

Indo-Soviet relations in the Nehru years: the view from New Delhi, by Surjit Mansingh

On 7 September 1946, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, set out the template of independent India's foreign policy in his broadcast to the nation as head of a new interim government anticipating the transfer of power. [1] Nehru's speech, entitled "Free India's Role in World Affairs", was made before the British government had decided to partition India and create Pakistan, before India's formal independence on 15 August 1947, and before the emerging rivalry between the two main victors of the Second World War had hardened into the Cold War. Because Nehru and successive prime ministers of India believed that the attitudes and objectives outlined in this broadcast grew naturally from India's geo-strategic location, its culture, history, and national movement, they continued to assert them despite changing international circumstances and skepticism in world capitals such as Washington and Moscow, which were grounded in realist considerations. Some of these initial statements on Indian foreign policy, which were very different from those of the former British government of India, and which were repeated and amplified by Nehru himself and Indian envoys over the years, require quotation here.

India's policy of nonalignment throughout the Cold War was presaged thus: "We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale." India's anti-colonial activism in the United Nations was predicted: "We are particularly interested in the emancipation of colonial and dependent countries and peoples and in the recognition in theory and practice of equal opportunities for all peoples. We repudiate utterly [...] racialism, wheresoever and in whatever form it may be practiced." India's attempts to establish good relations with both superpowers were heralded by the following statement: "We send our greetings to the people of the United States of America to whom destiny has given a major role in international affairs. We trust that this tremendous responsibility will be utilized for the furtherance of peace and human freedom everywhere. To that other great nation of the modern world, the Soviet Union, which also carries a vast responsibility for shaping world events, we send greetings. They are our neighbors in Asia and inevitably we shall have to undertake many common tasks and have much to do with each other."

New Delhi had the difficult task of persuading its own functionaries, as well as foreign governments, of its independence in international affairs while at the same time coping with the immense human costs and administrative burdens caused by Partition. Because of widespread skepticism, Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon (the Civil Service chief of the Ministry of External Affairs headed by Nehru) started his address to officers at the Defense Services Staff College in mid-1949 by asking: "Has India a foreign policy at all? If so, what is it?" [2] He quoted US and Soviet officials as both being puzzled by India's equation of the two power blocs and its tendency to side with the Anglo-Americans on various issues, and pointed out that popular opinion about India, as reflected in the media of the respective superpowers, was hostile or unenthusiastic.

Menon went on to deal with three issues that had profound effects on the evolution of India's foreign relations: Kashmir, the UN, and Korea. Recently opened British archives

reveal Britain's motives in creating Pakistan as a bastion of Western security and the colossal effort it made in 1948–9 to persuade the US and other members of the UN to support Pakistan's case on and invasion of Kashmir by ignoring the legal accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to India. [3] At the time, as Menon commented in his speech, "it was an eye opener to us." [4] Indian mistrust of Anglo-American pronouncements on Kashmir persists to the present day, more than 60 years later. Menon explained the unsatisfactory deliberations of the UN Security Council as an example of regarding a matter "not according to its intrinsic merits, but in its relation to power politics", from which point of view India had no standing. The exceptions were China, which tried to appreciate the Indian case, and "taciturn Russia, who did not utter one word throughout the Kashmir dispute" (Moscow's silence ended in 1952, when it became very critical of Anglo-American "interference" in Kashmir and then openly supportive of India's case).

Menon explained how the original conception of the UN as establishing a world order encompassing rival ideologies had suffered from Washington's effort to create an anti-Soviet alliance and Moscow's obsession with obtaining security through a widening belt of Communist control, resulting in a world divided into two blocs. "Between these two blocs," said Menon, "stands, alone, unfriended, melancholy, slow, India belonging to neither bloc and somewhat disliked by both." He explained why India could not join either bloc, articulating the theme of India's national interest lying in world peace, independence, and respect, which would be frequently reiterated. Furthermore, he cited India's acceptance of the chairmanship of the United Nations Commission on Korea as an example of a policy that was criticized as "neutral, passive, weak-kneed [...but] no more passive than non-violence" in Mahatma Gandhi's hands. Menon's speech on foreign policy was important not only because officers of the defense services needed to understand the policies they would be called upon to defend, but because K.P.S. Menon served as India's ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1961. During these eight years, Indo-Soviet relations first flowered and began to bear fruit as Soviet support for India's nonalignment grew.

