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EXAMINE THE POSITION IN WORLD AFFAIRS TODAY OF ANY COMMONWEALTH  
COUNTRY, INDICATING THE PARTICULAR RESPONSIBILITIES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES WHICH ACCRUE FROM BEING A PART OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

SYNOPSIS

This essay is an attempt to evaluate the part played by India in the affairs of the world today. Consideration is given to the basic aims at which Indian policy is directed and the theory, formative influences and sources behind the policy. The application of these aims is discussed by referring to the actual part India has played in world affairs although it has been found difficult to reconcile the theories with some actual applications, notably Pakistan. Mention is made also of the influence of Commonwealth membership on the formation and application of Indian policies.



Over the past few years, a radical and vitally important change has come over world politics. The development of new devastating techniques of warfare, the shrinkage of Empires, the formation of new sovereign states from colonial territories, all have obliged a complete reassessment of world affairs, but it seems undoubted that the change which, in the long run, will have the greatest effect has been the emergence into the main trend of human affairs, of the new independent states. It is with this in mind, that the emergence of India is of major consequence in world history, that an assessment of India's importance in present day world affairs, must be made.

Nehru, on the eviction of the British, declared that, "India now comes into the forefront of national events and world affairs", and in another speech, "What we are going to do in India is going to have a powerful effect on the rest of the world, not only because a new free independent nation comes out into the arena of the world but because of the very fact that India is such a country that by virtue, not only of her large size and population, but of her enormous resources and her ability to exploit these resources, she can immediately play a vital and important part in world affairs".

It would seem then that in Indian eyes at least the country is destined to become a force to be reckoned with in world affairs. The reasons for this importance can be attributed to many sources. Nehru attempts to explain it in terms of material resources and India's background of freedom from conflict. Others would have it that the significance of new nations on the stage of the world is measured, not by their economic or military power, but on their capacity for protest against the decisions and actions of powers which are vastly superior to them in economic or military respects or again by their nuisance value either by direct sabotage in world trade (such as closing canals or cutting pipelines) or by constituting a pressure group in the United Nations. But does India's importance rest only on the fact that it has nuisance value or is merely a continual embarrassment while greater powers control world affairs? Rather India's role is more positive and can only be accurately assessed by considering the various aspects of her foreign policy.

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India is peculiarly fortunate in that it is led by a man who has given such articulate expression to its foreign policies and who has attempted to formulate a foreign policy which expresses India's national interests and has enabled India to make a distinctively Indian contribution to world affairs. For Nehru was required to present a characteristic image of India to the world and it is through his personal impact that the image has been effective in the world. Since independence, Nehru has been "the philosopher, architect, engineer and the voice" of his country's policy towards the outside world. It must not be thought, however, that India's foreign policy is dependent solely on the whims and political fancies of one man, however competent he may be. He has gained the confidence and support of Congress, the newspapers and the country at large because he has been guided by the principle that, to use his own words, "in the final analysis all foreign policy concerns itself chiefly with the national interests of the country concerned." Nehru therefore has support because, in bringing prestige to India and making her a cogent force in world affairs, he is reflecting the emotions and aspirations of the Indian people.

(Some people would also point to the influence on Nehru of a small coterie of foreign policy counsellors. This coterie, they claim, includes the Mountbattens, who strengthen the Commonwealth relations and reduce Western antipathy, Mme. Pandit, who also has pro-Western sympathies, Dr. Radhakrishnan who influenced the non-alignment policy, Sardar Parikhar, who pioneered the policy of Chinese friendship and mediated in the Korean War and Krishna Menon, who has been Nehru's personal right-hand man for many years. Nevertheless it would appear that the objectives and guiding principles of foreign policy are Nehru's.)

In 1954, in association with leaders from Communist China, Nehru was responsible for the Panch Sheela, a series of principles on which the leaders believed the foreign policy of a country should be based. From the principles of the Panch Sheela can be evolved what constitute the pillars of Indian foreign policy and the principles also embody the basic foundation of all Indian attitudes - independence and self-determination. A consideration of the pillars will show to how great an extent these conceptions, so dear to the Indian mind after two hundred years under British rule, influence their foreign policy.

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India is paradoxically most criticised and most praised for its policy of non-alignment. Although it was not specifically stated in the Panch Sheela (logically enough, when one remembers it was drawn up in conjunction with a country definitely committed to one bloc) the ideal of peaceful co-existence was stated and in Indian eyes, the way to peaceful co-existence is through non-alignment. Reduced to its fundamentals non-alignment consists simply of a desire to remain aloof from the big rival blocs of nations and not become entangled in any alliances, military or otherwise, which would drag India into possible conflict. A corollary of this is that India desires to retain the friendship of and maintain close relations with all other countries. (And on gaining independence, Nehru hastened to assure the world that anything which caused hostility between Britain and India was directed at the domination and with the last vestiges of British authority this hostility vanished.)

