

From the Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

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Record of a conversation between Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India and Christian Pineau, Foreign Minister of France on March, 11 1956 in Delhi. Available in S. Dutt Papers, NMML.

Were also present at the meeting were Stanislas Ostrorog, French Ambassador in India; Jean-Henri Daridan, Chief of the Foreign Minister's Secretariat; and S. Dutt, Foreign Secretary, Government of India.

(Christian Pineau's remarks have been summarized)

Conversation with Christian Pineau. Minister of Foreign Affairs of France

M. Pineau extended an invitation to the Prime Minister on behalf of his Government to visit France. Nehru thanked him but said that he did not know when he could pay the visit since he would be extremely busy during the next few months.

2. The Prime Minister told M. Pineau that he had read his (M. Pineau's) speeches at Karachi and elsewhere with much interest. The Prime Minister appreciated the tone of M. Pineau's approach to the problems. This appeared to be quite flexible. In the Prime Minister's view there could be no security in the world under the shadow of the hydrogen bomb. The only possible security could come from good relations between the countries and lack of tension. It was now generally recognised that war in the present age would be a disastrous thing for all and must be avoided. If war must be avoided, everything that led to tension in the world must also be avoided. Cold war had no meaning if it could not be followed by a hot war. It was true that every country had

to be vigilant but the best protection for a country lay in good relations with other countries. The Prime Minister, therefore, thought that the general approach suggested by M. Pineau was the right approach. There was, he said, a conflict between the Eastern powers and the Western Powers. There was great ferment all over Asia. This was exercising a good deal of influence on the course of world events. An impartial appraisal of the new and the old forces was necessary and an attempt had to be made to give the right direction to these forces. Such right direction could be two fold. In the first place tension had to be relaxed. It was true that some problems were very difficult but they had to be solved. China was a new force which was developing in the world. This fact has to be recognised and a policy that was based on non-recognition of this fact was unsound. Looking quite objectively at the situation one might dislike a particular thing but if one was not strong enough to push it away it was childish to make faces at it. If it were said that there should be no war, countries should cease to make faces at each other.

3. The Prime Minister then referred to his tour of China and Soviet Russia and to the visit of Mr Bulganin and Mr Khrushchev to India and Burma. His visit to Russia helped the Prime Minister to understand a little more of the Soviet problem. He had no doubt that Bulganin and Khrushchev also understood more of the problems of India and Burma as a result of their visit to these two countries. What they saw in India had impressed them greatly. They had seen the developments in India in the economic and other fields. They also noticed that we were reacting kindly to friendship. They were good enough to admit that they had been misled in the past about India and had now had to revise their opinion. Prime Minister's own impression of the USSR was that (1) there was desire for peace among the peoples and the leaders, and (2) there was desire to settle down and lead a normal existence. The Prime

Minister told Mr Bulganin and Mr Khrushchev that India was now more friendly with the UK and France because problems with them had been settled. India disliked many things in the Colonies but did not shout about them publicly. "We speak to them privately", Prime Minister said, "because we do not want to irritate them". On the last day of his visit to India Mr Khrushchev said, "We want to be friendly with you but not to separate you from your other friends. We want to be friends with your friends". "Friendly approach always paid", said the Prime Minister. One has to be strong but friendly approach embarrasses the opponent and produces in him a friendly response. When a war is considered impossible, a half-war approach was foolish. Fear might be allayed by friendly intercourse and curb on one's language.

4. The Prime Minister was asked by Mr Dulles about his reaction to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR. The Prime Minister thought that the Soviet leaders' opinion that changes could be brought about by peaceful means and parliamentary methods was bound to have a good effect. There appeared to be a desire in the USSR to return to normal and to relax the present tension and the USSR would respond to every friendly gesture. The Prime Minister then mentioned the similarity between the US and the USSR: both worship technology; both were very hospitable and emotional. In fact, speaking quite personally, the Prime Minister said that he was afraid at the distant prospect of the United States and USSR coming to an agreement and sitting on the rest of the world!

5. The discussion then turned on different forms of socialism and the conflict between centralisation and individual freedom. The Prime Minister pointed out that a large number of people in USSR had now become literate. Although literature in Russia was slightly regimented, the people read the old classics. It was bound to make some difference

when the people had become literary-minded even though most of them were technically-minded too. The majority of the people now in the USSR had grown up under the post-revolutionary influence. They knew no other system except their own regime. There was some criticism of the lack of freedom and lack of consumer goods. The Prime Minister felt that progressively there would be more individual freedom. The more there was tension in Europe the more the USSR would insist on control over Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and other neighbouring countries. "If you want to improve conditions in the USSR", the Prime Minister said, "you must reduce tension".

