

# The Soviet Union's Partnership with India

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The partnership between India and the Soviet Union during the Cold War has been widely regarded as a success story. Although the two countries did not pretend to share the same values, they had no serious conflict of interests and created a model of mutually beneficial realpolitik. The relationship still evokes nostalgia in India, projecting the image of the Soviet Union as a respectful and reliable friend, and has been cited to Americans as an example to emulate. How accurate are these images? How did the two partners really see each other? What did they try to get in building their relationship, and how important to them was what they got? What benefits did they derive? How can we tell?<sup>1</sup>

In both countries, most writings on the subject were traditionally of the celebratory kind. More balanced accounts were written by foreign authors, but their value was limited by the influence of the ongoing Cold War and by a dearth of reliable sources. Despite India's American-style "Right to Information Act," access to Indian archives has been routinely obstructed by the government, which, with its penchant for secrecy, has kept the inside records of its decision-making out of public sight. Although much can be gleaned from private papers of important officials, they are available only through the early 1970s. For later years, retrospective testimonies of fallible eyewitnesses and newspaper reports are the only Indian primary sources we have.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Documents cited in this article come from the Modern Records Archive, Warsaw (AAN); National Archives of Romania (ANR); Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Foreign Relations Department (CCFR) in ANR; Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Chancellery (CCPC) in ANR; Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sofia (DAMFA); *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS); Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic (MfAA) in Political Archive of the Foreign Office, Berlin (PAAA); National Archives of Hungary, Budapest (MOL); National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI); Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML); National Security Archive, Washington, DC (NSAarchive); Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Moscow (RGANI); Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the Former German Democratic Republic in the Federal Archives, Berlin (SAPMO); Subimal Dutt Collection (SDC), NMML; and T. N. Kaul Papers (TNKP), NMML.

2. The detailed account by Jyotsna Bakshi, *Russia and India: From Ideology to Geopolitics, 1947–1998* *Journal of Cold War Studies*

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Similarly problematic, albeit with important exceptions, has been access to Russian archives. Fortunately, scholars do have access to the archives of the Soviet Union's former allies, with whom Moscow shared detailed accounts of its policy toward India. Some of the most revealing evidence used in this article comes from such unlikely places as Berlin or Budapest, revealing not only the Soviet side of the story but also the limitations of accounts by participants. Even though the evidence from East European archives is incomplete and inevitably one-sided, it presents a coherent and consistent picture that is different from prevailing accounts. The documentation also shows, however, that much more research remains to be done.

The nature of decision-making in both countries justifies focusing on high politics. The management of their relations was highly personalized—on the Soviet side because of the overwhelming power of the highest leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), who were not accountable to anyone, and on the Indian side because of the practice of leaving foreign policy decisions to the prime minister, assisted by a small coterie of advisers. In India's democracy, however, key decisions afterward were subject to criticism by a vibrant free press, which politicians had to heed if they wanted to be reelected. The bilateral relationship, beholden as it was to domestic politics in India but not in the Soviet Union, therefore always mattered more to those in New Delhi than to those in Moscow. Yet India usually took the initiative, whereas the Soviet Union mainly reacted.

Over nearly forty years, Soviet-Indian relations passed through three distinct periods, coinciding with the ascendance of three extraordinary pairs of leaders, each extraordinary for different reasons—Jawaharlal Nehru and Nikita Khrushchev, Indira Gandhi and Leonid Brezhnev, and Rajiv Gandhi and Mikhail Gorbachev. The rise and decline of a political dynasty in India paralleled the same trajectory in the Soviet Union. None of the periods ended well: the first in debacles with China, the second with Indira Gandhi's assassination, the third with the demise of the Soviet Union. How did the two improbable partners find each other in the first place, and what accounted for the longevity of their liaison?

(Delhi: Dev, 1999), is intended to tell the story "entirely from the Soviet/Russian perspective" (p. xiv), as reflected in published sources. The best accounts by political scientists are Robert C. Horn, *Soviet-Indian Relations: Issues and Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Peter J. S. Duncan, *The Soviet Union and India* (London: Routledge, 1989); and Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam, 1945–1992* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). On access to the archives in theory, see Uma Mohan, *The Right to Information Act, 2005: A Gift to Indian Citizens* (New Delhi: InfoRights India, 2006). On access in practice, see Claude Arpi and Subroto Roy, "Transparency and History: India's Archives Must Be Opened to World Standards," *Business Standard* (Delhi), 31 December 2008, pp. 11–12.