Nehru's admiration for the self-transformation of the Soviet Union into a world power was qualified by his distaste for the coercive methods used for the purpose; [5] his attraction toward Socialism (as espoused by the Fabian Society) was matched by a repulsion from ideological Communism, especially as articulated then by the Communist Party of India (CPI), seen to be directed by Moscow. The "Zhdanov Doctrine" propounded at the 1947 meeting of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), and adopted by the CPI, divided the world into two hostile camps, espoused violent revolution, and excluded "bourgeois" nationalist movements – such as that led by Mahatma Gandhi in India – from the category of "national liberation" movements deserving of Soviet support. [6] Nevertheless, Nehru made overtures to the Soviet Union by appointing his sister, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, who had been an active participant in the drafting of the United Nations Charter, as India's first envoy to Moscow. Stalin ignored her, depicting India as a mere tool of the "Anglo-American imperialists". Stalin's views on India changed in the last few years of his life, perhaps in consideration of United Front policies, perhaps because of an initial impetus for the loosening of Soviet cultural barriers that came after his death, and probably because India effectively demonstrated its independence of the Anglo-American bloc in its mediatory diplomacy at the UN on various facets of the Korean War, including the contentious issue of prisoner-of-war repatriation. In 1950, acting on Moscow's instructions, the CPI began supporting Nehru's "progressive" foreign policy in parliament and abandoned its strategy of armed struggle, which had been unsuccessfully attempted in the Telengana and Tebhaga uprisings of the late 1940s. In 1951, an Indo-

Soviet Cultural Society was formed to facilitate exchanges of artists, dance troupes, and intellectuals. In January 1952, the Soviet delegate to the UN broke his silence on Kashmir in support of India's case. In April 1952, Stalin received Pandit's successor, Dr. Radhakrishnan, and in February 1953, just two weeks before his death, Stalin held a wide-ranging conversation with the new Indian ambassador, K.P.S. Menon.

1953 was a pivotal year, and the annual report of the Indian embassy in Moscow explains why. [7] A last spurt of Stalinist repression was followed by a "kind of springtime in the Kremlin" after Stalin's death, brought about by new policies and hopes of reduced international tensions after the war in Korea ended in July. Ambassador Menon mentioned his meeting with Stalin as a "memorable experience" and summed up his impressions of Stalin's "almost rustic simplicity, his spontaneous humor, his single-mindedness, his perspicacity, his vision of the world as divided into black and white – with a lonely grey, India, standing in between – his utter ruthlessness, and his cynical and thoroughly Marxist disregard of morals which he made no attempt to hide." [8] Nehru made a tribute to Stalin in parliament as a gratuitously friendly gesture towards Russia that was reciprocated a few months later by Prime Minister Georgy Malenkov's open praise of India's contributions to peace, and subsequently by a complete rewriting of the entry on Mohandas K. Gandhi in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. The embassy's annual report included analyses of the removal of secret police head Lavrenty Beria, new economic policies, riots in East Germany, and conflicting views between the Soviet Union and the Western powers on the future of Germany that doomed the four-power conference held on the subject. The report noted incremental improvements in Soviet references to India as well as changes in Soviet attitudes towards Pakistan, from "lukewarmness" to "antipathy", saying: "This was due to the proposed defense pact between Pakistan and the U.S.A. The Soviet Union knew that such a pact was directed as much against her as against India. A formal note of protest was sent to the Pakistan Government. The generally unfavorable reactions in Asian countries to this pact were noticed in the press. In particular, our Prime Minister's statements on this subject and, indeed, on many international problems were quoted prominently in the Soviet newspapers." [9] The report concluded with a detailed discussion of certain noticeable liberalizing tendencies in the arts, literature, and music. [10]

