute for American Studies, only continued this consistent line of thought when, in March 1973, he observed:

" Relations with the capitalist nations will remain the relations of struggle, however successful normalisation and detente may be.....The essential question is what form that struggle will take. "

Sir William Hayter, the former British Ambassador in Moscow, puts it in his own way when he says:

" To us peaceful co-existence suggests the lion laying down with the lamb (or the bear). To the Russians, it means 'intensification of the struggle of the working class, of all the Communist Parties, for the triumph of socialist ideas.' Peaceful co-existence, in fact, is the Russian for Cold War. "

It is tragic that the world had to be reminded of these facts by an eminent and valiant Russian intellectual, Dr. Andrei Sakharov. According to the text of his Statement published by the Times (London) on September 5, 1973, he said:

" Detente without democratisation, a rapprochement when the West in fact accepts our rules of the game in this process of rapprochement, such a rapprochement would be very dangerous in that respect, and would not solve any of the world's problems, and would mean simply a capitulation to our real or exaggerated strength. It would mean an attempt to trade, to get from us gas and oil, neglecting all other aspects of the problem. I think it is very dangerous. By liberating ourselves from problems we can't solve ourselves, we could concentrate on accumulating strength, and as a result, the whole world would be disarmed and facing our uncontrollable bureaucratic apparatus. I think that detente without any qualifications, accepting our rules of the game, would be very bad. "

The record of the Soviet Government in the way of observing its obligations to its allies shows that the majority of solemn pledges given by the Kremlin over the last forty years have been broken and that the Soviet record of perfidy is perhaps unsurpassed in civilised history.

Lenin had laid down the doctrinal basis of this when he said: "Promises are like pie-crust made to be broken. It would be mad and criminal to tie our hands by entering into an agreement of any permanence with anybody." Stalin had added: "Words have no relation to actions. Otherwise, what kind of diplomacy is it? Words are one thing, actions are another."

The facts are that the Yalta Agreement, the Potsdam Agreement and the Atlantic Charter signed by the Big Powers at the end of the Second World War were shamelessly broken by Stalin who destroyed, in violation of these treaties, the independence of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Rumania.

There are also many specific instances of violations of this particular kind of Treaty by the Soviet Government. One can mention the cases of Poland, Finland, the Baltic States, the Republic of China, Iran, and of course Czechoslovakia, which was betrayed twice by its so-called allies, once in 1948 and again in 1968.

Let us now turn to the character of the present Government in New Delhi. It is led by a Prime Minister who saw nothing wrong in attending, in October 1967, the 50th Anniversary celebrations by world communist parties of the Communist Revolution in Russia. As it happens, apart from President Kekkonen of Finland who, for geographical reasons felt compelled to do so, not a single head of another democratic country or government in the world attended the celebrations. The Government led by the Prime Minister successfully prevented the Indian Parliament from condemning the brutal Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Whether it is in regard to Vietnam, West Asia, Chile or Guinea Bissau, the Indian Government's position has faithfully echoed the Soviet line.

Among the members of the Indian Cabinet are former card-holding members of the Communist Party of India whose resignations are known to have been purely "tactical." One of these, who had, in a secret document circulated in communist circles, preached the desirability of communists leaving their Party and infiltrating into the Congress and who became a Cabinet Minister, died recently in an air crash. But there are still others in the Government and at least three or four others of this category could be identified. One of them is the General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee who recently led a two hundred and eighty men delegation, including fifty Members of Parliament, from India to Moscow to participate in the World Congress of Peace Forces in October 1973.

The present Government in Delhi is one that has permitted massive infiltration of the civil service, of the press and of national life in general. Mr. Peter Sager's excellent research, embodied in his book Moscow's Hand in India, published by the Swiss Eastern Institute in Berne in 1966, revealed a most alarming picture of the extent that this infiltration had reached.

It is necessary to mention this because an analysis of the character of those who have entered into an alliance with the Soviet Union is highly relevant in analysing the pros and cons of such an alliance.

When President Sadat of the UAR signed his Treaty with President Podgarny, it had a particular character because President Sadat had already locked up Sabry and several others for alleged pro-Soviet and treasonable activities.

Had Sabry and not Sadat signed the same Treaty, would it not have had an entirely different connotation? The crucial point here is that the Indo-Soviet Treaty was signed by the Sabrys of India and not by the Sadats, and its motives and implications for the future security of India cannot therefore but be suspect.

Another criterion for judging the nature of an alliance could be the relative balance of forces and strength between the two parties. Is it an alliance between two more or less equally strong countries? Does it partake of the nature of an alliance between equals? Or is it an alliance between two extremely unequal parties, one of which inevitably dominates the other by reason of its military and economic superiority? The answer to this is fairly obvious, and the economic agreements and relationship between the two governments which were recently made more firm and far-reaching during Mr. Leonid Brezhnev's visit to India show the measure of the inequality. The country's dependence on the USSR for military supplies is, of course, well known.