## Innocents Abroad

As long as Iosif Stalin ruled in Moscow, Soviet relations with India were limited by his view of post-colonial governments as tools of Western imperialism. Stalin saw little benefit to be gained from the fractious Indian Communist Party, which was prone to both leftist and rightist deviations. His strategic ally in Asia was the People's Republic of China (PRC), which India likewise initially found a more congenial partner because of their common resentment of Western imperialism. During the Korean War, India used its Beijing connection to try to mediate an armistice, which was obstructed by Stalin. Before the Soviet Union and India could get closer, the Soviet despot had to die.<sup>3</sup>

The Indian-Soviet rapprochement dates from the elusive period after Stalin's death that has been tantalizing some historians as one of missed opportunities in East-West relations. India was one country that did take advantage of the opportunities that emerged, thanks to its ambassador to Moscow, K. P. S. Menon, who, as one of the last two foreigners to see Stalin alive, may have had a special feel for the changes that followed.<sup>4</sup> In April 1954, Menon forwarded to New Delhi with his endorsement an astute analysis of the looming opportunities in Moscow written by a junior member of the embassy, P. N. Kaul.

The memorandum found the situation "extremely favorable to us" because of the readiness of Stalin's successors to discard his dim view of India as a Western puppet. Kaul predicted that the Soviet Union would bring in factories, goods, development experience, technical expertise, and more. He foresaw political benefits for India from tilting to the Soviet side as well as for Moscow from gaining India's goodwill at a time when the United States was "picking off one weak or compliant Asian State after another and hitching it to its wagon."<sup>5</sup>

India's fledgling foreign policy was unlike any other. According to Menon, India aimed to serve peace, "but in a truer and nobler sense," because for Mahatma Gandhi's generation "peace through non-violence is not merely a matter of necessity but a matter of conscience."<sup>6</sup> Nehru believed India to be

3. Andreas Hilger, "The Soviet Union and India: The Years of Late Stalinism," in Andreas Hilger et al., eds., *Indo-Soviet Relations: New Russian and German Evidence* (Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security, 2009), <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id?56154>; and "Documents: The Stalin Years, 1945–1951," in Hilger et al., eds., *Indo-Soviet Relations*.

4. The other foreigner, also Indian, was Saiffudin Kitchlew, the head of the Soviet front organization known as the All India Peace Council. See K. P. S. Menon, *The Flying Troika* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 26–32; and Beam to Secretary of State, 19 February 1953, in *FRUS*, 1952–1954, Vol. 8, pp. 1078–1079.

5. K. P. S. Menon to R. K. Nehru, 30 April 1954, in Ministry of External Affairs, D/3042/Europe, NAI.

6. K. P. S. Menon, Speech at Indian Defence Staff College, 1949, in K. P. S. Menon Collection, Speeches and Writings, File 35, NMML.

uniquely capable of guiding the world away from the perilous confrontation between the superpowers. He saw both superpowers as sinful but believed that the Soviet Union was more capable of redemption because it was untainted by the evils of racism and colonialism. Together with Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, Nehru proclaimed the *Panchsheel* principles of peaceful coexistence as the foundation of India's policy of nonalignment.

Indian supporters of nonalignment saw it as realpolitik in disguise, "equal to balance of power in a bipolar world where war is impossible because of nuclear weapons." Nehru himself, however, drew a different conclusion, namely, that "the only way to influence the policies of a country is thus through some kind of friendly intercourse." Because this was an article of faith rather than a clear guide for action, India's foreign policy, as Menon admiringly stated, "rested on the intuition of one man, . . . fortunately," he believed, "based on knowledge."<sup>7</sup> Such deference to the leader was unusual even by Soviet standards.

Even as Nehru was promoting nonalignment at the 1955 Bandung conference of Third World countries, a fierce struggle was under way in Moscow over the direction of Soviet foreign policy. In pushing a strategy of "peaceful coexistence," Khrushchev was trying to reverse recent Soviet setbacks in Europe by opening a "second front" of the Cold War in Asia. His rapprochement with India reflected that calculation.<sup>8</sup>

The two countries were being drawn together not only by their status as relative newcomers to the Western-dominated international system but also by their leaders' craving for respect. Nehru, in particular, yearned for recognition that "India makes a difference and cannot be ignored." The Soviet Union, as a recognized superpower, could hardly be ignored, but Khrushchev and other intrinsically insecure Soviet leaders still needed "a major, high-profile, developing country like India [that would] be unabashedly friendly. It made a difference to their self-esteem and the perception of others."<sup>9</sup>

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7. K. Subrahmanyam, interview by Surjit Mansingh, 6 January 2008; Nehru's Note on Conversations with Khrushchev, 20 December 1955, in SDC, Subject File 17, NMML; *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2nd Series (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2002), Vol. 32, p. 365; and K. P. S. Menon, *Many Worlds* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 271.

