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The Indira Gandhi Years

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The Indira Gandhi Years

Edited by
A.K. DAMODARAN
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INTRODUCTION

A.K. Damodaran

For almost two decades, from the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties, Indira Gandhi was the most influential figure in Indian politics. For most of this period she was Prime Minister and the country's foreign policy was her primary concern all the time. She had a coherent picture of the country's security issues in their varied aspects - diplomatic, economic and strategic - and was, therefore, sensitive to the basic importance of external connections in all sectors of domestic policy also in the electronic age when remote influencing and guidance has always to be guarded against. In implementing her ideas she had the advantage of extremely competent assistance from some senior bureaucrats who had been conditioned to be sensitive to subtler nuances in the distant environment during Jawaharlal Nehru's long stewardship. Her own parallel apprenticeship in diplomacy made it easy for her to interact with professional diplomats from foreign countries and, also, her own officers in the government. She was also, from the beginning, careful to take advantage of the habit of devolution of authority Lal Bahadur Shastri had evolved during his brief tenure. She continued the practice of sharing responsibilities in foreign policy with a senior Cabinet Minister and relying on a fully equipped secretariat of her own to help in the coordination of various aspects of foreign policy. These useful institutional changes reflected the new, complex challenges posed by the global system and its more powerful actors; they were also more in agreement with the deliberate, carefully calculated, diplomatic style suited to the second generation of leadership. She had some accomplished, even brilliant, colleagues as Foreign Minister: men like Swaran Singh and Narasimha Rao, at the beginning and towards the end of her term of office, combined superb professional skills with engaging personalities. In all modern States the realities of world politics make it essential for the top executive in any system to be

directly involved in major policy decisions; it is this which has led to the increasing frequency of bilateral as well as multilateral summits. Within three or four years after her assumption of office, Indira Gandhi's personal skills, charm and clear articulation of her country's national interest, became one of the more familiar features of the international conference and diplomatic scenes.

Personalities representing even major nations and, for that matter, the powerful nations themselves, are no longer free agents with total responsibilities. Options are limited for all of us in the game of power politics. For the weaker nations they are usually restricted to two or three, more or less unpleasant options. This has to be kept in mind in judging the overall performance of a national leader in this predictably unpredictable area of activity. The papers in this volume which deal with most, not all of India's foreign policy implementation under Indira Gandhi, are sensitive to this reality. It would be futile in a retrospective exercise to blame a leader for not adopting a policy option which rules itself out on simple, realistic, practical grounds: in planning future strategy in an increasingly complex and dangerous world, where there are quiet landmines all over the place and time-bombs ticking away in unexpected nooks and corners, a demand for definite choices between more powerful nations and their policies which themselves keep on changing from administration to administration, leadership to successive leaderships, would be a counsel of un-wisdom.

These cautionary signals are very much in order in this exercise of tentative, near-immediate assessment of Indira Gandhi's foreign policy. During the period of her authority in India, major changes were taking place in the relations between the two most powerful States. Vietnam in the sixties and in the early seventies dominated Asia as well as the world. This was the period when the Arab-Israel dispute assumed an overwhelming and obsessive importance for Washington: Moscow reacted to developments in this region with a hyperactive diplomatic and security strategy with an activist programme of winning new friends and seeking reliable substitutes for 'lost' allies in the Arab world. In Europe which continued to be the primary focus of interest for both Moscow and Washington, there were positive, concrete developments like the Helsinki accord. The Sino-Soviet break, the US-Chinese rapprochement and the huge internal changes in China took place at about the same time as China's re-assumption of her proper place in the United Nations sys-

tem and her rapid emergence as a credible, third, nuclear weapon power. These developments in the seventies had their inevitable impact on our Asian environment. This was also the period when African decolonisation reached its penultimate stage with Zimbabwe's independence. Namibia and South Africa continued to be huge boulders in global diplomacy mainly due to the cosy adjustment of the major Western Powers with the *status quo* and their reluctance to change it. Changes in Portugal and in Spain and the rapid growth of the European Community on the one hand and the dramatic enhancement of Japan's role in economic and, also, in political matters in Asia and in the eastern neighbourhood of the Soviet Union synchronised with the Reagan era in U.S. politics and the new relevance of the Pacific region as a focus of technological, economic, financial, and potentially strategic significance. Latin America witnessed major changes in the eclipse of Brazil and Chile as major democratic states. Cuba's influence as a significant non-aligned Marxist State increased in a curious parallel to the new status of the PLO in Third World politics.

These developments were of profound importance to India's external concerns and no Indian leader could develop a foreign policy strategy which did not take them into account all the time; they had a certain comfortable air of remoteness when working out details: but they could be ignored only at our peril. The more powerful nations of the world had their own priorities which often clashed with our own priorities both in security and in development. The ability of a credibly significant middle power like India to pursue an activist and, if necessary, aggressive policy depended on a nice calculation of opportunity as well as risk. It was in such a fluid enough arrangement with possibilities for initiative during normal times, and when absolutely unavoidable, swift, irreversible action that the skills, decisiveness and domestic acceptability of a leader are vital in the protection of a country's national interests. These challenges brought out the best in Indira Gandhi's complex and multi-layered personality. After the first three or four years of probation in one of the most difficult jobs in the world, she developed both expertise and self-confidence, both awareness and the willingness to take prompt action; at the same time her long experience of the diplomatic world and the savage forces circulating beneath the smooth, polished, verbal surface, made her a cool, cautious player in a high-risk game.

This large world outside impinged on Indira's freedom of action

in another sphere. The India Indira Gandhi inherited was just beginning to face the hard realities of development in a non-congenial world. Her period of office coincided with the emergence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as dominant, authoritative organisations with the ability to intervene in the domestic affairs of the aid-recipient States. This was also the period when the Aid India Consortium under World Bank auspices became almost the arbiter of our financial strategy. Here again skill, courtesy, accommodation, compromise and tough resistance when necessary were required and Indira learnt to conduct herself with a certain assurance in the concrete negotiations with the multilateral organisations and with the major donor countries. This was as far as the purely economic part of the package was concerned. Indira Gandhi's personal contribution to this difficult area of foreign policy lay in the extra-economic, political, near-strategic aspects of our policy in the new, vexed, field of international economic cooperation. India's approach to these problems came to be controlled by her successful Third World diplomacy, in the Non-aligned Movement, in the Group of 77, in the UNCTAD and, later, in the North-South Dialogue. The evolution of the non-aligned group as a pressure group in the United Nations took place in her time: these facets of her policy are usually taken for granted by political analysts attracted by the dramatic security aspects. But these are vital to understanding her total achievement. Along with these campaigns in the NAM and in the U.N., one should, also place the successes of the country in food production, reversing the attitude of many powerful countries towards India. An area of vulnerability, weakness and humiliation became a source of strength and self-confidence. In the longer perspective of quarter-centuries, not decades, the Green Revolution and relative food self-sufficiency gave the country a certain freedom in unrelated fields of external activity.

The policies of the Great Powers the developments in the world economic scene, the mutations in technology and the changing nature of the direction and content of industry, all these provided the backdrop to India's activities as a newly independent, reasonably stable, increasingly powerful middle power in global terms: the central area of her foreign policy and her external interests, however, had to be in her immediate neighbourhood. Here, Indira Gandhi realised more sensitively than most of her friends, rivals and colleagues, lay the opportunities as well as the perils. It is in this field

that her most substantial achievements were recorded: it is here also, where the line between domestic and external security is totally blurred in a geo-strategic context, that her task was unfinished, the problems she faced as yet unsolved, when she fell a victim to the assassin's bullet.

I

The papers presented in the Symposium and the discussions provoked by these papers present a clear, objective assessment of the total foreign policy record of Indira Gandhi. It is intended, in this necessarily discursive survey, only to highlight some of the major features of India's conduct, attitude and activities over these two decades.

Before we proceed to go about this task of detailed evaluation, one basic problem has to be faced, the reality of continuity in India's foreign policy over the years, specifically across the Janata interlude which cuts Indira Gandhi's rule into two separate periods of unequal length. Here, without going into too many small details, the outstanding impression one gets is the manner in which the tradition of thirty years had become so much a part of our attitudes and behaviour that few changes were found to be practical by the Janata leaders even when they had been unhappy with this aspect or that of Indira Gandhi's policies. In one of his earliest speeches after becoming Prime Minister, Morarji Desai told the New Delhi meeting of the Non-aligned Bureau in April 1977 that "foreign policy was not a controversial issue in the recent elections". During the next three years, in our relations with the Soviet Union and the United States, with the neighbouring countries most of all, there was very little substantive change. The well-known reference to 'genuine' non-alignment remains a quaint verbal curiosity.