Another test of the desirability or otherwise of the alliance would be the effect it has had on India's relations with other countries.

It must sadly be conceded that this Alliance has isolated India in the councils of the world. Japan has, as always, continued to be cool and aloof. The South East Asian countries, who had looked to India for leadership for the last two decades, appear to have lost confidence in India's foreign policies. The US Government also appear to have lost interest in the affairs of the sub-continent which they do not consider of primary concern to their national interests and which is now rated low down in the list of American priorities.

Perhaps the biggest single hurdle raised by the Treaty is against the possibility of the normalisation of relations between India and Communist China. As is well known, the Chinese Communists have throughout the past two years held the view that not only does the Treaty reduce India to satellite status vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, but that the main thrust of the Treaty is to seek to isolate and encircle Communist China in the Soviet interest.

As a result, it was not long after the Treaty was entered into in 1971 that second thoughts began to come to the surface in Delhi, not only in the press but also, to some extent, within official circles. It was felt that the Treaty, alongside of India's complete dependence for armaments on the Soviet Union, had made India over-dependent on the Soviet Union and therefore vulnerable. Some of those who had supported the signing of the Treaty when announced began to urge that India should end a state of affairs where she appeared to have cut herself off from the rest of the world and that an effort should be made to edge away a little from the Soviets and balance a little better between the USSR, the USA, Communist China and other countries like Japan, West Germany and the countries of South East Asia.

In fairness to the Indian Government, it must be conceded that efforts were made more than once during the past two years to move towards a restoration of normal relations with Communist China. Nevertheless, these moves did not evoke any response from the Chinese Communists who evidently had made up their minds that the Treaty in itself was a threat to them. Perhaps the way in which Mr. Swaran Singh, the Minister for External Affairs, has been repeatedly saying that "India's friendship with China cannot be at the cost of Indo-Soviet friendship" which he described as "basic in our external policy attitude," has not exactly encouraged the Chinese Communists.

It is clear that unless New Delhi makes a basic change in its attitude, it might be difficult for it to restore a better balance with the various elements in the multipolar world that has evolved.

It was against this background that Brezhnev arrived in India in November 1973. The effusive welcome given by official New Delhi to Brezhnev in November 1973 gives every indication that Delhi intends to deepen the commitments of the Indo-Soviet alliance. On the other hand, the joint

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declaration emerging from the discussions omitted any reference to the Brezhnev Plan and, as far as one can make out, the Government of India has not yet overtly committed itself to participate in the promotion of the Brezhnev Plan to which, however, the Soviet leader made pointed reference in his speech to Members of Parliament in New Delhi. The India Government's spokesman has also announced in Parliament that no concessions have been made in the way of providing a base for Soviet naval forces in Indian ports.

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The main thrust of the Delhi Agreements appears to be in the field of economic relations where there had already been a gross distortion in the pattern of India's foreign trade as a result of governmental pressure to force trade into channels that led to what were called "the rupee payment countries," the theory being that, while others demanded payment in dollars, marks, yen and pounds sterling, the Russians sold to India against the rupee. This myth was blown sky high at the time of the devaluation of the rupee in 1966 when the Soviet and Yugoslav Governments made it clear ~~that~~ that the rupee they had in mind was not the Indian rupee at its depreciated value but the gold content of the rupee. This meant that they too had been making us pay in hard currency. On the eve of the Brezhnev visit, the loan repayments by India far exceeded fresh aid receipts from the USSR.

So too, the scandal of the "switch trade", by which the Soviets and its Eastern European satellites buy cheap from India and sell at a high profit to hard currency countries, has become well-known. By and large, it is alleged that the Soviet Union sell commodities to developing countries at price 15% to 20% higher than world prices and make their purchases from them at 15% to 20% lower than world prices. Evidence for these propositions is to be found in books like The Net Cost of Soviet Foreign Aid by J.R. Carter, J. Berliner's Soviet Economic Aid, Marshall I. Goldman's Soviet Foreign Aid, Vassil Vassilev's Policy in the Soviet Bloc on Aid to Developing Countries (OECD Developing Centre Studies), and Kurt Muller's The Soviet Bloc and the Developing Countries.

The Agreements signed in New Delhi during Mr. Brezhnev's visit to India threaten to aggravate the dominating position of the Soviet Union in India's international trade pattern. But what is even more objectionable is the agreement to dovetail the Indian Five-Year Plans into the pattern of the Soviet Five-Year Plans. While these developments are consistent with the general Soviet policy of economic relations, which is based on the motive of encouraging countries in the Third World to adopt "the non-capitalist path of development," the wisdom of thus tying India to the chariot-wheels of the USSR in return for the promise to supply certain scarce commodities like petrol, newsprint, power generating machinery, steel and edible oil may well be doubted.