8. For archival documents cited here, see "Documents," in Surjit Mansingh, Roland Popp, Anna Locher, and Shana Goldberg, eds., *Indo-Soviet Relations in the Nehru Years: The View from India, 1949–1961* (Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security, 2009), <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&cid?96318>; and "Documents: The Khrushchev Years, 1954–1966," in Hilger et al., eds., *Indo-Soviet Relations*. For an introduction to these documents, see Surjit Mansingh, "Indo-Soviet Relations in the Nehru Years: The View from India, 1949–1961," in Mansingh, Popp, Locher, and Goldberg, eds., *Indo-Soviet Relations in the Nehru Years*; and Andreas Hilger, "The Soviet Union and India: The Khrushchev Era and Its Aftermath until 1966," in Hilger et al., eds., *Indo-Soviet Relations*, <http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&cid?56154>.

9. Nehru, Note on Conversations with Khrushchev, 20 December 1955, in SDC, Subject File 17, NMML; and Ambassador A. K. Damodaran, interview by Surjit Mansingh, 26 December 2007.

Moscow's favorable response to Indian overtures led to Nehru's July 1955 visit to the Soviet Union, reciprocated later that year by Khrushchev and the figurehead Soviet premier, Nikolai Bulganin. According to Menon, the sight of Nehru had "a visible effect on the Soviet leaders. . . . He came, saw, and conquered." According to Khrushchev, it had no such effect: "We talked, but our previous attitude toward Nehru [as a British lackey] did not basically change." "What did we know about India?" Khrushchev later reminisced. "Our knowledge of India was, to be honest, not only superficial but simply primitive."<sup>10</sup>

The same may be said about Nehru and his traveling companions with regard to the Soviet Union. Narayana Pillai, secretary general of the Indian Foreign Ministry, found there no traces of racism and a political system in which the government and the party were "content to leave power to be shared between, and exercised jointly by, a few outstanding men at the top," whose "informality and camaraderie" he compared favorably with the habits of India's democracy. After Pillai returned, he gathered the group's collective impressions in a confidential print for the benefit of Foreign Ministry personnel.<sup>11</sup>

These impressions prefigured those of a whole generation of Indian envoys to the Soviet capital, who succumbed to the allure of their country of assignment. When Menon ended his tour of duty, he emphasized to his eager successor, Subimal Dutt, "how susceptible [Soviet leaders] are to kindness and how much they esteem men of integrity and goodwill." The most prominent of the Indian envoys, Triloki N. Kaul, confessed to "unabashed love" for the USSR. Kaul's 1991 book on Indian-Soviet relations, dedicated "to the friendly Soviet people with faith in their future," appeared just as the Soviet state was about to disappear.<sup>12</sup>

Khrushchev, with his Marxist upbringing, was better equipped than his Indian hosts to see behind the façade. What impressed him in India was not so much the royal welcome its government extended to the Soviet visitors as

10. K. P. S. Menon, *The Flying Troika* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 18, 110; and Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Vospominaniya: Vremya, lyudi, vlast'* [Memoirs: Time, People, Power], 4 vols. (Moscow: Moskovskie novosti, 1999), Vol. 3, pp. 320, 317.

11. "The Prime Minister's Visit to the Soviet Union and Other Countries (June–July 1955)," pp. 87–88, 91, in SDC, Subject File 16, June–July 1955, NMML. See also, Ashok Kapur, "Indian Diplomacy," in Ashok Kapur, ed., *Diplomatic Ideas and Practices of Asian States* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1990), pp. 27–41.

12. Dutt, Notes for Meeting with Soviet Chargé d'Affaires, June 1960, in SDC, Subject File 23, 1960, NMML; Menon to Dutt, 30 October 1960, in SDC, Subject File 23, 1960, NMML; "The Rediff Interview: T. N. Kaul," *Rediff on the Net*, 23 December 1998, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/dec/23kaul.htm>; and T. N. Kaul, *Stalin to Gorbachev and Beyond* (New Delhi: Lancer, 1991).

the contrast between the life of its elite and the “unimaginable misery” of its people. If his initial knowledge of the country had been superficial, he learned fast. He saw a long way to socialist India but was reassured by Nehru’s anti-colonialism and socialist disposition.<sup>13</sup>

The record of Nehru’s conversations with Khrushchev in December 1955 makes painful reading. When the Indian prime minister politely raised the issue of the troublesome Indian Communist Party, he was told that the Soviet Union “did not have information about the Communist Parties in other countries.” After a desultory discussion, the two statesmen congratulated each other on their frankness and parted in high spirits. Although short on substance, the results were sufficient to encourage Khrushchev’s hopes that he could use India to move the “correlation of forces” in the struggle with the United States decisively in Soviet favor.<sup>14</sup>