In the relations with India's smaller neighbours, there was a greater anxiety to be different on the part of the Janata leadership and the Janata intellectuals. But there was very little which could be done. With Nepal, an attempt was made to project a new image of sweet reasonableness with the decision to have separate treaties on transit and trade instead of one. The effect, in the long run, of this gesture has proved to be marginal. Some dramatic and probably ill-considered concessions were made to Bangladesh. There had been

nothing in Indira Gandhi's policy which precluded some of these new attitudes, particularly those dealing with the river waters. They were useful in some cases and, have by now, become a part of the totality of our foreign policy record. In our policy towards Sri Lanka the Janata Government had nothing of an innovative nature to suggest. The most ambitious attempt of the Indian Foreign Office under Morarji Desai and Atal Bihari Vajpayee to strike out on a new path was in China: here again, Mrs. Gandhi had made their task much easier by upgrading the level of diplomatic relations. It was a brave enough attempt, unfortunately aborted by the Vietnam factor. The Pakistan policy of the Janata Government had necessarily to be cautious and tentative because of the military coup. There was little scope for innovation.

On the whole, it would not be unfair to conclude that the Janata interlude in foreign policy was more notable for continuity rather than violent changes. The rhetoric of the long years in opposition had to be reconciled with the demands of a changed world environment. The process of readjustment was correspondingly easy for Indira Gandhi also when she resumed the reins of power.

This persistence of policy preferences, a certain predictability of response to new situations, - in other words the continuity factor has been an important element in India's image in the world. It is not so common as to be easily brushed aside as a minor aspect. When compared to most developing countries, most States outside the cast-iron loyalties of military alliances, India's record of fidelity to past policy and practice is unusual. A few examples will suffice: Indonesia in 1965, Chile in 1974, Bangladesh in 1975 and Egypt after Nasser are examples of dramatic breaks with the past in foreign policy. There are numerous other cases in the post-war world - Ethiopia, Somalia, Ghana, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka. Of much greater import, because of the sheer volume and weight of the country involved in the global system, is the change in China's foreign policy brought about by the successive emergence and eclipse of leaders like Liu Shao-chi and Lin Piao, and the return to power of Deng Xiaoping.

India, it can be seen, is *sui generis*, as far as foreign policy strategy and tactics are concerned. Successive leaders in the same party and different parties have found it difficult to depart from the Nehru line. It is not so much anything so organised and contrived like a bipartisan policy: it is a general obstinate need to be oneself, an emphasis on autonomy, which has its roots in the national move-

ment. In that sense, it is a peoples' policy, as well as a policy of the political elites, the party in power. Only in the first decade of our independence was foreign policy a matter of angry debate. During the first Cold War, in the absence of precedents, non-alignment appeared to the Swatantra and other opposition parties to be a disguised bias towards the Socialist bloc. It was the reflection in the Indian mind of the containment syndrome: it was also, for many ex-socialists linked with the 'god that failed'. There was also, definitely, a personal, Nehru-baiting element in it. Over the years, however, after Jawaharlal passed away, criticism of non-alignment as such has lost its edge within India. Outside the country, in partisan circles in the U.S.A. and her allies, there is ever so often a note of complaint, a certain perennial demand that India shall give up 'the tilt' towards the Soviet Union and, also, an implausible suggestion that we are straying from the straight and narrow path of equidistance: these become of substantive importance in the U.S. Congress. Elsewhere it is only of rhetorical interest.

Against this general background of continuity, stability and decorum, India's relations with the world outside can be appreciated as basically rational, most of the time dominated by national interest: the ideology of anti-colonialism was, however, never far from Indira Gandhi's mind. In this aspect of her foreign policy she remained very much the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the pupil of Mahatma Gandhi, and a child of the thirties in England and in Europe. Ideology, even sentimentalism, were allowed to permeate cold foreign policy decisions when Vietnam, South Africa and the Palestinians were concerned. Apart from this understandable heightening of emotion on a few issues, the approach was deliberate and principled.

The relations with the Super Powers and China have been exhaustively discussed in the papers in the Symposium. About the United States, apart from the well-known consequences of the China Link during the Bangladesh episode, the continuity factor is the ideological hostility towards the Soviet Union which was never accepted by India either in the earlier pre-*detente* phase or during the later post-Afghanistan alienation. What is important is not what Mrs.Gandhi and her advisers managed to salvage during all these years. The elimination of the huge counterpart funds accumulated under the PL-480 wheat loans, the development of technological cooperation in several significant fields going back to 1974 and fully developed in the second term of office and the generally amiable,

pleasant, non-committal relationship developed with Mr. Reagan in the early eighties leading to the Festivals and other nice commonalities: all this was persisted with in spite of Washington's total strategic commitment to Pakistan and understanding with China and the well-known equation between the latter two countries. Mrs. Gandhi's personal diplomacy was successful in neutralizing Mr. Reagan's pet prejudices: the emergence of a sizable ethnic Indian minority in the U.S. during her term of office, but in no way related to her policies, was brilliantly manipulated by her to lessen hostility and increase contacts. By the time she passed from the scene, there was a certain reality in the dialogue even though the perceptions remained widely divergent.

With the Soviet Union the developments since Bangladesh and the Treaty are well-known: what is not so well-known is the firm, controlled manner in which Indira Gandhi projected India's individual position in no uncertain manner even to such a trusted ally as the Soviet Union. This was most clear during the four months between the Indo-Soviet Treaty and the eruption of the East Pakistan conflict. There was never any attempt to gloss over differences in bilateral negotiations while no effort was spared to project a united front of shared aims, but not solidarity or alliance, to anxiously watchful third countries. This principled adherence to positions directed by India's national interest and the non-aligned philosophy was later demonstrated during the long agony of Afghanistan. Indo-Soviet relations during Mrs. Gandhi's time assumed a qualitatively new dimension because of the sharp increase in the volume of trade and the quality of economic cooperation during Brezhnev's time.

India's relations with the other parts of the developed world, the EEC, the white commonwealth and Japan are all reasonably satisfactory instances of continuity. Her individual signature can be seen in the wide ranging relationship with Britain, France and Sweden. Australia is an interesting case of personal rapport between two leaders leading to substantial improvement in bilateral matters, as well as an innovative departure in Commonwealth politics. Mrs. Gandhi and Mr. Fraser co-operated successfully both on CHOGM and South Africa.

On the developing world in general, there is nothing new to say: by the NAM Summit in 1983, India and her charismatic leader had become identified with all the 'lost causes' of the Third World, Palestine, South Africa, Namibia, apartheid, the Frontline States and

the least developed countries. Here Indira Gandhi's constituency was assured: even the strains of the emergency had little effect on this solidarity of the weak, the newly independent, the economically deprived and the politically retarded societies in the post-imperial confusion.

And so, inevitably, we come to the most vital aspect of India's security, her neighbourhood. Here the story is clear and there is little scope for misunderstanding or under-assessment. It is, however, necessary to remind ourselves of the strength of will, patience, determination and just the right twang of sauciness which went into the responsive, reactive strategy on East Pakistan. No diplomatic effort was spared: no possible support anywhere neglected: its success, the irreversibility of its result, its acceptance by the world including China and Pakistan all vindicate her policies, including the timing of the treaty with the Soviet Union with its carefully limited mutual obligations. With Pakistan, in spite of this war, Indira Gandhi proceeded to normalise relations at a carefully calculated pace. The Simla Accord and the restoration of diplomatic ties in 1976 made it easier for the Janata Government to pick up the threads: she did her best to contain the damage caused by the Afghanistan imbroglio but, at the end of her life, the Pakistani factor had again become crucial to our national security because of developments in Punjab.

With Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka, relations were surprisingly trouble-free in spite of some personal irritations. It was a popular thesis among opposition intellectuals during the Emergency and the first year of the Janata rule that authoritarianism at home and hegemonism abroad were the hallmarks of Indira Gandhi's Government. A comprehensive good neighbourhood policy was actively projected as a viable alternative. Subsequent events proved, that much of the responsibility for irritation lay in minority regimes' afraid of the democratic example across the border and in the interventions by extra-regional Great Powers. Many of the 'failures in cultivating friends and influencing people' in South Asia, for example, are inherent in the situation. Before she passed away, she welcomed and encouraged the Bangladesh initiative in regional cooperation.