The Prime Minister said that Mr Dulles had agreed with him about the general approach to normalisation in the USSR but this process, according to Mr Dulles, was a long-term one and some short-term solution had therefore to be found. M. Pineau said that he found more reticence in Selwyn Lloyd than in Dulles in approach to the Russians.

Draft Treaty

6. Discussion then turned on the draft treaty received from the French Government on the de jure transfer of sovereignty over the former French establishments in India.¹ The Prime Minister said that he did not anticipate any difficulty although some verbal changes of a minor character might be necessary in the French draft. If the draft could be agreed on informally at this stage Parliamentary processes could be gone through later. M. Pineau pointed out the importance of a decision on the equivalence of the French degrees to the corresponding Indian

¹ A treaty formally ceding to India the former French settlements of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam was signed in New Delhi on 28 May 1956 by Nehru and Ostrorog. This treaty superseded the de facto agreement of 21 October 1954. Chandernagore had already been transferred de facto to India in 1952.

degrees and diplomas.² He mentioned that this question had been discussed in the Commission set up for the purpose but no agreement could be reached during the last eighteen months. The French have now submitted a new draft. The French Ambassador intervened at this stage to say that there would be no point in the French maintaining a college in Pondicherry if the degrees given by this college were not to be recognised by the Government of India. The French Government would therefore appreciate a more definite commitment about the acceptance of the equivalence recommended by the Commission than was contained in the draft. The Prime Minister remarked that if something had to be done it should be done gracefully and adequately. It was agreed that this question would be gone through further at the official level.

Supplies for the Defence Ministry

7. The Prime Minister read out a note from the Indian Defence Ministry about the supply of 18 Mystere aircraft from France. He requested that as on a former occasion these aircraft might be transported in a French aircraft carrier. M. Pineau promised to do whatever was possible.

Algeria and the French North Africa

8. M. Pineau discussed French policy towards Algeria and the French North-Africa in details and said that the French Government did not want to continue in Algeria but the solutions applicable to Tunisia and Morocco were not suitable for Algeria because of the absence of any parties or leaders truly representative of the people with whom the French Government could deal; and also due to economic, religious and other differences between the two ethnic communities of Europeans and

² Under the treaty it was decided that the equivalence of French diplomas and degrees would be recognised by the Indian Government for admission to higher studies and administrative careers in India.

Muslims. On Nehru's suggestion to work out a solution on the lines of India, Pineau commented that unlike India, there were two armed camps and 1.2 million Europeans in Algeria. The only way open to the French Government was restoration of public law and order, followed by free elections and negotiations with those elected.

15. The Prime Minister said that he could quite understand that the situation in Algeria was quite different from that in Tunisia and Morocco. No solution he admitted would be equitable if as a result a large population had to be pushed out. He also recognised that there were no real leaders among the Algerian Muslim population. Possibly free elections might throw up real leaders, but under present conditions, elections would not be free. The Muslims and the Europeans fear each other. Owing however to developments in Egypt and Morocco the Muslims were feeling strongly that they had been left out of the stream of freedom. The Prime Minister had no solution for the problem of Algeria. He would only say that delaying matters would make solution more difficult. There was a time element in this and the background of a nationalist urge could not be ignored. For the French Government it was a difficult situation. The best solution of course was a free and independent Algeria in which no one section would control the other. Some sort of a regional solution might be admitted. The regions would be more or less independent. They would have common finance but a region would have autonomy in regard to certain subjects. The Prime Minister's point was that if there was no clearly defined objective, negotiations would become difficult. He referred in this connection to the national movement in India and how the British had made attempts to weaken the influence of this movement by encouraging communal elements, mainly Muslim. Ultimately, the British declared that they would not remain in the country beyond June 1948. That placed the burden of decision about the future of the country on the people of

India. Even at that stage it might have been possible to avoid partition but the difficulties created by the British officials and to some extent by the then Viceroy Lord Wavell and the Indian States left no choice but to agree to Partition.

The people in Algeria were in touch with Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. The Muslims in these countries encourage the Algerian Muslims. If some broad objective was laid down these countries might help in toning down the agitation.

Kashmir

16. Pineau confessed that he did not know enough about the Kashmir problem and said that he declined to discuss it in Karachi. However, since one of the parties to the SEATO insisted on raising the issue, it could not be completely ignored. He said that the French delegation had used its influence to see that the SEATO resolution emphasised economic matters. He felt that SEATO would not interfere in the Kashmir dispute against India and noticed that Dulles was also of the same view. The Prime Minister pointed out that whatever the intentions, the reference to Kashmir against the background of Pakistan's general attitude and behaviour towards India and of US military assistance to Pakistan, could only cause deep resentment and grave concern in India. PM also pointed out the impropriety of any resolution on, or reference in one to, Kashmir when only one of the parties to the dispute, namely, Pakistan was present.