The first trade agreement between India and the Soviet Union was signed in December 1953, ushering in a process of economic cooperation between the two countries that was to become the pillar of friendly Indo-Soviet relations over almost four decades. The Soviet government was eager to establish economic relations with countries outside its own Communist bloc on a practical basis of mutual advantage rather than on grounds of ideological conformity. The Indian government also wished to diversify its commercial relationships beyond the British Commonwealth and obtain industrial assistance from diverse sources, but did not accept Soviet offers without serious consideration. A note of April 1954 prepared by the Indian embassy in Moscow argued in favor of developing economic relations with the Soviet Union on a wider scale for the following reasons: [11] First, the Soviet Union appreciated India's independent foreign policy and was anxious to obtain its goodwill in face of assertive US activity in Asia. Second, far from adversely affecting US economic assistance, "a little Soviet competition will only induce the U.S.A. to be less grudging in its proffers of technical and industrial assistance." Third, economic cooperation with the Soviet Union would pose no danger to India's internal security or democratic polity as the Soviet government was "now genuinely reconciled to [...] the need for the co-existence of rival systems of political economy." Fourth, there were limits to

what the Soviet Union could offer and India could accept, but it was worth pursuing the possibility of the Soviet Union establishing a tractor factory in India first and perhaps a steel factory and oil refinery later on.

This tentativeness disappeared as India's Second Five Year Plan was drafted by Professor P.C. Mahalanobis and the powerful Planning Commission to further the social and economic goals outlined by Nehru: to increase the scope of the public sector; to develop heavy industries and strengthen the foundations of economic independence; to increase the domestic production of consumer goods; to eliminate unemployment gradually; to increase agricultural productivity and to improve the quality of social services. By the end of 1955, India was looking to the Soviet Union for technical advice and training in several specific industries and financial assistance in establishing some of them. The Indian government held high-level coordination committee meetings on the subject of economic cooperation with the Soviet Union in November 1955, leading to the preparation of an aide-memoire handed over by Nehru to Soviet leaders asking for "information or technical aid or equipment" in specific industries. [12] Due to Moscow's positive response, the Soviet bloc became the second-largest foreign contributor to Indian economic development by 1965. This arrangement was highly acceptable to India for many reasons. It was a government-to-government program for expansion of the public sector, a field that Western concerns were reluctant to enter. It opened and established an indigenous oil and petroleum exploring, distilling, and distributing industry in India, which had formerly been dependent on Anglo-American oil companies. Soviet assistance appeared to come without the "strings" of Western criticisms of Indian foreign and economic policy and bolstered India's nonalignment. It was designed for long-term programs of mutually supportive projects including training, design, use of products, and complementary plans rather than short-term projects. Markets at both ends were assured. Furthermore, in 1959, after India had suffered a crisis of foreign exchange shortage, a new pattern of trade and payments in Indian rupees was established between India and the Soviet bloc countries. Some of the problems created by structuring economic cooperation outside the international market system, especially those related to pricing goods and keeping to delivery schedules, only surfaced after the collapse of the Soviet Union and India's turn to market economics in the early 1990s.

If 1953 was a pivotal year for the post-Stalin Soviet Union, 1955 was the first peak in Indo-Soviet relations. It was marked by the visit of Prime Minister Nehru in June and July 1955 to the Soviet Union – including some Central Asian Republics – as well as to Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the capitals of Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy, the UK, and Egypt. Nehru and two senior officials recorded their impressions, which were circulated as a confidential booklet to selected persons by the Ministry of External Affairs. [13] Nehru's two notes were written in the informative, instructive, reflective style that had typified his letters to his daughter from prison in pre-independence days and was characteristic of his regular letters to chief ministers of Indian states. He shared his knowledge of history and world affairs so as to better explain his impressions and reactions to current events, people, and places; he was a natural teacher, and recognized as such by his contemporaries in government. Thus, his remarks on the absence of "civil liberty as we know it or as the term implies" in the Soviet Union were accompanied by reflections on Russia's autocratic past, differences among the Communist states, the Soviet sense of "being surrounded by danger and by hostile forces", and descriptions of the tremendous economic and scientific advances being made there along with an emphasis on athletics, construction, and the education of children. He was