### **Khrushchev the “Time Server”**

At issue were the two anti-Soviet alliances the West was trying to build in Asia with the help of Pakistan, the Baghdad Pact and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). In March 1956, Khrushchev sent his shrewdest aide, Anastas Mikoyan, to New Delhi. Having stopped in Pakistan en route, Mikoyan in New Delhi warned Nehru that the Pakistani government intended to use the pacts in its dispute with India about Kashmir. Mikoyan assured Nehru of Soviet support. Nehru described his country’s relations with Pakistan as “somewhat peculiar” and then volunteered a detailed account of his recent confidential talks about the pacts with U.S. and British leaders. He repeated his mantra that “the proper policy was to cultivate friendly relations with all countries,” before joining Mikoyan in confidently—and correctly—predicting that both pacts would soon collapse anyway.<sup>15</sup>

Other than showing different personalities, the budding partnership did not yet amount to much, but it started to acquire more substance after India pleased Moscow by refusing to vote for the United Nations (UN) resolution condemning the USSR’s suppression of the Hungarian uprising in November

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13. Khrushchev, *Vospominaniya*, Vol. 3, pp. 321–337.

14. “Record of Nehru’s Conversation with Khrushchev and Bulganin, 12 December 1955,” in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 2nd Series (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 2003), Vol. 31, pp. 334–345.

15. Notes on Mikoyan-Nehru Conversations, 26–28 March 1956, in SDC, Subject File 19, 1956, NMML. Extracts of the conversations are reproduced in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 32, pp. 397–401.

1956. The vote, cast by Nehru's ostentatiously pro-Soviet protégé Krishna Menon and fiercely criticized in the Indian press, may have been triggered by the prime minister's alarm at diplomatic reports suggesting that the Hungarians hoped to provoke war to bring them liberation, as indeed some of them apparently did. Later on, Nehru vented his outrage—if only on paper—at the Soviet-backed Hungarian regime's execution of Hungary's defeated leader, Imre Nagy. Perplexed by "these amazingly foolish steps," he predicted in a private letter that Moscow would find it difficult "to outlive this black mark." He was wrong; Soviet relations with India did not suffer.<sup>16</sup>

The benefit Moscow derived from India's forbearance was largely symbolic and was reciprocated in kind by the removal of a disparaging entry about Gandhi from *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. India's benefit from Soviet friendship until then had been mainly economic and symbolic—a giant steel mill and other icons of Soviet-style industrialization donated by Khrushchev. Soviet aid to India lagged behind that to Indonesia and Egypt—the main targets of Khrushchev's arms diplomacy—but he was trying to expand it.

When Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Georgii Zhukov came to India in 1957, he almost spoiled his reception on board an Indian warship by pompously asking his host, Admiral Ram D. Katari, why the Indian government would want to buy an aircraft carrier from Britain. "He virtually impaled me against the centre-line capstan," the admiral later recalled.<sup>17</sup> Despite initial resistance by the Anglophile Indian military, India soon became a voracious consumer of Soviet military hardware. The reason for this striking development was the simultaneous disintegration of both Soviet and Indian relations with the PRC.

Moscow's ties with Beijing started to sour in 1958, when Khrushchev's proposal for a joint submarine fleet with China was angrily rejected by the PRC leader, Mao Zedong. The process accelerated after the abrupt cancellation the next year of Soviet assistance to the Chinese nuclear program in advance of Khrushchev's summit with President Dwight D. Eisenhower—a summit intended to prove that U.S.-Soviet peaceful coexistence was working. Relations between India and China also began to deteriorate because of a dispute over the delimitation of their common border, poorly charted since colonial times. The dispute became militarized after Tibet's rebellion against Chinese rule in March 1959 and the Indian decision to give asylum to the Tibetan religious leader, the Dalai Lama.

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16. Charles H. Heimsath and Surjit Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1971), p. 427; and Nehru to Menon, 28 June 1958, in SDC, Subject File 20, June 1958, NMML.

17. R. D. Katari, *A Sailor Remembers* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982), p. 83.



China thus began to cast a shadow over relations between Moscow and New Delhi, both of which had invested a good deal in their friendship with the PRC. If Khrushchev was partly to blame for the USSR's rift with Beijing, the Sino-Indian conflict placed him in an unenviable position. As incidents along the border multiplied, with each side vying for Soviet support, he tried to temporize. In April 1959 he reassured Menon that Soviet-Indian relations were "so good that one can hardly wish them better." However, when India's ambassador to Beijing tried to explain to his incredulous Soviet colleague that Indian support for the Tibetan cause was religious rather than political in nature, the latter advised his superiors to back China. Moscow led the Chinese to believe that they would enjoy Soviet support, but did not say so openly. The Soviet media, despite keeping silent about India's connection with the Tibetan rebellion, irritated Beijing by publicizing Western criticism of China's mistreatment of the Tibetans.<sup>18</sup>

