

SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Volume 34

Reference on Pondicherry

General Perspectives

Page 56

You may have also heard that the British and French governments had issued an ultimatum day before yesterday evening, warning Egypt, that if Egypt did not accede, they would take military action. What had Egypt done to deserve a sudden threat like this? I will not go into the past history and nor should anyone try to do so. What has happened now? Egypt is innocent. It is Israel which attacked Egypt.¹ Therefore, the guilty party is the Israeli Government and not Egypt. Israel was advancing into Egyptian territory. The British and French Governments threatened Egypt and wanted her to surrender the Suez Canal to them. Their argument was that if this was not done, there was a fear of their ships being in danger in the war. So, they wished to defend the Suez Canal and wanted Egypt to withdraw ten miles. In short it meant surrendering ten miles of Egyptian territory beyond the Suez Canal. If the Israeli forces advanced, the British and French Governments wanted to defend that territory. It is obvious that Egypt said that it was not acceptable to them. Egypt is an independent country and wished to know what right the others had to capture Egyptian territory on the pretext of protecting it? Only a year and a half or two ago, the British forces had been removed from there.² Now, they were on the lookout for some excuse to go in once again. It is a strange situation. I was amazed and so was the rest of the world at these developments.

¹ On 29 October 1956

² See post, p. 401 fn 7

We have no quarrel with the British. We have friendly relations with them. When our country became free, all our old quarrels were forgotten. They go their way and we go ours. But, we have mutual consultations and often accept one another's views. There is no hostility. We have friendly relations with France too though we do not like many of the things that they do. We came to a friendly agreement about Pondicherry and other French colonies in India.³ So, we are friendly towards all the countries. The only real complaint that we have is about a small pocket of Portuguese rule in India-Goa-because not only do they continue to hold it, but innumerable Indians are in jails there. They had gone there unarmed and were immediately sentenced to ten or twenty years imprisonment. We have heard that they are being kept locked up in dungeons.

Among them is a Member of Parliament and the others who are well-educated people.⁴ I am very doubtful if any country in the world would tolerate the kind of things that Portugal has been doing. Yet, we have put up with it because we did not wish to take military action. The Portuguese have to go-there is no doubt about that. But, we are putting up with their actions because as far as possible we wish to avoid fighting and military action.

³ The French enclave of Chandernagore in West Bengal became apart of the Indian Union after India and France signed the treaty for its cession in Paris on 9 June 1952. The remaining settlements, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam, were formally ceded to India after another treaty was signed in New Delhi on 28 May 1956

⁴ Since May 1955, about eight hundred satyagrahis had entered Goa as part of the struggle for freedom. Of these, nine were detained and the others were thrust back into Indian territory. Among those detained were N.G. Goray and Madhu Limaye, members of the Praja Socialist Party, and Tridib Chaudhuri, General Secretary of the Revolutionary Socialist Party and a Member of the Lok Sabha. See also Selected Works (second series), Vol. 30, pp. 388-390.

I have given you some examples of where our duty lies. Bombs are being thrown on Cairo and other places because they apprehend danger to the ships in the Suez Canal. If there is danger, from where is it likely to come? It can be only from Egypt. What has Egypt done? In the months since Suez Canal has been under the control of Egypt, nothing has happened. Ships have been passing through peacefully inspite of all kinds of obstacles. If they were afraid of an Israeli attack they could have stopped it in other ways, by taking the matter to the United Nations or whatever it is. But they have threatened Egypt instead. It is a strange thing.

You might have read the fable of the wolf and the sheep. I am reminded of that. Now, Egyptian ships are being torpedoed and Cairo is being bombarded. What I would like to ask is suppose some country, or say a group of countries want to come into India to defend something on some other pretext what will our answer be? We will naturally say that no foreign troops will be permitted to set foot on Indian soil and if they do, we shall do our best to repulse them and shall fight them to the bitter end. If Egypt gives a similar reply, what crime have they committed? It is the right reply and all our sympathies are at the moment with Egypt and its people. I do not know what will happen if any power thinks that by taking military action or by using threats, they can put up a puppet regime in a fellow-country of ours which has recently become free. But, I know one thing that most of the countries of Asia will not tolerate or accept this quietly or bow down before such tactics.