very interested in learning the details of the Soviet planning process and its possible application to India. Nehru's meetings with the top echelons of Soviet leadership persuaded him "that the Russian outlook today is very definitely opposed to war" because they did not want to lose what they had built since World War II, that they were "eager for a settlement with the Western Powers and that they value India's friendship". Nehru conveyed these impressions to British Prime Minister Anthony Eden and other ministers, with whom he also discussed the two major Cold War problems of the day, Germany and East Asia.

Throughout his tour, Nehru stressed India's "special position" as an independent country that was not aligned with either side in the Cold War, speaking in a "soft, gentle voice" in the cause of peace; he found that Marshal Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia had "gradually come around to a policy very similar to ours". Nehru met a similar opposition to military pacts expressed by the new head of the Egyptian government in Cairo, Gamal Abdel Nasser. The following year, Nehru, Tito, and Nasser met on the Brijuni Islands. Their efforts to garner support for their positions of nonalignment led to the launching of a Non-Aligned Movement at the Belgrade Conference of September 1961. Canada was never a member of the non-aligned group of nations, being a founder member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but enjoyed close relations with India at the time, and the two countries pursued similar approaches to the role of neutral mediators in keeping world peace in the nuclear age. In that context, a secret and detailed report by Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson of his conversation with Khrushchev in October 1955 is of special interest, as it was shared with India. [\[14\]](#)

Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin and Communist Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev reciprocated Nehru's tour in the Soviet Union by making a well-publicized three-week visit to India in November-December, 1955. Nehru recorded a long note assessing the visit. [\[15\]](#) He cited Soviet willingness to try and understand India and express confidence in it by asking for its inclusion in international conferences on Korea and Indochina. He contrasted Soviet behavior with Western reactions of "anger and resentment" at India's rising international prestige and the persistence of "over-bearing attitudes" based on past colonial relationships. Nehru made an exception for Canada, which he described as "sensible" and free of such "bias as well as from the extreme attitudes of the United States". He mentioned his own discomfort with the Soviet leaders' uninhibited public expressions of support for India and their denunciations of the West. The Indian public and press, however, were delighted. Nehru explained the public reaction as a result, in part, of high-profile mutual accusations over the failure of recent Geneva conferences between the US and the Soviet Union. More seriously, public support for the Soviet Union was attributed to reactions against the formation of the Baghdad Pact, which was directed against the Soviet Union and brought the area of conflict "right up to our borders" by including Pakistan, as the South East Asian Treaty Organization had also done, as well as US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' joint declaration with the Portuguese foreign minister stating that Goa (an enclave on the west coast of India) was part of metropolitan Portugal.

During the visit, Nehru raised the matter of the CPI violently opposing the Indian government while receiving direction and support from Moscow, which Khrushchev

denied. They discussed various aspects of Indian industrialization and economic development, in which the Soviet leaders were willing to assist.

The Ministry of External Affairs made summaries of the talks held between Nehru, Bulganin, and Khrushchev on 19 and 21 November and on 12 and 13 December. [16] They discussed the four-power foreign ministers' conference in Geneva in some detail on 19 November, and US and Soviet policies on disarmament, nuclear energy, and the Middle East on 21 November. When the Soviet leaders returned from an official visit to Burma in December, Nehru met them in his house on 12 and 13 December and inquired about their impressions of India. Both admitted that the opinions they had held in Moscow had been changed because their earlier perceptions had been shaped by "colonizers of India" and "books not written by friends of India" and so advocated greater cultural exchanges to dispel mutual ignorance. Nehru again brought up the subject of the CPI being a negative factor in Indo-Soviet friendship and referred to the five principles of peaceful coexistence, including non-interference in domestic affairs. Khrushchev denied responsibility for the CPI and repeated assurances that he would "do everything to strengthen friendly relations with India". The following evening, with senior officials present, the leaders discussed agriculture (the Soviet Union donated equipment for a 30,000-acre new mechanized farm in Suratgarh, Rajasthan), China, the UN, and Kashmir, and finalized the precise wording of the joint statement to be issued on conclusion of a mutually satisfactory visit.