Not only had the relationship with India brought the Soviet Union no tangible advantages in its competition with the West, but it also embroiled Khrushchev against his wishes in India's conflict with China, a conflict for which Moscow was obviously unprepared. After a skirmish on the Sino-Indian border in August 1959 produced the first casualties, the Soviet envoy to New Delhi, Ivan Benediktov, did not question his Chinese counterpart's insinuation that Washington had been trying to play off India against the PRC and the Soviet Union. Through party channels, however, Soviet leaders informed the PRC that they considered China responsible for the incident, only to follow with a public statement amounting to a declaration of neutrality in a quarrel between friends. At the same time, the Soviet Union gratified India by extending it a \$375 million line of credit for nonmilitary purchases.<sup>19</sup>

The Chinese leaders claimed that the Soviet Union "deliberately took sides with India," accusing it of "accommodation and compromise on important matters of principle." The reference was to the divergence between Khrushchev's strategy of peaceful coexistence, which envisaged India as an ally in the competition with the West, and Mao's strategy of "international class struggle," which classified India as an enemy. The ideological dispute came to be intertwined with the border dispute as Mao escalated the struggle by en-

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18. Menon, *The Flying Troika*, p. 235; Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 141–142; and Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2006), p. 91.

19. Soviet Record of Benediktov-Fu Conversation, 29 August 1959, in NSArchive; Chen, "The Tibetan Rebellion," p. 93; and Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, p. 45.



gaging in personal attacks on Nehru, calling him “half-man, half-devil,” among other epithets.<sup>20</sup>

India was one of the factors that widened the Sino-Soviet rift at Khrushchev’s confrontational meeting with Chinese leaders in October 1959 after his return from the United States, where he had consorted with another devil:

*Khrushchev:* We may say that Nehru is a bourgeois statesman. But we know about it. If Nehru leaves, who would be better? . . . We believe that the events in Tibet are the fault of the Communist Party of China, not Nehru’s fault.

*Mao:* No, this is Nehru’s fault . . .

*Khrushchev:* Why did you have to kill people on the border with India?

*Mao:* They attacked us first. . . .

*Zhou:* Whose data do you trust more—Indian or ours? . . .

*Khrushchev:* Comrade Zhou Enlai. You have been Minister of Foreign Affairs . . . for many years and know better than I how one can resolve disputed issues without spilling blood.<sup>21</sup>

After a testy discussion about the merits of the USSR’s and China’s respective strategies, in which India served as the testing ground, Mao trumped Khrushchev by labeling him a “time server.”<sup>22</sup> This was a fair description of Khrushchev’s opportunism in dealing with the Indians, who had the misguided notion of an inviolable Indo-Soviet friendship irrespective of what happened in the world. Following another border clash on 21 October, in which the Chinese indisputably killed advancing Indians, Nehru reaffirmed his faith in Soviet backing by telling the Indian parliament that there was not “any country in the world which is more anxious for peace than the Soviet Union,” reproachfully contrasting the USSR’s friendly attitude with China’s hostility.<sup>23</sup>

Nehru had reason to be disillusioned with China, whose enmity exposed the fallacy of nonalignment as he understood it, but he kept his illusions about Soviet amity. Khrushchev likewise had not abandoned his illusion that the Soviet Union’s relationship with India could make a difference in the broader competition with the United States. But what ultimately shaped the

20. John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 71–72; and Mikhail Y. Prozumenshchikov, “The Sino-Indian Conflict, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1962: New Evidence from the Russian Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 8–9 (1996–1997), pp. 251–257.

21. “Record of Khrushchev-Mao Conversation, 2 October 1959,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 12–13 (Fall 2001), p. 266.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

23. Gupi K. Arora, interview by Surjit Mansingh, 4 January 2008. The quotation from Nehru is in Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India and Vietnam*, p. 34

relationship was the coming military confrontation between India and China, which neither Nehru nor Khrushchev anticipated or desired.

## **Khrushchev and His “Peaceful” Friends**

The 1962 Indian-Chinese war remains a more sensitive issue in India than in China because of India's humiliating defeat. More is therefore known about what happened in the highest places from Chinese, as well as Soviet, sources than from Indian sources. It is not even known how much Nehru was in charge or to what extent his singularly unqualified defense minister, Krishna Menon, may have called the shots as the showdown was approaching. It is clear enough who was in charge in Beijing, but this does not mean that the war was predetermined. In view of the uncertainty, how did Khrushchev's relations with China affect those with India?<sup>24</sup>