With Sri Lanka, particularly, both in 1971 and 1983, when the small island nation faced a mortal threat to its integrity, India tried to adopt a helpful, and, at the same time, clearly non-interventionist

posture. It is a problem which continues to fester: the seeds of the disease antedote Indira Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and, indeed, Indian Independence. Her generosity on Kachchativu, her accommodation on the Stateless Citizens' problem, and her prompt response to Srimavo Bandaranaike's S.O.S. in 1971 made for a certain understanding between her and the S.L.F.P. leader. She was, however, able to establish a useful enough understanding with President Jayewardene in spite of ideological differences. In this, as we have noted earlier, she was displaying her usual quality of pragmatism.

With China, too, in spite of the generally frosty nature of the relationship because of the border problem and the Pakistan and Soviet linkages, Indira Gandhi did her best to improve relations. By the end of her Prime Ministership, a dialogue had been resumed on bilateral matters: on most global issues there was understanding and, even, some co-operation.

One major aspect of India's security policy continues to bear Indira Gandhi's personal interest, the country's nuclear strategy. She inherited a situation which had been only a little while earlier complicated by China's nuclear weapon programme. Then came the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Her decision to explode a nuclear device but to forbear from going ahead with a weapon programme was of vital importance. As was suggested, at the beginning of this survey, the available options for the leader of a great but vulnerable country like India are limited. Only time will prove whether her patience and forbearance were justified. The most recent developments in the global arena in this field, the acceptance by the two most powerful nations of the hitherto unmentionable non-violent alternative in inter-State disputes as well as in community life, tend to support the view that her patience was justified.

When the foreign policy of a major country in an era of dynamic change is analysed, there are bound to be many weaknesses and flaws. It was not the aim of this book to make a laundry list of these failures and achievements. Indira Gandhi's record is there for all to see, to dissect, analyse and understand. Our considered impression is that she has nothing to lose by the scrutiny of investigative research.

Two aspects of her personality and achievement, however, deserve attention - quite apart from the reality of the diplomatic triumphs. Firstly, she had a certain ability to get along on easy terms

with people: this was something deeper than populism, even though there was bound to be a populist flavour in her domestic politicking and her international support of many crusaders and freedom fighters. This was something which went back to her "Congress childhood", so to speak, stronger than marked tendency to loneliness and even alienation which many of her friends and admirers have noticed in her. This led her to instant rapport with Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and Yasser Arafat: there was also something of this special friendliness with Tito and both Kosygin and Brezhnev. More important were her successes, short-lived, with President Johnson, and more enduring, with Ronald Reagan. The Cancun meeting with the President led to the remarkable success of the 1982 visit. Over the years she became easy and more assured: she had always been gracious and courteous even though she could use frostiness as a potent diplomatic weapon. She was, even during her regal years, never pompous or offensive. These personal qualities were of genuine importance.

The essentially institutional aspects of Indira Gandhi's foreign policy need some analysis. In her time the Foreign Office came into its own as the main resource organisation on external relations in the country. Lal Bahadur Shastri had bequeathed a reasonably efficient arrangement in which the Prime Minister's enlarged secretariat interacted effectively with the Foreign Office under a separate Minister. During Mrs. Gandhi's long tenure the Prime Minister's Secretariat was expanded to include sections dealing with economic and scientific policy. The Prime Minister's Secretariat and the Foreign Office co-operated with each other at the highest level in coordinating the foreign policy activities of the Government in all sectors. When a crisis of major dimensions developed, as in East Pakistan, Mrs. Gandhi devised temporary but effective institutions to tackle the problems like the Policy Planning Committee presided over by Mr. D.P. Dhar. This meant, in effect, an arrangement by which the Heads of the important government departments concerned, including defence, intelligence and home security organisations, worked together on a day-to-day basis so that there was no confusion in decision-making. There was also an attempt during that time to make the Congress Party have some institutional arrangements to study and assess foreign policy. The difference between the party and the Government was always carefully observed. As in other systems influencing was possible through important personnel common

to both. The tradition of foreign policy discussions in the AICC for example, which had been a common feature during the Nehru years continued during Mrs. Gandhi's Prime Ministership, as also the association of the Congress State Units to some degree with foreign policy propaganda.

Much more important than these immediate institutional arrangements which ensured smooth functioning of the State apparatus during difficult times and their projection to the people in the country in a balanced manner, was the detailed personal interest taken by the Prime Minister in not merely the formulation but in the implementation of the foreign policy. Perhaps, the most important and useful aspect of her style in foreign policy administration was her access to different opinions from various levels within the Ministry of External Affairs. This access was usually limited to policy papers prepared by the Ministry, supplemented when necessary with personal consultations. These briefings were extremely important in Mrs. Gandhi's method of work; she used to supplement these internal sources with uninhibited discussions with foreign diplomats, statesmen and also academics. In these things Mrs. Gandhi who was usually scrupulous about protocol matters was careful not to be inhibited by level and rank. Some of her most useful contacts were with junior academics from major countries with connections in the right places.

In the appointment of Ambassadors to foreign countries, Mrs. Gandhi was something of a conservative. She preferred to have people from within the Foreign Service man most of these posts. It was only in very extremely sensitive capitals where the personal rapport with the Head of the Government could be a factor in the envoy's effectiveness in the country of accredition, did she depart from the simple rule of promoting Foreign Service Officers at the proper time and posting them. After the first three or four years, Jawaharlal Nehru had learnt that there was very little in common between the Indian situation and the special 'spoils of office' criteria in the United States. During his later years Prime Minister Nehru came increasingly to lean upon Foreign Service personnel for moral diplomatic work even though there was always some distinguished outsider like Krishna Menon or Swaran Singh for the extraordinary occasion. Also, it should be noted that in those early years, the difference between senior bureaucrats within the Service and outside was a little blurred. It was only later, by the time Mrs. Gandhi came

to office, that a fully trained Foreign Service was available to man most posts.

All this led to a certain professional pride on the part of the young Indian diplomat which was qualitatively distinct from the much more historically important but rather remote praise of the country as well as the Service in the achievements of great Indian diplomats like Krishna Menon and also B.N. Rau and, above all, the personality and performance of Nehru himself. The heroic days were over after two decades and Indira Gandhi presided over the transition to professional competence and various acquired skills.

Finally no assessment of the Indira Gandhi years would complete without noting her encouragement of professionalism in the Ministry of External Affairs and in the Foreign Service. In her time, the appointment of non-career bureaucrats or political figures to diplomatic posts was the exception than the rule. She was responsible for the establishment of the Economic and Policy Planning Divisions in South Block and made full use of them. She was superb at inspiring the middle-rank officer with a feeling of commitment to a strong leader and a great country. For more than three decades she had been excited by international relations: as Nehru's daughter she had had a unique apprenticeship. By the time she settled in as the Prime Minister, she was as knowledgeable as the best of her officers, often better informed. Her officers drafted the speeches for her: it was she who finalized them, approved a phrase here, rejected an idea there, and in the end, gave them a quality very personal to her. All this meant that the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service felt very much a part of an efficient, well-built team, with a superb professional in command. We also knew that she was more than a professional: she was a practising politician with prejudices and special priorities: in the end the decision had to be made on various factors, all of which were known only to her. It was not a bad arrangement.

1. THE HERITAGE OF INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY, CIRCA 1966

A.K. Damodaran

Indira Gandhi succeeded to the Prime Ministership of India in unexpected and personally tragic circumstances. A major crisis had just been resolved not to everybody's satisfaction but with reasonable neatness. The conflict between Pakistan and India with the Kashmir problem as the central provocation had come at a time when the nation had still not recovered from the trauma of the India-China conflict and the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, who had come to represent for two generations at least India's will to be sovereign. Lal Bahadur Shastri's death after the Tashkent Agreement confronted the ruling party with a difficult choice between two or three candidates among whom Morarji Desai was easily the most prominent. The Congress leadership, however, felt that considering the interests of continuity with the Nehru policy in domestic and external matters, as well as because of her proven ability to undertake important tasks with courage and success, Indira Gandhi was the better candidate. The next five years proved that this was a choice between not only individuals, but also policies; attitudes towards the Big Powers and two major social and economic problems within the country were involved. There was however a certain blurring of lines between leaders concerned on many specific matters. On the whole, there was a national consensus behind what was usually called "the left of the centre approach" in economic policy at home and the non-aligned attitude in international issues, which was associated with Mrs. Gandhi.

It was, of course, extremely important that Lal Bahadur Shastri did not leave behind an unresolved conflict. In that tragic moment when he passed from the scene, when his authority and influence

and mastery over policy were still on the ascendence, Shastri had the extreme good fortune to write the finishing page in one particular episode in the long conflict with Pakistan. This should not be underestimated. The next six years were not trouble-free in the Indo-Pakistan situation. However, the Kashmir factor had, for the present, been taken out of the multilateral field and was accepted as a bilateral issue by Pakistan. The next time there was a conflict between India and Pakistan, a conflict of major dimensions and incalculable consequences for the future of the sub-continent, the motivations lay in a region physically as well as ideologically distant from the Kashmir problem. The Bangladesh crisis had its origins in exclusively internal developments within the Pakistani polity. This is an aspect of our relationship with Pakistan, which we are apt to forget and thus lead to an under-assessment of Shastri's great achievement.