SEATO and Baghdad Pact

17. Pineau generally agreed with the Prime Minister's views on the international situation and particularly the adverse effects of these pacts on the international situation.

18. The Prime Minister said that while serious situation existed in various parts of the world, e.g., Israel, Indo-China, Taiwan, etc., he felt that following the "summit conference" in Geneva last year, there had been a lessening of general tension in the world, even though the conference had decided nothing. For example, he had noticed a change in Soviet thinking. The present was, therefore, the time to take advantage of this trend and to push it. He felt that regional military pacts such as SEATO and the Baghdad Pact were a step back. The individual problems he had mentioned were all connected and they would become less dangerous if advantage was taken of the lessening of general tension.

19. India advocated the "Five Principles" to which a number of countries had given their adherence. Neither this nor the lessening of world tension meant that countries could afford to be less vigilant: India had a 2,000 mile frontier with China and had to maintain checkpoints along this. However, because the two countries had accepted the Five Principles, it would be more difficult for either to go against them; an atmosphere conducive to right action and unfavourable to wrong had been created. The Prime Minister pointed out that India had communists, and as the USSR subscribed to the Five Principles, he told Mr Bulganin that the Communist Party of India carried out the orders of the USSR. Bulganin had, of course, denied this, but he knew that the Communist Party of India had been warned to behave better.

20. The Prime Minister felt that one must deliberately follow peaceful methods. There was no half way house between world peace and world conflict and a "cold war" had no meaning unless there was a prospect of a "hot war". Stress on military pacts was positively harmful, and he saw no good coming out of it. There was too much thinking in military terms which prevented the solution of even simple problems, such as the

release of a few Americans from China and the repatriation from the USA of Chinese willing to return. Interminable talks had been going on in Geneva between representatives of the USA and China, but no settlement could be reached because the language used was one of threats.

21. The "cold war" approach made matters difficult, particularly as the big powers had what might be termed proteges. No one, for example, could conceive of Chiang Kai-shek's regime continuing for very long, even in Formosa, and Dulles had conceded this, but the USA was committed to Chiang. The Peking regime, on the other hand, was not going to be upset and would continue to gain in economic strength through Soviet assistance. It could not, and no Government could, tolerate two islands a few miles from its shores being controlled by hostile elements. A year and a half ago the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference had unanimously agreed that Quemoy and Matsu should be evacuated.³ Nothing, however, could be done. Because the USA had certain ties, the British could say or do little.

22. There had been too much thinking along military lines. In the last five years, the history of USA diplomacy was not really one of success. The USA was powerful and strong and had had its way, but it had irritated the weak without any real gain. Not only had military thinking made US diplomacy less successful, but the USA and UK unfortunately backed the reactionary elements in Asia, e.g., Nuri Pasha in Iraq who had never moved out of the 19th century. This ignoring of the people was wrong and harmful and helped subversive elements in these countries. The USSR where too military thinking had played a great part had been much cleverer in the last year, and in many cases, e.g.,

³ The reference is to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference held from 31 January to 8 February 1955.

Yugoslavia and Austria, had employed peaceful methods with success. Vis-avis the USA there was a general impression that it thought only in military terms.

Regional pacts such as SEATO, etc., were of little value from the military point of view, as indeed was military assistance. For example, what purpose was served by US military assistance to Pakistan? Did anyone believe that Pakistan was in danger of Soviet aggression? If war came, it would be fought in Europe or China.

Pineau expressed his general agreement; and volunteered that Afghanistan had perforce been made to turn towards the USSR.

The Prime Minister explained that there had been an economic blockade of Afghanistan by Pakistan, and Afghanistan which was a poor but not a communist country had been forced to get goods from the USSR.⁴

23. The Prime Minister then explained the dangers of military aid to Pakistan and its repercussions on India.

Indian independence was the result of a revolutionary but peaceful mass movement. The leaders of Pakistan did not grow from the mass movement. They had stressed the religious aspect. In fact, the people in power in Pakistan today were those who had opposed freedom and the Pakistan Government was almost purely a "Service" Government. Furthermore, the Pakistan Government did not have a political or economic purpose or background, but was moved by a mentality which was adventurous and military, and even for internal government

⁴ Being a landlocked country, Afghanistan had to depend on Pakistan for her trade with India. But Pakistan's differences with India, and with Afghanistan on Pakhtoonistan issue proved an obstacle. The closure of transit facilities through Pakistan increased the cost of transportation and necessitated diversion to other markets. The Soviet Union's share in the Afghan trade went up from 14% in 1950 to 30% in 1956, while despite the 1950 Treaty between India and Afghanistan, trade between them declined considerably.

reliance was placed on the military. It had taken them nine years to produce a Constitution which had been so framed that the minorities felt they were relegated to a second class category of citizenship. This combined with economic stagnation, was driving nearly a thousand people of the minority community into India every day. Since Partition, out of a 12 million minority population in East Bengal, three million had come to India. If the present trend continued, the remaining nine million might come with grave problems for India to solve.