After the row with Khrushchev, Mao was eager to mend fences. He let Moscow know that “we never, under any circumstances, will move beyond the Himalayas. That is completely ruled out. This is an argument over inconsequential pieces of territory.” Dwelling on what united rather than divided China and the Soviet Union, he envisaged spreading “the influence of China and the socialist camp on the Indian people.” To coordinate policy, Zhou Enlai in January 1960 implored Khrushchev not to raise the issue of the border and possible Soviet mediation at his forthcoming meeting with Nehru, lest he prejudice Beijing's proposal to negotiate mutually acceptable swaps of territory that Zhou was going to present in New Delhi in April.<sup>25</sup>

Zhou did not have to worry. Nehru himself promptly raised the border issue with Khrushchev, requesting not Soviet mediation but outright support and offering “to supply any material which you may like to have.” Relieved, Khrushchev commended India and China, both “friendly and peace-loving countries,” for “not asking for mediation.” Perhaps because of Moscow's growing economic assistance, Nehru apparently assumed that Soviet political

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24. “Chinese Foreign Ministry Declassifies India-China War Documents,” *ZeeNews*, 13 June 2009, <http://www.zeenews.com/nation/2008-11-15/483716news.html>. On Nehru's papers in custody of his family, see Claude Arpi, “Nehru's or India's Papers?” *The Pioneer* [New Delhi], 3 May 2004. Extensive, if selective, new Chinese evidence was introduced at the “India and the Cold War, 1947–1991: Archival Perspectives and Historical Revisions” conference, Washington, DC, 18–19 May 2009, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/India%20Conference%20Program\\_final.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/India%20Conference%20Program_final.pdf).

25. “Summary of Mao-Antonov Conversation, 14 October 1959, dated 21 October 1959,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 56–58; and Chen, “The Tibetan Rebellion,” p. 97. See also, “Record of Zhou Enlai–Tsedenbal Conversation, 26 December 1962,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 8–9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 265–269.

assistance would also be available if needed. He thus was strengthened in his conviction that India did not need to negotiate. After Zhou delivered his proposal, he returned home empty-handed. As one of Nehru's acerbic Indian critics put it, the Indian prime minister "counseled *talks* but . . . would not deign to *negotiate*."<sup>26</sup>

The Soviet Union preferred to keep its hands off. When Soviet academics proposed a conference to study the interaction between Indian and Chinese civilizations, the leaders of the CPSU were not interested. This was just as well, for Nehru was as little inspired by Buddhism as Mao by Confucianism. China's policy was driven by its murky party politics and what Khrushchev called Mao's "sick fantasy." In 1960 the PRC's policy nevertheless became more conciliatory during Mao's temporary eclipse after the disastrous impact of his Great Leap Forward.<sup>27</sup>

Even as late as 1962, the prevailing view among China's ruling elite was that of former ambassador to Moscow Wang Jiaxiang, who insisted that friendship with India could and should be preserved and that there was "no objective basis at all for any conflict." This view prevailed despite the initiation in November 1961 of Nehru's ill-advised "forward policy" of planting military outposts in the disputed territory on the preposterous assumption that the Chinese would not dare to dislodge them by force "even if they were in a position to do so."<sup>28</sup>

Irrespective of what had been happening at the border, the shift in Chinese policy did not occur until Mao reasserted his authority at a secretive party conference at Beidaihe in August 1962. By endorsing Mao's view that "class struggle is fiercely under way in the international arena," the conference gave him a green light to demonstrate that his revolutionary strategy in foreign policy was superior to Soviet strategy. The expanding Indian probes offered him the opportunity to use India as a testing ground. On 6 October he

26. Record of Khrushchev-Nehru Conversation, 13 February 1960, in SDC, Subject File 24, 1960, NMML; and A. G. Noorani, "Indian Thinking on Foreign Policy," *Frontline*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (January 2001), <http://www.hindu.com/fline/fl1801/18010950.htm>. On the failed talks, see British journalist Neville Maxwell's *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), which was informed by the Indian government's classified "Henderson Brooks Report." See "Report on Sino-Indian War Still Classified," *The Hindu* (Chennai), 21 March 2009, p. 4.

27. Prozumenshchikov, "The Sino-Indian Conflict," pp. 251–252; and Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 300.

28. Wang Zhongli, *Liming yu wanxia* [Daybreak and Evening Twilight] (Beijing: Publishing House of People's Liberation Army, 1986), pp. 394–395, as translated in Giri Deshingkar, "The Nehru Years Revisited," in Tan Chung, ed., *Across the Himalayan Gap: An Indian Quest for Understanding China* (New Delhi: Gyan, 1998), p. 409. The second quoted passage is from the classified official history, P. B. Sinha and A. A. Athale, *History of the Conflict with China, 1962* (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, 1992), p. xx.

decided to respond to another, widely expected Indian probe by resorting to military force, even while conceding to his intimates that “a war between China and India is truly a most unfortunate event.”<sup>29</sup>