At the same time, it is a fact that Indira Gandhi inherited the tremendous intellectual and ideological legacy left behind by Nehru after 18 years in office, with a total sense of involvement and, indeed, in the beginning, identification, which was the result of her political apprenticeship established during the last 10-12 years of Nehru's Prime Ministership. This was the time when, originally starting with involvement in the internal electoral politics and administrative questions within the Congress Party and organisation, she gradually began to acquire her mastery over detail, both in domestic and foreign policies. It was also precisely during this same period that Lal Bahadur Shastri became a considerable figure in his own right in the Indian Government. Both Shastri and Indira Gandhi had worked together over several years under Nehru's immediate and watchful tutelage. There was thus, a certain ease, or, rather, an absence of awkwardness in the two transitions which followed Nehru's death in 1964.

Even this is not the whole story. Shastri's achievement was, by any standard, a major contribution in the development of India's growth as a nation state. He was barely twenty months in office. During this period he was able to impress upon the government his own special attitude towards things; his simple, straightforward, home-spun personality contrasted deeply with the much more sophisticated attitudes of both his mentor and predecessor Jawaharlal Nehru and his successor Mrs. Gandhi. But on basic issues of policy like the attitude towards the public sector and the careful

avoidance of too much attachment to the Big Powers, Shastri's position was indistinguishable from that of Nehru. As far as relations with the neighbours are concerned, he actually began very well in trying to remove causes of irritation and built up an equitable relationship with Nepal and Sri Lanka, for instance. With Pakistan, however, his efforts did not succeed because the military leadership in that country deceived itself into thinking that India after Nehru had become a fairly soft proposition. This belief that India was vulnerable to pressure, led to the increasingly belligerent actions of Pakistan in 1965, first in the Rann of Kutch and then in Jammu and Kashmir. Shastri's reaction, however, was firm and principled, unexpectedly so for Pakistan; in the moment of crisis, he proved his mettle and even though he died in proving it, he left behind one problem at least reduced to manageable dimensions. Shastri's place in history can best be understood by comparing him with other leaders who began apparently as temporary, transitional figures, but who, after the assumption of office, acquired unexpected stature. In our own times, Pope John the XXIII is a good example. If Shastri had lived for four or five more years, he would have left behind as substantial a legacy as the great Pope, who was originally elected because he had no enemies, for strictly negative reasons. An equally opposite parallel would be the Soviet General Secretary Andropov, who was in office only for a little more than an year and was sick most of the time, but was able to bring about a sea-change both in the administrative situation and in the political culture of the country within that very short time. Shastri faced the almost impossible situation of coming after one of the truly great men of our times: it was a formidable inheritance. In his generally modest, self-effacing manner, he lived up to the challenge of history. He continued the Nehru policy and the Nehru culture with a certain serene confidence and, towards the very end of his short career as a national leader, he made his own very individual contribution by the firm and decisive manner in which he reacted to Pakistan's provocations.

II

All this meant that Indira Gandhi has a reasonably coherent and recognizably effective foreign policy framework, to build upon, when she came to power as Prime Minister. Quite apart from develop-

ments within India, the previous two or three years had seen major changes in the world system, whose significance was only slowly beginning to be realised in 1966. As far as India was concerned, the biggest single element was, of course, the new feelings of discomfort, almost irresolution and diffidence, which had followed the military setback in the conflict with China. This had, to some degree, been neutralised by the 1965 conflict, which had given the Indian Armed Forces another opportunity to prove their effectiveness in the battle-field. Apart from the new adversary relationship with China and the emergence of the Sino-Pakistan understanding, the most important major development with which we were concerned was the Sino-Soviet dispute, which had been simmering for several years, but which came out into the open soon after the India-China conflict and the Cuban crisis. The situation in Southeast Asia had changed beyond recognition during the years before Indira Gandhi assumed office. First, there was the confrontation in Southeast Asia between Indonesia and Malaysia and the Chinese involvement in these arguments, ultimately leading to the major upheaval in Indonesia in October 1965 when the leftist forces, Sukarno and the Communist Party were effectively removed from the scene. The Vietnam conflict, which had taken a dramatic new turn a few months before Nehru's death in late 1963 and early 1964 had become the central issue of America's foreign policy by 1966. Within China, only 3 or 4 months before Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister, came the first stirrings of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which was going to have an enormous impact upon China's own domestic economy and political life, but was also destined to affect her relations with the external world for more than half a decade. In the U.S., Kennedy's assassination a few months before Nehru's death had led to major changes in policy and attitudes. President Johnson's vision of the Great Society endorsed by the American electorate in the 1962 election was, unfortunately destined to be still-born because of the sheer momentum of the Vietnamese conflict. In the Soviet Union also, during this period immediately preceding Indira Gandhi's years in office, there was a change of leadership. Khrushchev's ouster did not lead, so it ultimately turned out, to any major policy change in the Soviet Union's relationship with China or the U.S. But the new team in the Kremlin had a certain ambitious programme of diplomatic activity in the all of Asia. With the United States preoccupied in Vietnam, the British adopting a markedly

pro-Pakistani stance and thus giving up any mediatory role, and the Chinese more and more inward looking because of ideological self-questioning, the Soviet Union found itself to be a reasonably plausible candidate for conciliatory activity in other Asian conflicts. (This was the period when Moscow appeared to be having a certain role in resolving the West Asian conflict.) This was the historical background against which Premier Kosygin was able to play such an activist role in arriving at the Tashkent Agreement between India and Pakistan.

III

In many ways it was thus an uncertain and increasingly dangerous external environment which Indira Gandhi and her colleagues inherited in January 1966. But much more important than these new elements of danger in other parts of the world was the central weakness in India itself because of the shock, our sudden awareness of our own economic weakness. For the previous 4-5 years, we had been a formal aid recipient from several Western nations. The Aid India Consortium had been functioning since the early 60s. The Commonwealth countries had also been significant donors of technical assistance, while West Germany and France had interacted with us in various credit-cum-aid arrangements in industrial collaboration. For all of these years, the US had been the major purveyor of economic assistance, particularly in the form of food to our country. The years since Independence had seen some progress in these matters, but we were very much vulnerable to the vagaries of the monsoon and, in fact, the first years of Indira Gandhi's stewardship of the nation were haunted by this fundamental weakness with its inevitable political consequences.

In facing up to these challenges both at home and abroad, Indira Gandhi had the reality of Jawaharlal Nehru's achievements to build upon. The 50s had been the creative period in India's foreign policy; this newly independent country had played a major role in containing two of the most difficult and dangerous post-war conflicts in Asia. Both in Korea and in Indo-China, India, under Nehru had taken the initiative to reduce tension and succeeded against what had appeared to be impossible odds. The organisation of the Afro-Asian political consciousness in the post-imperial phase and its further development into a new dimension by the conscious evolu-

tion of non-alignment between the two power blocs as the inevitable choice for newly independent nations, were also, to a great extent, a part of the Indian achievement. It was also during this period that India under Nehru played a vigorous, indeed, aggressive role in the de-colonisation process, both within the UN and outside. These parallel developments - the emerging solidarity of the developing nations for the Third World, as it was known in that decade, the successes of the anti-colonial campaign and the willingness to be involved in the disputes between the Great Powers or their surrogates without identifying oneself with either group - all these led to the acceptance of India's role as an effective and constructive member of the world community at a time when the system appeared to be fractured in an irreversible fashion. The conference in Belgrade and the military action in Goa represented the peak of this successful period.

Then came the sad anti-climax of the India-China conflict and the inevitable tarnishing of the country's image. It is not merely a question of image alone; there was a deeper problem of self-confidence. But it was Jawaharlal Nehru's greatest achievement perhaps, in the long career that at this moment of apparent defeat he resisted all temptation to give up the policy of non-alignment. This was made easier, of course, because of the fact that as a political entity and as a sovereign state, India was too large to be a welcome addition to either bloc in the Cold War. This was made fairly clear by both the United States and the United Kingdom during the months immediately after the conflict; it was made equally clear by the Soviet Union also by its refusal to identify itself totally with China. The great power blocs had begun to see in the non-aligned group of nations non-adversaries rather than non-allies. Instead of being assessed as nuisances, they were seen as a necessary part of the post-war system. At home, non-alignment had become an integral part of the country's policy; by the time Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister, the period of fierce partisan controversy over foreign policy in the Cold War context were over for the time being and a national consensus was slowly emerging. This comparative security from attacks from the flanks in the on-going parliamentary argument was a dependable factor in formulating the responses to new developments, new trends and new blandishments, from whichever quarter they came. There were, however, always sincere critics and anxious sceptics: they were however individuals or small

groups. The reaction in the country to the Czech developments was muted when compared to the reaction to Hungary in 1956.