The annual political report of the Indian embassy in Moscow for 1955 [17] briefly recapitulated Soviet and international events since 1953, the flow of visitors, and the efforts made by the Soviet government "to make the people here India-minded". The report also comments on Western speculation on the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and India and cites an opinion expressed in a British journal that "Russia is courting India as a counterpoise to China." Looking back, we recall that the mid-1950s was a time of very high Indian involvement in international issues manifest in high-level pronouncements on conflicts in the Middle East and Indochina, on the need for nuclear disarmament and cessation of nuclear testing, as well as activism in the UN for admission of new members, speeding up the process of decolonization, and trying to calm the shrill vituperation of Cold War rhetoric. The personal prestige of Prime Minister Nehru was high, and he felt that his exchange of visits with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had laid the basis for a strong and friendly relationship based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence, which was one of the prime goals of Nehru's foreign policy. Disillusionment came a few years later, when ties that had been forged in the meantime with the Soviet Union proved useful.

In the mid-1950s and later, India was most troubled by the formation of Western-sponsored military pacts in Asia that channeled military aid to Pakistan and so posed a direct threat to India's national security. Nehru expressed his objections vociferously in parliament and in talks with visiting British, French, and US foreign ministers in 1956, all of whom assured him that SEATO and the Baghdad Pact were defensive pacts against possible Soviet threats. Nehru also spoke to Anastas Mikoyan of the Soviet politburo. The note made of the latter conversation [18] reports Nehru sharing the gist of his conversations with the Western officials and Mikoyan reporting on his talks with the president and prime minister of Pakistan, who had both told him that "these pacts were necessary for defense against India [...and] that Pakistan bases and Pakistan armed forces

would never be used against the Soviet Union.” But Mikoyan did not want this to be repeated in public, lest his Pakistan interlocutors denied their statements. Mikoyan also gave Nehru a summary of proceedings at the 20th Party Congress held that year, which came to be known as the historic initiation of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union. Nehru, for his part, reported on his friendly talks with the Shah of Iran and his intention to accept US President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s invitation to visit the US; he did so in December 1956. Soviet opposition to Western military pacts in Asia as well as its support, without strings attached, of India’s anti-colonial motions in the UN pleased New Delhi.

Many in India and abroad were disappointed, or even outraged, by India’s dispassionate reactions when the Soviet Union used military force to suppress the Hungarian uprising of late 1956; the more so because the invasion of Egypt by forces of Israel, France, and Britain in September 1956 had evoked high anti-colonial rhetoric and active Indian involvement in UN actions to staunch that crisis, including contribution of the largest contingent to the United Nations Emergency Force to keep the peace. That episode posed no dilemmas for India, because its condemnation of colonialism and colonial-type actions was open and well known, and because there was no real danger of the Suez Crisis causing the Cold War to erupt into a hot war. As far as Hungary was concerned, India had little knowledge of the country, no resident diplomatic representation there at the time, and no emotional involvement with it. Moreover, the militant rhetoric issuing from Radio Free Europe and US representatives at the UN seemed to pose a risk of war for some time in October-November 1956. India’s nonalignment, as well as its relations with the Soviet Union, came under strain and obliged it to perform a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, Nehru in parliament praised and sympathized with the revolt of the Hungarian people, describing their actions as a “national uprising”; when Soviet troops re-occupied Budapest on 4 November and Imre Nagy was replaced, Ambassador Menon conveyed India’s “deep concern and regret over the events in Hungary”. [19] On the other hand, Nehru appeared to give public credence to Moscow’s explanations of the crisis, and India’s representative at the UN opposed condemnatory or punitive resolutions against the Soviet Union, trying, without success, to secure permission for the UN secretary-general to visit Hungary. As the danger of war passed, Nehru was more openly critical of the Soviet military presence in Hungary and advocated a mutual withdrawal of Warsaw Pact and NATO forces from Central Europe. He was deeply shocked when Imre Nagy was executed in June 1958 and, in a personal letter to Menon, expressed his feelings of dismay at this “cold blooded act” as well as general discouragement that a “succession of foolish actions” had spoiled some good positions and “almost put an end to the idea of real peace in our generation”. [20] It was not the first or the last time that the reproaches of an Indian prime minister were ignored by Soviet leaders.