Closely connected with non-alignment is the desire for world peace. "By enlarging the area of peace, of countries which are not aligned to this group or that," declares Nehru, "you reduce the chances of war." India hopes that by not aligning with any war-conscious bloc it would provide the basis for a third bloc, the existence of which would ensure the balance of power being maintained in the cause of peace. This third bloc would, of course, play its most important role in the United Nations and here India has already provided a convincing lead to other new nations. The policy is, therefore, not only one of keeping aloof from power alignments but also trying to make friendly co-operation possible. India is prepared to associate itself in a friendly way with other countries without the least commitment.

As with all the pillars of India's foreign policy, the fundamental source of her non-alignment is independence. Membership with any bloc is equated in Indian eyes with loss of freedom of action in external affairs. One of the most important things that India gained with its independence was freedom from reliance on any outside source for its policies. Non-alignment is the expression in external policy of an outlook that also influences internal and domestic policy, that India should not accept anything that involves the slightest degree of dependence on any other authority.

India wishes to face her problems (domestic and international) in a way that is peculiarly her own and by so doing she wishes to assert her independence. Alignment would also mean the loss of the tremendous vantage ground that India has of using such influence as she may possess in the cause of world peace.

The other sources of India's non-alignment policy are many. Perhaps the most important of these other sources is the economic development of India. Her low living standards, inadequate capital and almost desperate need for industrialisation all provide powerful inducements to the policy of non-alignment. Foreign policy, some would declare, is the outcome of economic policy and although this is not ultimately the cause of India's adoption of non-alignment, it has a profound bearing on it, as India must take capital for development from wherever she can get it. Until economic strength and stability are attained India's foreign policy will tend to be more vague and inchoate.

Geography, despite the technological advances of the times, still affects India's policy. The proximity of the powerful communist states is something which cannot be ignored in India and a desire not to alienate her neighbours must affect her policies. Her geographical position also influences India's intimate friendship with Burma and the other states in the Indian Ocean area.

In addition, India seems to feel it has a moral obligation to remain uncommitted, in the light of the structure and dynamics of world politics, bi-folarity, the cold war, the arms race and military blocs, to offering any support to one of the blocs which are responsible for this state of affairs.

So far only those sources have been considered which have had direct bearing on non-alignment. All of these sources are, however, influences on the other pillars of Indian foreign policy.

One of the other pillars, also affected by the independence 'obsession' is India's concern for the independence of other colonial territories. This was expressed in Panch Sheela as a respect by all powers for the integrity and sovereignty of all states and as non interference in the internal affairs of any country by another power. This is natural when one considers the two hundred years of foreign rule India underwent. This wish for independence of other countries also affects India's desire to lead the new African and Asian nations into independence of the great blocs. "Are we," asks Nehru, "the countries of Asia and Africa, devoid of any positive position except being pro-communist or anti-communist?"

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The last important affirmation in Panch Sheela, and another pillar of Indian policy is the belief in non-aggression. This stems partly from India's over-riding desire to see a peaceful world, partly from the Hindu tradition of toleration imbedded in Indian thought and partly from Ghandi's creed of 'ahimsa'. (non violence). Non-violence, claims Nehru is applicable to international affairs and he uses it to justify his toleration towards Goa although it is hard to reconcile to India's actions in Pakistan.

India also opposes racialism. "One of the pillars of our foreign policy, repeatedly stated, is to fight against racial discrimination, to fight for the freedom of suppressed nationalities." Thus one of India's main states in the world is the freeing of subjugated peoples and a concern for any evidence of racial intolerance. Closely interwoven with this is the already mentioned desire to see all nations independent. To achieve these ends she is even willing to sacrifice her policy of letting each country live its own life in its own way. She has a special concern for the Indians in South Africa and it is perhaps only the realisation that by criticising South Africa's internal policies she would lay her own open to criticism, that prevents more positive action. Indians, however, still regard those in South Africa as compatriots.

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Such then are the theories and influences behind the formation of India's foreign policy. How does the application of these theories influence the actual trend of world events?

India has, of course, consistently refused to form any alliances or pacts with other powers. Nehru insists that India's Commonwealth membership does not attach her to N.A.T.O. and indeed after 1952 new opposition to N.A.T.O arose when it extended its role to the defence of the colonial possessions of its members.

The Indo-Pakistani conflict, while confined to the Indian sub-continent, nevertheless bears a close relationship to India's extra sub-continent policies. Throughout their brief histories, <sup>the</sup> two nations have been in a state approaching undeclared war and a large portion of the countries' limited funds are absorbed in defence. The discord has serious strategic consequences, as true security for the sub-continent depends on joint defence and co-ordination of armed forces. One of the critical issues, the Indus Waters' problem, has recently been settled but Kashmir remains as a serious problem. The effect on foreign policy outside the sub-continent has been marked. The conflict strains Indo-British relations as London supports Pakistan and it strains Indo-American relations as, since 1956, the United States have sent aid to Pakistan.