IV

By the time Mrs. Gandhi took over the reigns of office, India's relations with the two global powers had reached an interesting stage. With both the great countries, there had been, in many fields, a much greater interaction than before; at the same time, there were already the beginnings of the suspicion and misunderstanding on political issues, along with multi-faceted co-operation in the cultural and economic field with the United States. With the Soviet Union, on the other hand, relations were still, on the whole, at a formative stage; there was, however, already a deep friendliness which had been the result of Jawaharlal Nehru's special appreciation, at a time when such an attitude was rather unusual, of the helpful role of the Soviet Union and the socialist world in some of the major global problems which preoccupied India and the other new independent countries, particularly the campaign against colonialism in the United Nations General Assembly. It was by no means a clear relationship which India had with either Moscow or Washington; there was, however, enough substantial background of useful interaction for an imaginative leader to continue the process with confidence.

In the 2-3 years after Sino-Indian conflict, there had been a notable increase in American friendliness towards and expectations of India. The days of containment of communism were still there and the Asian Military Pacts which had a precisely anti-China content were very much in an active phase. This attitude, in fact, was accentuated in Washington by the developments in Vietnam. All this, however, did not, in any way, lead to any specific revision of the US assessment of the importance or usefulness of Pakistan, in the regional context. It was the Pakistan factor which continued to dominate US-UK diplomacy towards India during the 1962-64 period. The abortive talks with Pakistan on Kashmir were instituted at their suggestion; their failure did not, in any way, lessen the feeling in Washington that a militarily aligned Pakistan was much more important than non-aligned India. Such an attitude was strengthened by the fiasco of the maladroit attempt to have a Voice of America-

All India Radio Agreement. It was clear to the Americans that public opinion in India, a parliamentary democracy with an exuberant press, would not permit nice cosy arrangements like the ones they had with Pakistan under a military ruler. At the same time, these were the years when US aid to India became a major factor in India's economic planning. From the very beginning, the Americans were the leaders in providing aid to India. Most of the time, the aid was in the form of food assistance; under the PL-480 Agreement, this resulted in a large accumulation of Rupee funds which played an important role in increasing the US influence in the Indian intellectual circles and also, conversely producing a disproportionately large amount of academic research on matters Indian in American universities. The Fulbright Programme, in particular, was also a significant factor in providing a substantial input into the intellectual-cum-communications link between the two countries. The actual assistance which the United States provided to India till 1966 came to Rs.1251 crores, way ahead of the Soviet Union, West Germany and Britain. More significant was the involvement of the United States from the early sixties in the consortium aid arranged under the World Bank auspices. Here again, the influence on the decision-making in the multilateral financial organisations was primarily that of the United States. By the time, Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister, this donor-recipient relationship had assumed an unusually important dimension in food aid. Successive years of drought and near-famine conditions led to the United States being massively involved in food assistance to India. The very first agreement on an accelerated programme of PL-480 foodgrains supplies to meet the urgent crisis conditions was announced in December 1965, a few weeks before the new Prime Minister took over. This relationship was important in the next 2-3 years and had more remote consequences in the general US-Indian relationship, both positive and negative.

Apart from these bilateral arrangements, India was also a major beneficiary of the change in US immigration laws in 1965 which removed quotas and permitted qualified professional applicants from all countries to enter. This had interesting consequences in the long run; by the time, Mrs. Gandhi's term of office was over, the Indian ethnic group in the United States had become large and influential.

The Sino-Soviet conflict had, to some extent, led to a certain scepticism in Washington about India's usefulness as an alternate

model to Chinese communism. However, sympathy with India's democratic experiment continued to be not only relevant but decisive in many areas, until the Nixon-Kissinger change of policy in 1971. The Indo-Pakistani conflict of 1965 did not produce any revulsion in favour of either country in the United States: there was a certain willingness on the part of Washington to take a back seat in the post-ceasefire negotiations when the Soviet Union took the initiative. In its preoccupation with Vietnam, Johnson did not react to the conflict with such sharp resentment as happened later during the Bangladesh conflict. In other words, there was no tilt but only comparative indifference.

All in all it would not be unfair to say that the Indo-US relationship had been developing reasonably well in the cultural and intellectual fields and was a major factor with decisive significance for further advances in the Indian economy, not least of all in India's grain production. In the political field, however, there was a certain coolness because the Indian position on Vietnam continued to be openly critical of Washington's intervention and, more specifically, its aggressive bombings of Vietnamese towns and harbours. Here it is important to note that there was a certain national consensus in India on the Vietnam problem; whatever differences, there were centred only round the manner in which our opposition to American intervention was articulated. The anti-Soviet, pro-American lobby in the country was only arguing for a little more discretion and prudence in voicing the criticism.

V

Relations with the Soviet Union had unexpectedly improved immediately after the border conflict with China. During the conflict itself the Soviet Union had been studiously neutral. Before the conflict there had been a fairly continuous record for about 6 or 7 years of collaboration in economic matters, the most notable being the Soviet assistance to India's heavy industry programme and to the country's public sector. Just before the conflict broke out discussions on defence purchases had begun and these were continued without any inhibition in 1963 when the Sino-Soviet dispute had come out in the open. Within one year after the actual conflict between India and China there had been a very clear alignment of loyalty in Asia cut-

ting across ideological lines. In fact, the Chinese made it clear that one of their most serious complaints against the Soviet Union, quite apart from the argument between dogmatism and revisionism in the ideological polemics, was the Soviet partisan of Asia and assistance to India before and during the conflict. The Indo-Soviet negotiations on defence purchases had resulted in a formal arrangement by September 1964. By the time of the Tashkent Agreement the idea of licensed manufacture of aircraft had been decided. All this was against the background of a rather ambitious programme of economic assistance by the Soviet Union to India. By the end of 1965 the Soviet Union had, in fact, emerged as the second largest aid giving country with a little less than Rs.500 crores.

The Soviet mediation between India and Pakistan after the conflict in 1965 added a new dimension to this relationship. Here again, it has to be emphasized that it was a carefully detached, neutral but helpful attitude by a global power towards two warring nations. The Soviet Union's bonafides as a mediator were accepted by Pakistan and tolerated by both the United States and the United Kingdom. The success of the negotiations led to some expectations in Moscow that they would be able to continue this role. There was thus a certain new delicacy in the relationship between New Delhi and Moscow in the initial period of Mrs. Gandhi's Prime Ministership. On the political and economic fronts, there was continuing progress; but there was bound to be a certain difference in perception about Pakistan. This was finally resolved only by major changes "on the ground", so to speak, during the Bangladesh crisis.

Indira Gandhi had thus inherited a not wholly unsatisfactory policy towards the two global powers. There were several positive elements but there were also actual difficulties and some warnings of very rough weather ahead with the United States. The first phase of her leadership of the nation was, therefore, preoccupied, to a great extent, with keeping these relations in good shape. It was possible to achieve some semblance of a balance in this relationship only because the precepts and practice of non-alignment had become fairly strong by then. Indira Gandhi personally was convinced of the need for detachment from too much proximity to either major power, but it was not merely a matter of personal conviction on the part of a powerful leader; there was a very clear national consensus on the issue.