24. At the time of Partition the services in India had been divided roughly on the basis of 3 to 1 between India and Pakistan respectively. The Indian army then numbered about 4,50,000 and to divert funds for economic development, this had been reduced by 50,000 and it had been planned to reduce it by another 50,000. This, however, had not been possible. India had a long frontier to guard and the Pakistan army was growing. Mr Dulles had told the Prime Minister that it would soon be the same size as the Indian army. The Prime Minister pointed out that there would be one big difference between the two forces: the Indian army had old and outmoded equipment, while the Pakistan army was being equipped with the latest guns, aircraft, etc., and being made into a highly mechanised and mobile army.

25. Against whom was this army going to be used? Certainly, Pakistan had no reason to fear aggression from the USSR. While the Pakistan people were quite friendly, it was not unusual to hear the comment: "Wait till we are armed and then we will settle with you". Given the adventurous mentality prevalent in Pakistan and the fact that the people could be aroused on religious issues, US military assistance was dangerous and made difficult the solution of outstanding problems. In fact, the Prime Minister continued, had it not been for promises of such

military aid, which encouraged the belligerent attitude of Pakistan, the Kashmir issue would have been solved long ago.

26. Apart from the grave concern aroused in India, such military growth in Pakistan inevitably meant that in India funds earmarked for economic development might have to be diverted, and this was against our main objective. India wanted peace with Pakistan and wished her prosperity. If the USA had given economic assistance to Pakistan that would have been of advantage not only to Pakistan but also to India. As it was, the military assistance given to Pakistan rendered, more or less, nugatory the \$ 50,000,000 assistance India had received from the USA. It had had to be noted that this aid had never been asked for and accepted only because it had no strings attached to it.

Pineau asked whether PM thought that US military assistance would continue if Pakistan gave evidence of aggressive designs against India. The Prime Minister pointed out that having once armed Pakistan, the USA would be able to do nothing if aggression did occur. Experience with Syngman Rhee had shown that once aggression occurred, post-mortem of it did not help.

Israel

27. Pineau said that the situation there was extremely difficult and dangerous. Both in the USA and in France powerful Jewish groups were pressurizing the Government to give military assistance to Israel. The French position was all the more difficult because of some traditional friendships and responsibilities. Pineau, however, hoped that Nasser who was interested in the economic development of his country, would be a restraining influence upon the Arabs. He asked the Prime Minister whether Nasser whom he would see in Cairo would talk frankly to him, particularly about Algeria.

The Prime Minister said that Nasser was an honest and straightforward man, who would speak more frankly than most. He emphasised Egypt's importance as prime amongst the Arab countries and expressed his pleasure that M. Pineau was going there.

Vietnam

28. The Prime Minister explained India's position in Indo-China under the Geneva agreement and pointed out the difficulty that would arise in South Vietnam if French forces were completely withdrawn, as they had been responsible for the protection of the International Commission. South Vietnam refused to accept the responsibilities devolving upon them as the successor to the French Government, which had signed the Geneva Agreement, although it was only too happy to accept the benefits. At the same time, South Vietnam wanted the International Commission to continue. This created a very difficult position. Dulles too did not want the French to continue because the French did not approve of the head of the South Vietnam Government, but he wanted the French to leave a unit to protect the Commission.

Pineau said that the French had not been requested by Diem to leave any troops behind. The American materiel had been handed over to the national army in accordance with an agreement between General Collins and General Ely.⁵ The balance they would hand over to the USA. He said that France was interested in the unification of Vietnam, and would soon be sending an Economic and Cultural Mission to Vietnam—they could not, of course, send a diplomatic mission. He hoped that this might be helpful.

⁵ In December 1954, General Paul H.R. Ely, the then French High Commissioner in Indo-China, and General J. Lawton Collins, Eisenhower's personal emissary, reached an agreement in regard to the training, equipment, and armament of the young Vietnamese army.

The Prime Minister said that much of the American materiel must have been taken by various groups, thus making for disorder. Dulles had asked him whether sending about 300 people to make an inventory of materiel supplied by them would be a violation of the Geneva Agreement.⁶ The Prime Minister said he had not given a reply.

29. Pineau thanked the Prime Minister for India's intervention last December in the UN, which had helped the French Government.⁷

⁶ See ante, pp. 350-351.

⁷ Following removal of the Algerian question from the agenda of the ongoing session of the UN General Assembly by a formula devised by Krishna Menon without implying any change in the attitudes of the parties concerned, the French delegation returned to the Assembly on 29 November 1955 after two months' absence.