As the confrontation was approaching, Indian officials painted themselves a rosy picture of a supportive and benevolent Soviet Union. In September 1962, Indian President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan spoke glowingly to Benediktov about Soviet foreign policy as “a beautiful example to follow” and praised “the wisdom, understanding, and great tactfulness of the Soviet government, particularly comrade Khrushchev.” Radhakrishnan was alluding to the recent agreement with the USSR to help India build a military aircraft factory and to supply MiG fighters to India—though only after having already supplied them to China.<sup>30</sup>

Khrushchev, for his part, painted another kind of rosy picture in his hopes that he could beat Mao at his own game. This is what he intended to do when he decided to install missiles secretly in Cuba to protect its revolution from the capitalist superpower, to challenge the United States in its own backyard, and to rectify the strategic nuclear imbalance. The scheme was at an advanced stage of implementation when Beijing, in a show of residual trust between the ideological rivals, notified Moscow on 8 October of China's imminent strike against India.<sup>31</sup>

Forced to choose between his two “peaceful” friends, Khrushchev left no doubt about his choice. Returning Beijing's confidence, he affirmed solidarity with China. He assured the PRC ambassador, Liu Xiao, that the Soviet Union would not side with India in the coming confrontation and offered to delay the delivery to India of the promised MiGs. Khrushchev confided in the envoy his “most cherished dream . . . to get rid of the cold current [that] is separating us.”<sup>32</sup>

It is not clear whether Khrushchev also briefed the Chinese about his Cuban adventure. However, the Chinese must have known enough about it from their own sources to show solidarity with the USSR once the scheme

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29. Niu Jun, “1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China's Foreign Policy,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 48, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 2005; Dai Chaowu, “Indian Diplomatic Policy, Relations among Big Powers and the Sino-Indian Border Conflict of 1962,” *Social Sciences in China*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 4–11; and John W. Garver, “China's Decision for War with India in 1962,” in Alastair Iain Johnson and Robert S. Ross, eds., *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 116.

30. Record of Radhakrishnan-Benediktov Conversation, 4 September 1962, in NSArchive; and Sergei Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 29–30, 256–57.

31. Garver, “China's Decision for War,” p. 120.

32. Radchenko, *Two Suns*, pp. 25–26.

started unraveling after the U.S. government's discovery of the missiles on 16 October. Before the ensuing crisis escalated on 22 October and raised the threat of a Soviet military clash with the United States, China had started its own war with India. How did the coincidence of the two developments affect Khrushchev's attitude toward India once the Chinese forced the Indians to retreat?<sup>33</sup>

## China Becomes the Common Enemy

Unlike three years earlier, this time the USSR showed no sympathy. Despite advising Beijing through diplomatic channels not to apply a "class approach" to India, Moscow ignored New Delhi's pleas for at least "moral support." In vain did the recently appointed Indian ambassador, T. N. Kaul, hint broadly and prophetically that what happened to his country might well happen to the Soviet Union on its own disputed boundary with China. On 25 October a *Pravda* article shocked New Delhi by rejecting its interpretation of the borderline and ascribing its policy, as Beijing did, to Western imperialists. Moscow went as far as providing sensitive intelligence about India to the PRC.<sup>34</sup>

Khrushchev's decision on 28 October to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba prompted Chinese accusations of a sellout. The Soviet leader defended it as a service to peace, contrasting his prudence with China's rush to war, but continued to advise India to negotiate a ceasefire on Chinese terms. Khrushchev scolded the Indians for, as he put it to the distraught Kaul, wanting to fight "at altitudes where a man's bottom freezes when he shits." The diplomat's protestations that "every inch of our soil is as sacred to us as yours is to you" failed to impress the Soviet leader, who referred to China as a brother and a big one at that.<sup>35</sup>

Only with further developments on the battlefield did Khrushchev reconsider. After India responded to the PRC's call for negotiations by launching an ill-prepared offensive on 14 November, and after the collapse of India's army left the country undefended, China unilaterally declared a ceasefire on

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 257; and Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, pp. 225–226.

34. Prozumenshchikov, "The Sino-Indian Conflict," p. 253; Records of Jaipal-Benediktov and Kaul-Benediktov Conversations, 24 October 1962, in NSArchive; and Radchenko, *Two Suns*, p. 30.

35. Dong Wang, "The Quarrelling Brothers: New Chinese Archives and a Reappraisal of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1959–1962," CWIHP Working Paper No. 49, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 2006, p. 63; and T. N. Kaul, *A Diplomat's Diary (1947–99): China, India and USA (The Tantalising Triangle)* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2000), pp. 77–78.