VI

Pakistan's unique position as the raw nerve centre of both India's body politic and her relationship with the external world had been demonstrated more than adequately in the weeks before Mrs. Gandhi was inducted into the office of the Prime Minister. In a sense it was even a more significant coincidence of factors and motivations. The former Prime Minister had just completed a major task in India's confrontation with the country's most difficult neighbour when he passed away leaving to his successor the job of mending the fences in all fields with a degree of improved self-confidence, due to the fact that the purely military aspect of the war had to a great extent restored the country's and the army's confidence in itself. At no single moment during the post-independence period could India or Pakistan afford to ignore the other's existence, policies and activities even when they were totally unrelated to the bilateral sphere. The four or five years before 1966 had seen some major changes in Pakistan's view of the world and these changes had to be taken into account by policy makers in India. The first and the most important was the right-about turn in the Pakistan-China relationship which transformed a minor but important member of the anti-Communist alliance in Asia into a reliable partner of the People's Republic of China. The emergence of Bhutto as the decisive policy maker in foreign policy coincided with this period. In concrete terms this had resulted in the resolution of the "border dispute" between China and Pakistan which skillfully evaded the question of legal ownership of the territory in question by introducing a provisional clause into the document. During the border conflict and afterwards Pakistan made no secret of its sympathies with India's adversary. It was a far cry from 1959 when President Ayub had offered a defence pact with India in rather histrionic gesture. During the year that followed the conflict, conciliation talks under US-British auspices went on for six sessions with no ultimate solution being found for the Kashmir dispute. It was the failure of these conversations and the new, and as it turned out, misplaced contempt in the Pakistani military circles for India's fighting capacity as well as the New Delhi's ability to ensure stability in all parts of the country which led to the way of events beginning with the Hazratbal Mosque episode, the drama of continuing infiltration into the valley and the

outbreak of hostilities in September 1965. The Chinese were by now no longer merely sympathetic onlookers of Pakistan in the South Asian "civil war". They were also not in the least bit discouraged by the lack of connection between their new theory of People's War and their projection of the minority military regime in Pakistan as representing a progressive historical force in the Asian situation. While the conflict was on, China tried to help Pakistan by a largely illusory ultimatum based upon demands for the dismantling of temporary structures and the return of cattle across the Nathu La border: these were fairly transparent subterfuges for intentionally ineffectual interventionism. While this could be demonstrated by cold analytical logic, neither the defence authorities nor the political leadership in India could take a gamble on China's intentions and had necessarily to set apart a part of the Indian forces for a possible attack from across the Northern border. To that very real but limited extent, China's help was useful to Pakistan. Apart from its new collusion with China, Pakistan tried its best to develop its relations with Turkey and Iran on the RCD network, the main motivation again being anti-communism, this time directed against the USSR. These were the days of happy 'alignment' for Pakistan. Perhaps more worrisome in its impact upon our security was the continuing tendency of both the United Kingdom and the United States to be supporters of Pakistan on all occasions. The 1959 military assistance agreement was very much alive. The new Labour Government in Britain proved its bonafides without too much effort during the Rann of Kutch crisis: however, when the September war erupted the United Kingdom and Prime Minister Wilson preferred to take a strongly partisan position critical of India in the settlement of the dispute and Soviet Union quietly moved into Britain's traditional place.

All this time, the alienation between the eastern and western wings of Pakistan continued to smoulder even though there was never any realistic expectation on the part of the Indian Government that this could lead to major changes. Ever since the elections in 1954 and later on during the Urdu-Bengali agitation, the vast majority of the Bengali people had been antagonised. It was a very unsatisfactory situation in which one of the factors which helped the Government in Karachi was the willingness of pro-Peking and anti-Indian progressive groups in East Bengal to argue the case for the Central Government against the imaginary danger from across the border in India. These were the years when Mujibur Rahman was in

the Opposition and discontent was slowly piling up to explode into the 1971 cataclysm. India had during the last years of Jawaharlal Nehru's lifetime and during the earlier part of the Lal Bahadur Shastri's term of office persistently tried to improve relations with Pakistan. Both Jayaprakash Narayan and Sheikh Abdullah, newly released from jail, tried their best to negotiate settlement in the Kashmir dispute but neither succeeded. Jawaharlal's death interrupted the process and after that the Pakistanis lost interest and the slide towards a physical conflict became almost inevitable. This was the extremely complicated but not necessarily unpromising relationship which Indira Gandhi inherited. The Tashkent Accord was by any standard a major development. There was, temporarily at least, a lack of external malevolent interest in Indo-Pakistani relations. Even China was going to be engulfed in the pre-occupations of the Cultural Revolution for the next three years. There was, therefore, a certain realism in programming a return to dialogue and negotiation.

VII

The India-China relationship, the on-going dispute which resisted efforts at conciliation through years of negotiation and finally led to a bitter but short border war was easily the most troublesome, the least rewarding, of the several aspects, positive and negative, of the foreign policy legacy bequeathed to Indira Gandhi by her predecessors in office. This particular relationship was so important to India's general external relations that it has been influencing our approach when we are dealing with all other countries with which India has had anything to do, the Super Powers and the immediate neighbours. There is no need to go into the details of that dispute here but there is a need to recall ourselves the manner in which Jawaharlal Nehru tried till the last week of his life to resolve the dispute in an honourable manner. He welcomed and fully utilised the mediatory offer of the Colombo powers. He made direct offers to the Chinese on the question of civilian/military posts in the Western sector. China's reactions were on the whole negative discouraging. This could be understood because by the time Nehru died and Khrushchev passed from the scene, the Sino-Soviet border dispute had become much the more dominant preoccupation in the Chinese policy formulations. There had been links earlier between the two, like the

notorious attack on Nehru's socialist philosophy. This was also the period when China made, in the brief interregnum between the collapse of the Great Leap Forward and the unleashing of the Cultural Revolution, a major diplomatic campaign in the Afro-Asian world directed against India and the Soviet Union. At home, for China, this was the time of readjustment and the apparently harmonious shared relationship of Liu Shaoch'i and Zhou Enlai, with a smiling Mao beaming in the background. Abroad Sukarno was being encouraged to adopt a confrontationist course against Malaysia and hoped to become the global leader of the newly emerging forces. The left wing forces in Laos and North Vietnam were completely with China in the fight against the Americans. Zhou Enlai was making his diplomatic forays into Africa trying to assume the leadership of a revolution which never existed except in the mind of Mao. It was during this optimistic period when the Chinese were beginning to flirt with the idea of internal revolutions in 'difficult' countries like India, Burma and Thailand. Pakistan was always outside the ideological analysis. There was a problem of intellectual as well as moral escapism, here, for a group of dedicated revolutionaries. This policy aberration, it is interesting to note, provoked shocked surprise in China's Albanian friends.

The interaction of the Sino-Indian antagonism, the Indo-Indonesian alienation and the Sino-Soviet conflict had led to India's sponsorship of the Soviet Union in the proposed second Bandung Conference in 1964. The Non-Aligned Summit in Cairo was necessarily of minor importance when compared with its predecessor in Belgrade. This was in fact the decade when non-alignment was not necessarily on the wane but quiescent because of the national preoccupations of its major members and because of the global preoccupation with Vietnam and the Arab-Israeli dispute. In such a global setting, India was seen by China as of comparatively secondary importance, a country which owed too much to both Super Powers to be independent. It was an unpromising stage in the post-conflict phase but, looking back, one can see that there were some possibilities of improvement in the fact that the actual physical confrontation across the new ceasefire line had become less and less dangerous. Indira Gandhi was, in fact, preparing slowly for a very gradual improvement of relations when the Great Proletarian Revolution isolated China and India became one of the primary targets of the revolutionary indignation in Peking. Much had, however,

been saved in spite of this totally unnecessary and disastrous conflict between the two largest nations in the world and in Asia. India tried to continue its pre-conflict policy on Tibet, China's membership of the UN and maintained a fairly large Mission in Peking to keep the dialogue going. All these were important instruments which could be used when the opportunity was ripe in the future.

VIII

Among India's other neighbours the relations with Nepal were perhaps the least satisfactory. Here again, the Chinese connection was important. In its campaign to diplomatically isolate India, China had concluded border agreements with almost all of India's neighbours - Burma, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. On Bhutan and Sikkim there was of course a fundamental difference of perception between India and China on the former's right to speak on their behalf. This had been a major issue during the official talks between the two countries on the border in 1960. China's fairly activist good neighbourly policy towards Nepal was in response to King Mahendra's anxious search for an alternative to India both as a political partner and a security ally; his other desire for some sort of an economic or commercial balance could not be satisfied so easily. In terms of economic aid India was far ahead of any other country including China. The track record of India in Nepal in affording economic assistance within the framework of the Colombo Plan had been positive. There was really no other alternative donor in sight until the Chinese appeared on the scene in the early 60s. The Treaty of Trade and Commerce between the two countries which had been concluded along with the major Friendship Treaty in 1950 led to a huge volume of trade between the two countries across the open border. By the early 60s, nearly 95 per cent of the Nepal's foreign trade was with India. Indian assistance had been notable in many fields but most of all in hydro-electric energy and road building. Lal Bahadur Shastri had been personally involved even before he became Prime Minister in improving Indo-Nepal relations and the Indian effort to handle the problems with Nepal with imagination and generosity continued throughout his tenure. There was, however, dissatisfaction in Nepal with some of the aspects of the security treaty which had led to the Indian military mission in Kathmandu

and the setting up of border check-posts on the Nepal-Tibetan border. These were all taken to be affronts to Nepal's sovereignty by the new ruling group. They were also not happy about the arms assistance agreement of 1964. This troubled relationship was of course carefully exploited by China and there was a serious attempt by the Nepalese authorities to project a plausible enough triangular foreign policy, thus diluting India's special relationship.