Khrushchev stopped in India for talks with Nehru in February and March 1960. At the time, Khrushchev’s confidence in his personal authority and in the economic, military, and scientific advances being made by the Soviet Union was high. In his conversation with Nehru, he held forth at some length about US failures and Soviet strengths, and did not fully answer questions on how the German problem could be resolved or disarmament achieved. [21] The two men agreed that disarmament negotiations should include the larger Asian countries and that the People’s Republic of China should not be excluded by the US from the UN. Nehru then referred “to a matter that is of great interest and embarrassment to us”: the relationship with China, which was deteriorating because of military incidents along the contested border. Nehru hoped that a personal meeting with

Zhou would be helpful, but feared “that our respective positions are so different that at present there is no bridge between us.” The penultimate page of the record is missing, but Khrushchev does not appear to have confided the problems he himself was experiencing with China’s supreme leader, or to have made any offer of support or mediation, because Nehru said he did not “expect a judgment”, but was sending the Soviet leader material so that “Mr. Khrushchev and his friends may have familiarity with our position.” In Calcutta, on Khrushchev’s return from Burma and Indonesia, the two leaders spoke about French nuclear tests, prospects for disarmament, Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace program, and the progress of the Soviet and the Indian economic plans, with India now receiving more Western and Soviet assistance. [22]

In the course of 1960, Cold War tensions and harsh rhetoric were ratcheted up as a result of what was known as the U-2 incident. A US surveillance airplane taking off from a secret military base in northwestern Pakistan was shot down over the Soviet Union, and Khrushchev effectively canceled a scheduled summit conference. Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt provided Prime Minister Nehru with a summary of relevant developments. [23] While Indian media criticized the US for the incident and for asserting the right to send its airplanes into the airspace of another country without permission, it also, with the exception of the Communist press, criticized Khrushchev’s cancellation of the summit meeting. No action by the UN could be expected. Meanwhile, the Chinese government used the incident as a propaganda opportunity, accusing India of “supposed indifference” to the U-2 incident and continued publishing personal attacks on Nehru. Both China and India hoped for Soviet support or neutrality in their by now irreconcilable border dispute. Indian President Rajendra Prasad, accompanied by Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt, made a two-week ceremonial visit to the Soviet Union in June and July 1960. [24] They gained favorable impressions of general improvement in standards of living and loosening of restrictions. They saw that the Soviet experience could not be applied to India, “where we value freedoms enshrined in our constitution of thought, speech, and religion”, but wanted to learn more about comprehensive planning and the leveling of social inequalities.

Indian Ambassador Menon and First Secretary A.S. Gonsalves kept New Delhi informed of developments inside the Soviet Union as well as relations with Poland and Finland in the later half of 1960. [25] They reported Soviet and Polish concerns about trends in West Germany, as well as Moscow’s dissatisfaction with the UN’s handling of disruptions in the former Belgian Congo. New Delhi at the time was more concerned with its border problems with China and ways of financing the Second Five Year Plan, but subsequently became a mainstay of UN peacekeeping operations in the Congo and opposed Soviet proposals to replace the UN secretary-general’s office, then occupied by Dag Hammarskjöld, by a collective executive of three, a “troika”, with each member representing the Western, Socialist, and Nonaligned group of states. The annual report for 1960 [26] remarked on Khrushchev’s “extravagance” of language in approaching various issues of the day, but repeated the assessment that he wanted a relationship with the West based on peaceful coexistence. Khrushchev’s visit to Southeast Asia had resulted in a decision to establish a “Friendship University” in Moscow for students from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and his visit to India evoked praise, expressions of friendship, increase in Soviet credits, and expansion of bilateral trade. An important new item was the Soviet sale to the newly formed Border Roads Development branch of the Indian Army of eight An-12 aircraft, capable of carrying heavy equipment to high altitudes, on rupee payment and easy terms. During 1960, the ideological dispute between the Soviet and Chinese