Indeed, taken as a whole, relations between the U.S.A. and India have been typified by deep and abiding friction and clashes. They disagree over all issues which concern them both; recognition of Communist China, the Japanese peace treaty, disarmament, Kashmir, foreign aid and military blocs. The basic difference is that the United States see the contemporary world in a black-white perspective, allowing no middle way. In U.S. eyes non-alignment objectively strengthens Communism. Nehru, however, rejects such reasoning, claiming that there is a moral right for non-alignment as a means of negotiating between the great blocs and so a means of attaining peace. There are many points of similarity between the two countries; they both subscribe to the individual rights of man, they both reject the theory and practice of supreme Communism and they have similar political roots. But the way America has taken over British interests in Asia and the racial problem in the southern U.S.A., both result in cleavage. In contrast Russia has accepted Indian non-alignment, supports her over Kashmir and has no legacy of imperialism, at least not in Asia. India is also attracted by Russia's professed racial equality and her attack on illiteracy and backwardness. But it must not be thought that Indo-American relations have been consistently strained or Indo-Soviet relations consistently friendly. Hostility to Russian methods (especially in the light of the Ghandian creed) prevails in India.

India's friendship with Communist China (she was the second nation to recognise the regime) is, it has been suggested, detrimental to her own vital interests. Yet the events of 1948-1949 for India constituted a rebirth of China and a sense of Asian solidarity takes precedence over divergent ideologies and antagonistic social, economic and political systems. India is convinced that China's internal troubles are sufficient to counteract the geographical danger she constitutes and that the most realistic policy to adopt towards her would be to attempt to draw her out of the immediate sphere of Communist influence and into a sphere of all-Asian non-alignment. Nehru is, however, disturbed by Chinese penetration and unwillingly faces the fact that rivalry for Asian leadership between the two nations is inevitable.

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So far consideration has been given to the part India plays as an independent nation; but consideration must also be given to the part she plays as it is affected by her membership of the Commonwealth. The decision to remain in the Commonwealth was really Nehru's and it is obvious that he regards membership as something prized which brings advantages. By remaining a member India gave the Commonwealth the basis for the multi-racial aspect which so distinguishes it today and it is the Commonwealth thus changed which has become a force to be reckoned with in world politics.

The basic reason for membership was that India could ill afford total isolation in the cold war before she could formulate her national interests and from these derive a characteristically Indian foreign policy. Membership has widened the stage on which India can play an important role; it has enabled India to be in the Western camp but not of it. Just as communication with Russia and China is assured by India's status as an uncommitted nation so her connection with the West is assured by her Commonwealth membership.

The Commonwealth thus gives India a chance to play more effectively what is its most important part in world affairs, non-alignment. For while allowing India freedom of action, Commonwealth membership does not restrict, in fact even enhances, India's opportunities to give concrete expression to her typically Indian policy. Just how membership increases India's stature is shown by Toya Zinhin's observation, "Mr. Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, talking to the free world is a man whose voice is as loud as his guns, not very loud. The voice of Mr. Nehru, a senior partner of the Commonwealth talking to the free world is as loud as the Commonwealth is wide, loud enough even to be heard in Washington through the London relay."

The final influences of India's Commonwealth membership can be easily evaluated. India's independence is guaranteed and her non-alignment policy is not threatened but given a better chance to pursue its course. Her economic ills enjoy the healing influences that result from membership in the Sterling Bloc. India's criticism of British colonial policies is more restrained, the comparison between her attitudes to Indo-China, Indonesia and Goa on one hand and Malaya, Kenya on the other amply supporting this. India, in almost every respect, is more favourably disposed to British conduct, tending to voice her criticism of the Western power bloc against the United States. India's attitude to many international problems as a result of Commonwealth membership is moderated by the British outlook. This is a reciprocal process and many see in Britain's decision to recognise Communist China, Indian influence.

Thus while Commonwealth membership does not actually affect Indian policy (except, perhaps, to moderate it, especially over racial discrimination within the Commonwealth) the nature of the Commonwealth today makes it possible for India, by membership, to make her policies more telling and to associate more closely in the diplomatic and other fields with nations of similar interests. Another important consideration is that Mr. Nehru obviously considers the Commonwealth to be an influence for peace, and the desire to establish a realistic mode of peaceful co-existence is secondary in Indian policy only to maintaining Indian national integrity and to ensuring self-determination for other nations.

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The part that India has played in foreign affairs over the thirteen years of her independence has been of great importance. She has been the central point of the Asian picture and her efforts to foster Asian co-operation, and so form an area of peace, which culminated in the Bandung Conference 1955, although they have so far failed, have been of immense importance. She has provided a leadership in the outside world for Asia's political awakening and her example must influence the even newer African states. But in the final assessment, India's importance rests, not on influence or example, but on the honest effort of a new nation to shoulder its responsibilities in a changing world.

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