With Sri Lanka, the position was very much better. In fact, one of the major achievement of Lal Bahadur's short term of office was the conclusion of Srimavo-Shastri Agreement on the future citizenship of stateless persons of Indian origin in Sri Lanka. It was a reasonable compromise and has worked well through the subsequent years even though the actual physical problem is still far from being completely resolved due to slowness in the registration of Ceylonese citizens and the natural increase of those who are still stateless. Whatever these difficulties might be, this is as good an example as any of two neighbouring countries sharing economic problems and unemployment worries, trying to sort out a major dispute. The other, much larger, domestic issue of continuing friction between the Ceylon Tamils and the Sinhalese majority had already emerged in the late fifties; it had, however, no external aspects in those days and India was uninvolved.

Relations with Burma were on the whole good, within the strict framework of Burma's isolationist philosophy. There were problems because of the continuing unrest in India's north east and Burma's largely unadministered Northern Marches. This was the time when the Chinese were providing training and weapons to rebels in both countries without any inhibition. Co-operation between the two countries was thus not only desirable but necessary. India had over the years shown great understanding for Burma's economic worries. The expatriate Indian population in Burma had been sent back under rather severe conditions but India studiously exercised self-restraint and avoided escalating the problem. Prime Minister Shastri visited Burma in December 1965 and there was complete understanding between the two countries on the need for co-operation between vulnerable neighbours in a difficult world. General Ne Win's response was necessarily subdued because of Burma's extreme sensitivity about annoying the Chinese. They were engaged in a very difficult diplomatic exercise of maintaining strict neutrality in the India-China confrontation. In spite of all these inhibitions the relationship was stable enough for the new Prime Minister and her

colleagues to look forward to a reasonable stage, if unexciting, period of very gradual improvement.

IX

At the time of the unexpected change of Government in New Delhi, in January 1966, the Vietnam conflict was slowly but unfortunately decisively, becoming the most important global issue of the period precisely because the most important powerful country in the world was so totally committed to it. President Johnson had already been in office for two years; however, his hopes of a peaceful transition to a complete welfare state at home was receding into the distant future. The pre-occupations of war were obscuring all other considerations. Johnson had been elected President in his own right only an year earlier. The involvement of the Americans in Vietnam had, however, suddenly accelerated from the presence of mere advisers in large numbers to a whole army. Both China and the Soviet Union were, in spite of their bilateral dispute, co-operating with each other in helping Vietnam. The domestic, political crisis in America over the conflict was still many months away. As far as India was concerned, our position was delicate because of our enormous obligations to the United States because of food aid. There was every temptation to be discreet and prudent in criticising the Americans. Mrs. Gandhi did not choose to do so after she became Prime Minister and this, more than any other single factor, testified to essential continuity in the country's foreign policy. Because of specially close ties between Vietnam and China in those days, Vietnam had adopted a rather unsympathetic attitude towards India in our border conflict with China. That we did not allow this to affect our awareness of the essentially anti-colonial nature of the Vietnamese struggle is a tribute as much to our own national consensus on the subject as to a deep tradition of friendship between two peoples since those early pre-independence contacts between Jawaharlal Nehru and Ho Chi Minh.

There was yet another element in the Indo-China tragedy as far as we were concerned. India was the Chairman of the International Supervisory Commission in Indo-China established in 1954 of which Poland and Canada were the members. This gave us an opportunity to experience at first hand the horrors of the bombing of the civilians

in all the three Indo-China States. Also this imposed upon us a certain obligation to be helpful and constructive in resolving the problem, an attitude of mind which was not appreciated in Washington. The Indo-China problem was, in fact, going to be a minor irritant in Indo-US relations for several years. From the very beginning, however, there was never the slightest doubt in the mind of India's political leadership, her Prime Minister, or among the ordinary people also, for that matter, that it was our abundant obligation to do everything possible within our limited capacities to help Vietnam.

This was also the attitude towards Laos and Cambodia. In those years, both factions in the Laos power struggle were friendly with us even though the Souvana Phouma group was naturally nearer to our way of thinking because of a rather sympathetic attitude to non-alignment. However, Prince Souvana Phong was always careful to be in touch with us through the Commission.

The third country in Indo-China - Kampuchea - had played an important role in the mediatory effort by the Colombo powers in the border conflict. Prince Sihanouk had always been friendly with us but during this period, there was a certain exaggerated friendliness of the Kampuchean ruler towards China which could not, obviously, tally with sympathy for India in a difficult situation. These minor symptoms of alienation were going to be more significant when tragedy came to Cambodia in the seventies but in 1966 it would not be unfair to say that India had reasonably normal relations with all the three countries of Indo-China, in spite of our dilemmas as Chairman and the frequent shuttle travels of the Members of the Commission between Hanoi and Saigon.

Indonesia was, of course, traditionally among the countries in Southeast Asia, the most significant in our foreign policy. This had been so from the very early days of our independence. The Bandung Conference, the Panchsheel Principles and the general evolution of non-alignment contributed a great deal to increased co-operation between India and Indonesia. All this had, however, degenerated into a state of fairly sharp antagonism by 1965. Over the years, Sukarno became more and more friendly with the Communist Party at home and with the Chinese Communist Party abroad. This was bound to have its impact on relations with India. New Delhi's refusal to support Djakarta in its confrontation with Malaysia made matters worse. There were other minor problems. It was against this back-

ground that the major change of leadership through a bloody military uprising took place in Indonesia in 1965. This did not have any immediate consequences as far as India's relations with Indonesia were concerned, but as the months and the years rolled by, the new Government became less hostile to India's policies and also, incidentally towards Malaysia and Singapore.

The other major country in Southeast Asia - Thailand - had a reasonably friendly relationship with India; there was a shared awareness of Chinese hostility and also a shared interest in the revival of ancient cultural ties which were useful in keeping the political links intact. There was, however, no close understanding or a common policy possible between such a clearly aligned country like Thailand and non-aligned India. To a great extent, this observation would also apply to India's relations with the Philippines. There was no overt hostility but there was a general lack of political sympathy and no great economic interest to make amends.

With Malaysia and Singapore, however, our relations in those days were extremely friendly. Both countries had been staunch supporters of India during the India-China conflict and there was no real problem between the two countries because of the Indian communities there. Economic relations including commerce and industrial collaboration were progressing at a reasonable tempo.

India's relationship with the Arab world centred round Indo-Egyptian friendship during those years. In 1956 and in 1962, Nehru and Nasser had demonstrated to each other not merely the desire but a willingness and a capacity to help when help was needed. The 1967 war was still two years away when Mrs. Gandhi came to office. The triangular relationship between India, Yugoslavia and Egypt was recognised to be vital by all the three leaders. Among the other countries of West Asia, India's profile continued to be high because of its non-aligned posture and its acknowledged secularism which rendered Pakistan's propaganda efforts innocuous. With Israel, India's relationship continued to be at a very low level. There was only a consular relationship which existed between the two countries. If Israel's conduct had been different during the years before and after Suez, things might have been different; as things turned out, Israel's *relentlessly expansionist* policy made improvement of relations improbable. This was, however, a sector of India's foreign policy where there was any amount of real divergence of views between the political parties. There were several groups in the

country, Socialist, anti-Soviet, pro-American and generally anti-Nehru who were all the time advocating better relations with Israel. Both Nehru and Shastri had stuck to the position that it would be not only unethical but politically imprudent to cultivate Israel when that country's relations with the Arab countries were so bad.

The early sixties was the period when non-alignment became institutionalised and the earlier Afro-Asian search for solidarity was finally fulfilled in an expanded form in which individual Latin American countries like Cuba and European states like Yugoslavia had a major, even innovative, role. Jawaharlal Nehru had the percipience to recognise genuine greatness wherever it existed, even in realms far beyond his usual experience. Just as he had seen in Tito in the late forties a fellow traveller in search for genuine freedom and sovereignty in a world shackled by big power control and big power rivalry, he was one of the first to see in Fidel Castro and in revolutionary Cuba a promise of things to come in Latin America. By the time, he passed from the world scene, Nehru had made India a mainstream nation in the developing world. In 1964, about the time he died, the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development took place and this provided the poorer countries in the United Nations an opportunity for bargaining with the rich developed nations on matters of trade. At the beginning of the decade the need for a concerted approach towards global developmental needs had already been recognised in the UN mostly because of Indian agitation and propaganda. The process of decolonisation was semi-complete with only Portugal and Central Africa refusing to give up power in an obdurate fashion. In all these global processes Indian diplomacy had, by the time Mrs. Gandhi became Prime Minister, acquired a certain expertise. These were of immense benefit to the country n ot only in multi-national fora but also in bilateral matters because from the very beginning India had believed in greater involvement, greater participation in the global economic system. Hers was not the philosophy of isolation. At the same time, non-alignment in Indian practice meant an awareness of the beneficial possibilities in economic interaction with that large part of the world which remained outside the so-called world monetary system i.e. the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union. Non-alignment had thus developed beyond decolonisation and into an active force for economic democracy at the international level.