Meeting The Press

Page 564

Q: Sir, in the Security Council resolution one of the six points that were mentioned was with regard to insulating the Canal from national politics. That was not mentioned in the five points in the Indian Plan.

JN: Our Plan was prepared and was handed over to people before the Security Council resolution. The Security Council resolution containing these points was subsequently framed. You might have noticed that different interpretations⁵ are being put already on that Security Council resolution and more particularly about the particular one you mentioned.

Q: Is the hope now brighter for a negotiated settlement?

JN: Oh, yes. I think, we are definitely now in the negotiating stage, and it is difficult to go back on it. Shall we go on to some other matter?

Well, about Algeria, I can say that some developments that have taken place there during the last day or two, have rather worsened the situation. Our position in regard to Algeria has been firstly that Algeria is entitled fully to freedom and independence; secondly that this question, as others, should be considered in a friendly way by the parties keeping in view all the aspects of the problem; for instance in Algeria, there are a large number of French settlers, a very considerable part of the population and you might remember the statement I made in parliament about this. It seems to me that on several occasions in the course of the last three or four months there was an approach to negotiations between the French Government and the Algerian nationalists, but it did not actually result in that. Something

⁵ Britain, France and Egypt interpreted differently the six principles and were divided on their implementation

happened which came in the way. Then came the Suez Canal crisis, which rather diverted attention at least for the rest of the world and which, I believe, probably in French minds was indirectly connected with the other. I can say that it is impossible for the Algerian question to be settled by force and by trying to suppress the nationalist movement there. Tunisia⁶ and Morocco⁷ which have attained independence were till recently on very good terms with France. Because of this fact, now they are excited at the developments. We in India have always tried to follow some kind of middle course between our sympathies and our desire, more especially as a Government, not to interfere in other peoples' matters, in their internal affairs, and thirdly our desire to be helpful quietly in a possible solution of the problem.

Somebody asked me about the French claim to search ships carrying arms.⁸ I don't know what the legal answer is but presumably it would give rise to friction between the parties concerned-whatever the parties may be but I really cannot answer what the law on the point is.

Q: It is at the instance of India that the Algeria question was taken out of the UN Agenda last time. Do you think it is now time to bring it up?

JN: It was at the instance chiefly of India that it was put on the UN agenda.⁹ Secondly, it is also true that it was at the instance of India that it

⁶ On 20 March 1956, Tunisia attained independence from the French protectorate

⁷ On 2 March 1956, Morocco attained independence from the French protectorate

⁸ The French National Assembly had adopted the motion on 2 June 1956 that it would search ships in the Mediterranean carrying arms because that could help the Algerian rebels

⁹ In fact, the Arab-Asian group in the UN proposed in September 1955 in the General Assembly for debate on Algeria which was accepted. Krishna Menon, India's representative

was taken off,¹⁰ because by putting it on the agenda we achieved the object indirectly, i.e., to draw the attention of the UN and the world to this question but it could not be discussed there subsequently because you remember that the French representatives withdrew. So, in effect it could not be discussed. It had achieved its primary object, and then it became a kind of brake on the discussion of even that issue or any other issue with which the French Government were concerned. Therefore, India advised at that time that it might be taken off for the time being for that session. As a matter of fact, nothing could have happened in that session as it was not going to last long. So it was taken off. That exhibits that our approach, our views are clear about the matter but the manner is we want to be helpful not, merely condemnatory. We wanted to help in finding a solution without giving up any principle and not merely for delivering strong speeches which do not bring about any satisfactory result and only irritates all the parties concerned.

in the UN, said that the Algerian question had been brought before the UN solely for the purpose of conciliation

¹⁰ In June 1956, the Security Council rejected the demand of 13 Asia-African nations to debate the question of Algeria. India did not sign this request. For India's stand see Selected Works (second series), Vol. 33, pp. 485-86.