Communist Parties on the inevitability of war and the violent transition to Socialism surfaced at the Bucharest Congress of 81 Communist Parties. The resulting joint statement was seen as a “distinct triumph” for Khrushchev, and the Indian mission was particularly pleased at its creation of a new category of states deserving full cooperation. The label “independent national democracy”, which was used to describe this group, fit India. The following years brought increased friction between the Soviet Union and China as well as open conflict between India and China. Details and documentation of both conflicts are plentiful in the public domain, but junior officers in the Ministry of External Affairs produced an accurate analysis of differences between the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties in 1963. Each of these analysts, A.P. Venkateshwaran, J.N. Dixit, and C.V. Ranganathan, subsequently became very influential in shaping and executing Indian policies abroad. [27]

India invited several Soviet dignitaries for reciprocal visits, including then First Deputy Prime Minister and former head of Gosplan Alexsei Kosygin. [28] Menon assessed him as “a rising, or risen, star” whose presence, “when we launch our Third Five Year Plan, will be particularly appropriate”. Menon depicted Kosygin as one of the most outstanding and influential members of the Presidium who had risen through “sheer intellectual and administrative ability” and was being groomed as Khrushchev’s successor. Nehru and Kosygin exchanged views in New Delhi on 20 February 1961, [29] and Kosygin also met India’s vice president and had two meetings with members of the Planning Commission on 21 February and 3 March 1961. [30] Kosygin gave Nehru a detailed letter from Khrushchev explaining Soviet views on questions of disarmament, the UN, and the situations in the Congo and Indochina. Nehru was ready to cooperate in his capacity as chairman of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Laos (Canada and Poland were co-members) if the UK and the Soviet Union decided to reconvene it. A senior Indian diplomat, Rajeshwar Dayal, was the UN secretary general’s special representative in the Congo, where Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba had been murdered. Kosygin visited some of the main projects assisted by the Soviet Union and held detailed talks with the Planning Commission. He also suggested raising salaries in the public sector, giving executives more power, employing more technicians and training large numbers of specialists, and ensuring continuity and dovetailing of the planning process. In the late 1960s, Kosygin became more critical of the Indian economy. He is remembered in India chiefly for his successful mediation in January 1966 at Tashkent after the Pakistan-India War of 1965, and his efforts to expand Soviet influence throughout South Asia.

One important era in Indo-Soviet relations came to an end when Nehru passed away in May 1964 and Khrushchev was ousted from power in October of that year. The two had constructed a mutually satisfactory relationship for their countries from unpromising beginnings. The Soviet Union was able to overcome Western trade boycotts prompted by the US policy of containment by establishing economic ties with India and other nonaligned states in Asia and the Middle East. Moscow sought to enlarge its field of operation beyond its immediate periphery and its minority position in the UN by befriending newly independent countries in the age of decolonization. India, as the first and largest of these nations, and presumed to be the most influential among them under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, was a natural object of Soviet courtship in the mid-1950s. Moreover, support for Indian anti-colonial and anti-racism stances in the UN came without cost to Soviet policies; both countries found their security interests threatened by the US-sponsored creation of military alliances in their respective neighborhoods and voiced similar concerns for peace openly. In the polarized climate of the Cold War, the Soviet Union obviously gained from India’s friendship.