Non-alignment, however, in the Indian experience under Nehru

was meaningless unless the whole question of nuclear disarmament was also taken into account. In Nehru's eyes, the threat of the nuclear arms race, because it was in the future, was much more important than the familiar colonial problem. This was a questionable assumption and fairly early during Mrs. Gandhi's period it became clear that colonialism in its subtler disguises was much more tough than any one had expected. As far as the nuclear problem was concerned it became suddenly urgent and more complicated for India's national security within a few months after Nehru's death when the Chinese exploded their first nuclear bomb and their entry into the association of nuclear weapon powers was first tolerated, then accepted and later, virtually welcomed. Only one year earlier, India had been a contented signatory of the Partial Test Ban Treaty which both China and France had refused to sign. The manner in which these two non-signatories of the only existing statute limiting the further development of nuclear weaponry were allowed to carry on with their programme was bound to cause disillusion; there was, therefore, even before her assumption of office, a certain justification for the decision of Mrs. Gandhi not to sign the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty in 1969.

With the countries of Western Europe and Japan, India always had a reasonably stable and mutually beneficial relationship. Jawaharlal Nehru had visited most of these countries. In all these countries India was recognised as an important country even though not an ally. It took many years for active participants in the Cold War on either side to recognise the importance of non-alignment in the general sense and neutrality in Europe. By 1966, many of these ideological irritations with India were a matter of memory only. In fact, in countries like Germany, there was a realistic appreciation of the manner in which India had refused to be swept away into adopting two extreme positions on specific policy issues either for or against one of the two states in the Cold War. A good example was the refusal of India to 'recognise' the German Democratic Republic until the European problem was sorted out, even though this did not inhibit the development of economic and cultural relations at a rather high level. This led to a certain discontent in the socialist camp but most people recognised that great nations do not function through gestures only. One of the most important statesmen of modern Europe, Willy Brandt was an admirer of Nehru in these matters and in this connection proved to be of a great use during

Mrs. Gandhi's Prime Ministership, especially when tough problems like that of the East Pakistan refugees confronted India.

These were tangible political achievements but, quintessentially India remained a vulnerable and weak country even though a major actor on the international scene because of her weaknesses. These were the years when the poverty line was "discovered"; these were also the years when our food requirements made us realise that as long as we were food aid recipient, our credentials as a sovereign member of the world community were suspect. It was this awareness which finally led to the achievements of the Green Revolution in the early years of Mrs. Gandhi's Administration. Today twenty years later long after we have sorted out the food problem there are large areas of inadequacy and insufficiency in our national economy which required annual injections of financial assistance from the rich countries. This is something which we have learnt to live with; there is almost a feeling of complacency about it. These are, however, the problems of post-colonial world in an age when technology is leaping ahead by light years while the human personality remains essentially simple and motivated by fairly crude desires and terrors. This is something which India shares with other developing countries. We are very slowly learning to recognise these problems and how to tackle both as an individual nation and as a group of countries. Finally, we are also learning to recognise the need for planetary solidarity, nothing less in the face of the ultimate nuclear catastrophe. In all these ideas which are so relevant to us in 1986 there is a certain indelible line of continuity with the ideas and experiences of Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri.

2. INDIA AND THE SUPER POWERS

V.P. Dutt

For most countries of the world, management of relations with the Super Powers to the greatest advantage of the country, avoiding the hostile blasts emanating from their power and clout and keeping as benign a relationship as possible without getting locked in their vice-like grip, has been a principal problem since the middle of the twentieth century. It was not always within their capability to achieve these objectives but the art of diplomacy lay in maximising the gains and minimising the losses. The kind of effort a country made also depended upon its perception of the kind of role it was entitled to play in the international arena.

Taking Mrs. Gandhi's tenure as a whole, the most prominent elements in foreign policy were the determination to maintain India's decision-making capability and her non-alignment and to keep asserting India's place in the international community. She started with a more friendly attitude towards the West, but was determined to protect Indian interests and India's place in the sun, and in the process clashed with US policies and approaches. She zealously guarded India's autonomy in relation to the Big Powers and resisted any attempt at dictation by them. While giving primary consideration to national interests, she would take steps not to let the relationship with the Big Powers become too one-sided and unbalanced - and to keep intact the framework of non-alignment. She distinctively believed that India was potentially a major power and to the extent possible would not play second fiddle to the Big Powers. Without bothering too much about ideology and perhaps instinctively she felt that the poor of the world were her constituency and over the years almost naturally inherited Jawaharlal's mantle of leadership in the Third World. During these years the country had to go through a great many stresses and strains.

Policy towards or relations with the Big Powers did not start from a new slate during Indira Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister. The parameters of these relationships had already been fairly determined by the preceding events and by the general framework of India's foreign policy of non-alignment. Nehru's peace area approach and US opposition as well as its general dislike for the policy of non-alignment, the conflict with Pakistan and the Western tilt towards that country, above all the Kashmir issue which deeply impinged on the secular policy and unity of India and on which on the one hand the West ranged itself on the side of Pakistan and on the other the USSR offered valuable support at the U.N. and recognized the accession of Kashmir to India, yet the continuing, close economic relationship with USA and the West as well as a new economic relationship with the USSR - all these and much more that need not be detailed here formed the backdrop. Then came the conflict with China and India's reverses at the Himalayan borders imposing new pressures and compulsions on foreign policy and relations with Big Powers. It led initially to some tilt towards the US but also to a budding relationship in the field of weapon supply and manufacturing within India with the Soviet Union. Lastly the short Indo-Pakistan War of September 1965, with a virtual Sino-Pakistan alliance, and an emerging role as a peace-maker of the Soviet Union symbolized by the Tashkent Agreement.

It was within the framework of these portentious developments for India that Mrs. Gandhi had to operate her foreign policy and manage the India-US-USSR triangle. There was also the internal tentativeness as Mrs. Gandhi graped her way towards getting a hold over the volatile political situation and ensuring her own predominance. However, Mrs. Gandhi was not a novice in international relations. She had considerable experience of men and matters in international politics as her father's companion and hostess in his contacts with foreign politicians and dignatories and had had considerable training given to her by Jawaharlal Nehru in the field of foreign policy.

If at this time there were some imperatives in Mrs. Gandhi's perception of the international scene and India's interests, in relation to Big Powers, these could perhaps be summed up as the desire to develop within the framework of non-alignment a more constructive and co-operative relationship with the US and the need to retain friendly relations with the USSR, keeping paramountly in view the

hostility of China and the conflict with Pakistan. India was in the unenviable situation of facing trouble on two fronts and the clear evidence of China and Pakistan in close embrace against their common adversary-India. The war with China had left a deep scar and exercised significant influence on India's relations with the two Big Powers for a considerable time.

USA: Convergence and Divergence

Undoubtedly Mrs. Gandhi and her Government at this time still entertained the hope of a vastly improved political and economic relationship with the United States. The bitter experience of the Chinese aggression, a communist country after all, as it was then believed, had engendered the expectations that had yet to fade away that the US and India shared common ideals and interests and that the US would, therefore, be much more forthcoming in the relationship with India. Mrs. Gandhi was also not known for her any particularly ideological person, without the intellectual inhibitions of her father, and was perceived to be somewhat more inclined towards the West.

Of immediate concern to India was the domestic situation. The country was reeling under the impact of draught and floods and critically dependent on food imports for feeding the population and keeping the spectra of famine away. Shipments of foodgrains were coming largely from the West. Mrs. Gandhi's Government was substantially dependent on Western aid. The limitations on India's foreign policy were clear. The country found itself in an economic bind and could not afford the luxury of an abrassive foreign policy.

After having been elected in her own right as Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi undertook the first trip abroad as Prime Minister to the United States in March 1966, seeking more assistance and a much better political relationship. But this also turned out to be Mrs. Gandhi's first serious lesson in international politics as the Head of the Government of India. She had gone there with the themes of joint commitments to democracy, India's developmental efforts within a free political system and the danger of the Chinese drive towards hegemony in Asia,[1] but the public reception given to her by the administration was different from the private pressure exercised by it. In public President Lyndon B. Johnson was stated to have said