The Soviets will naturally expect a quid pro quo. Soviet sources say as much. Noting that relations among 'the principal revolutionary trends of our day implies reciprocal support,' one writer reminds us that 'proletarian internationalism is not a one-way street.....' In return for 'all-round Soviet support,' the 'national liberation movement....must

also stand up in defence of the socialist countries.' Ulyanovsky ('The "Third World" - Problems of Socialist Orientation') puts the matter rather more baldly when he asserts that the extension of assistance 'makes definite demands' on the 'foreign policy guidelines and concepts' of the developing states; it 'demands convergence with socialist countries.'

There is no indication that the Indian Red Riding Hood at any stage reacted to the advances of the visitor to Delhi last November by saying, as well she might have: "Grandma, what big teeth you have!" On the contrary, all the talk about self-dependence and the oft-repeated desire to end foreign aid were happily forgotten during the euphoria of the visit.

The laws of economics have a habit of prevailing over political manipulations and distortions, and it will be some years before it is clear whether the effort to integrate the Indian economy with that of the USSR and its East European satellites has succeeded or failed. In any event, the total assistance assured is scanty when compared to the massive economic aid given by the USA during the past two decades which has yielded both countries such poor dividends.

Among the minor gains by the Soviet Communist leader should be noted the fact that India, in breach of protocol, accorded to the leader of the Soviet Communist Party, who occupies no position in the Soviet Government, honours reserved for the Head of the State and that, by signing the Agreements with the Soviet Communist Party leader, the Indian Government willingly accepted the fact that the Soviet Government is nothing but an instrument in the hands of the totalitarian Communist Party.

It is clear that the Indo-Soviet alliance aggravates the already existing threats of infiltration and disruption to the free way of life of the Indian people. After the Brezhnev visit, New Age, the organ of the Communist Party of India, triumphantly carried in its issue of December 9 the banner headline: "New Possibilities Opened Up for Advance of Left and Democratic Forces." It had no hesitation in identifying the source of the inspiration: "The great merit of the Brezhnev visit is that it has created favourable conditions for building up such broadest democratic unity based on mass struggles and mass movements, for realising the benefits that should accrue from the visit and the agreements. Now the task is to move the masses into action to realise the new possibilities that have opened up."

Perhaps the most balanced assessment of the over-all picture of the alliance as it emerges after the Brezhnev visit is that of one of India's most competent commentators, Mr. A.G. Noorani. "Make no mistake about it," he wrote, "the Russians have scored gains else their spokesman Zamyatin would not have talked of 'a qualitatively new and positive advancement of relations between India and the Soviet Union'....While India turned down some Soviet proposals which would have cut off her options with other powers, it has, nonetheless, moved significantly closer to Russia to a point which bodes us no good."

1. Yes. In my view, our Constitution -- in the drafting of which I had a small hand as a member of the Constituent Assembly -- is altogether adequate for all legitimate purposes. It provides for the necessary checks and balances and also for a system of limited government which alone permits of the social and economic advancement of the people.
2. Yes. I am in favour of more financial and economic power to the States. Thanks to the Soviet-style system of comprehensive and centralised planning which we have adopted, a great deal of the legitimate powers of the States have been misappropriated by the Centre. It is time it now disgorged them.
3. The quality and therefore the working of our Legislatures, both at the Centre and in the States, have been poor and have been deteriorating consistently since Independence. Having been a member of all Parliaments since 1945 to 1970, with the exception of that of 1952-1957 alone, I can say that the best in quality and performance was the Indian Legislative Assembly in which I functioned before Independence as opposition member from 1945 to 1947.

No constitutional change can improve the quality or performance of a legislature. This can only be done, as a British Statesman once put it, if we "educate our masters" -- the electorate.

4. Yes. Our political system badly requires proportional representation in elections. In the absence of such a system, we get the most ludicrous results where, as at present, with a popular vote of 43%, the ruling party has more than two-thirds of the seats in the Lok Sabha and has misused this bogus majority to tinker with the Constitution and the Fundamental Rights of the citizen.

Never since Independence has any Government in Delhi obtained a majority of the votes cast and yet we have always had, except during the parliament of 1967-1970, a gross distortion of the popular will with the government enjoying a fictitious majority which has prevented the emergence of a two party system.

As it happens, I made a move in the relevant Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India to provide for

proportional representation in parliamentary and State legislature elections which was defeated by the brute majority of the Congress Party, to which I then belonged, despite my move being strongly supported by all minorities including the Muslims, Harijans, Christians and Sikhs.

5. There is no need for our Constitution to be changed. Experience has shown that it is a very fine instrument, provided our young democracy knows how to use it.

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