India gained too, in both intangible and tangible ways. Nehru saw his foreign policy of nonalignment vindicated by the “non-exclusive” friendship of the Soviet Union based on peaceful coexistence and non-interference in internal affairs. The attention that US Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy paid to Nehru, as well as their acceptance of India’s nonalignment, was welcomed by Indians and sometimes ascribed to Soviet competition. Such enhancement of prestige, albeit intangible, was greatly valued by a nation that had no assets of hard power at the time and relied so heavily on moral influence. India derived one tangible benefit of Soviet interest in the UN Security Council when the problem of Kashmir was raised in 1952 and 1957 and Anglo-American resolutions were countered by a Soviet veto. The other substantial contributions went to India’s planned industrial development. Though US economic assistance to India during the 1950s and 1960s exceeded that of the Soviet Union, it was constrained by free-market ideology from bolstering India’s public sector, which was so central to Nehru’s economic policies of the time, in a way that Soviet assistance was not. Soviet military sales to India began in 1960, but were not yet as important as they became later. A third concrete gain was virtual Soviet neutrality in its border dispute with China, saving India from the nightmarish prospect of having both its giant Communist neighbors arrayed against it.

Nehru and Khrushchev had every reason to congratulate themselves on the state of Indo-Soviet relations. The next decades brought new issues and new leaders to the forefront of new narratives.

Dr. Surjit Mansingh, American University

[1] The speech was published in *The Hindustan Times*, 8 September 1946; also in Surjit Mansingh, *Nehru’s Foreign Policy, Fifty Years On* (New Delhi: Mosaic Books, 1998), 19-24.

[2] [Speech by Indian Foreign Secretary K.P.S.Menon](#), 1949, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), K.P.S. Menon Collection, Speeches & Writings File No. 35, New Delhi.

[3] Quoted in N.S. Sarila, *The Shadow of the Great Game* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), chapters 8, 12, and 13.

[4] [Speech by Indian Foreign Secretary K.P.S.Menon](#), 1949, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML), K.P.S. Menon Collection, Speeches & Writings File No. 35, New Delhi.

[5] Nehru published a collection of articles expressing these views after his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1928, entitled *Soviet Russia: Some Random Sketches and Impressions*, [Allahabad, Allahabad Law Journal Pr.] 1928.

[6] See Andreas Hilger, “[The Soviet Union and India: the Late Stalin Years](#),” introduction to archival collection on Indo-Soviet relations, <http://www.php.ethz.ch>

[7] Embassy of India, Moscow, The Annual Report on the Soviet Union for 1953, sent to the Foreign Secretary, 12 February 1953, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Ministry of External Affairs, No. R.6/1954, New Delhi.

[8] *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.

[9] *Ibid.*, paragraph 23.

[10] Post-Stalin Literary and Artistic Trends in the Soviet Union. Shri K.P.S. Menon Special Report, NAI, Ministry of External Affairs, Europe II, 54 (7111), 1954, New Delhi.

- [11] [Letter from Ambassador K.P.S. Menon to Foreign Secretary R.K. Nehru](#), 30 April 1954 and [Report on Trade Relations](#), 1954, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Ministry of External Affairs, D/3042/Europe, New Delhi.
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- [17] [Embassy of India, Moscow, The Annual Political Report of the USSR for 1955](#), 15 February 1956, NAI, Ministry of External Affairs, Research and Intelligence, 3 (30)-RI, 1956, New Delhi.
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- [19] See K.P.S. Menon, *The Flying Troika* (London: Oxford University Press: 1963), 171f.
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[29] [Note on Conversation Between Kosygin and Nehru](#), 20 February 1961, NAI, Ministry of External Affairs, Europe East, Progs. Nos. 13 (123), 1960, New Delhi.

[30] [Note on a Conversation Between Kosygin and the Indian Vice President](#), 20 February 1961, Ministry of External Affairs, Europe East, Progs. Nos. 13 (123), 1960, New Delhi and [Notes on Conversations Between Kosygin and Indian Planning Commission](#), 1961, NAI, Ministry of External Affairs, Europe East, Progs. Nos. 13 (123), 1960, New Delhi