19 November, effective two days later. Nehru's desperate call for help to Washington on the day in-between finally moved Khrushchev to rally behind India. Four days later, Kaul received from him the promise of military assistance India wanted but no longer needed.<sup>36</sup>

Mao, who attached little value to the real estate in the Himalayas, preferred to accentuate India's humiliation by withdrawing Chinese troops to the line from which they had started. Afterward, Nehru was a broken man. Pathetically, he voiced to Benediktov his "great satisfaction" at the state of Indian-Soviet relations and praised Khrushchev for his "exemplary" handling of the Cuban missile crisis and his understanding that "Indian reactionaries" were the ones responsible for the debacle by having supposedly pushed for a military solution of the border question. Indian-Soviet relations reached their lowest point.<sup>37</sup>

Khrushchev accompanied his arms package with advice to Kaul: "Militarization always brings a heavy burden on the people, and this is particularly true for India, for which militarization would be a veritable scourge." India was nevertheless on the road to becoming a "psychologically militarized state," which it has largely remained ever since. Two years later, a shopping spree for Soviet arms by Indian Defense Minister Y. B. Chavan and President Radhakrishnan on their trip to Moscow was a preview of more to come.<sup>38</sup>

The outcome of the war belied the initial Soviet assessment that the conflict would have "no bearing on Soviet-Indian relations."<sup>39</sup> Khrushchev's turnaround during the war presaged his final break with China in 1963. That year, India's overdue strategic review identified China as its main enemy, and Soviet leaders were coming to look on the PRC in the same way. China's emergence as the common enemy of both India and the USSR thenceforth defined their relationship. Nehru, who died in May 1964, would no longer be part of it, nor would Khrushchev after his fall from power in October of that year. Two days after Khrushchev's downfall, China exploded its first nuclear bomb.

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36. Kaul, *A Diplomat's Diary*, pp. 77–78.

37. Record of Nehru-Benediktov Conversation, 12 December 1962, in NSArchive.

38. Record of Kaul-Khrushchev Conversation, 24 November 1962, in TNKP, Correspondence with J. L. Nehru, NMML; Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), p. 49; and R. D. Pradhan, *Debate to Revival: Y. B. Chavan as Defense Minister, 1962–65* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1999), pp. 211–228.

39. Report by Hungarian Embassy in Moscow, 17 January 1963, in Küm, *India Tük 1945–1963*, 11. Dobož, 00223/2, MOL.

## The Manipulator and Her Benefactors

The immediate challenge faced by Nehru's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, did not come from China but from Pakistan, with which India went to war in 1965. China, however, "added straw to the fire" by demanding that India destroy its fortifications on the border and withdraw its troops from there. To prevent another "hotbed of war" from arising, Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin undertook mediation and succeeded in brokering the Treaty of Tashkent to restore the status quo under international supervision. The treaty, though motivated by the narrow goal of preempting Western mediation, stands out as the most constructive accomplishment in the history of Soviet-Indian relations. Having restored the status quo under international supervision, the pact brought the two neighbors closest ever to a settlement of their sterile Kashmir dispute, but not close enough.<sup>40</sup>

Shastri's death on the day the treaty was signed inaugurated a new era by bringing to power Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, who, unlike her father, was a genuine realist bent on reversing the lopsided relationship with Moscow. She calculated that "India is the main country that can, in course of time, prevent further Chinese expansion. India's ability to do so, however, is crippled by her disputes with Pakistan" and that the USSR wants to proceed "without hurting the basic interests of India or openly throwing Pakistan into Western or Chinese hands. At the same time, the Soviet Union realizes that it would be even worse if India was driven into the Western bloc."<sup>41</sup>

Although influenced by her leftist private secretary and mentor, Pushottam Haksar,<sup>42</sup> Gandhi entertained no illusions about the Soviet Union or any other country, convinced that they all "were guided only by their own interests and had no obligations to other countries which did not conform to those interests." She wanted to calibrate Soviet arms sales to India and Pakistan in order to prevent the Soviet Union from "taking over management of the subcontinent." On a visit to Moscow in 1966, Gandhi received more economic aid, but Kosygin resisted her request for more arms. Impressed by her commitment to the "Indian way to socialism," however, in another year he relented, offering further assistance to modernize India's military in the vain hope of encouraging peace talks with Pakistan. Kosygin's reversal caused In-

40. Record of Ceaușescu-Brezhnev-Kosygin Meeting, 9 September 1965, in CCPC 124/1965, ANR; Memorandum by Kosygin for Soviet Politburo, 11 November 1965, in Listy 45–54, Delo 489, Opis' 30, Fond 5, RGANI; and Soviet Report on Tashkent Conference, February 1966, pp. 13–21, in A 18017, MfAA, PAAA.

41. Gandhi to Kaul, 25 September 1965, in TNKP, NMML.

42. The yet-to-be-explored Haksar papers at the Nehru Library are the single most important source on Gandhi's policy prior to Haksar's dismissal in 1974.



dian Communist leader Makineni Basavapunnaiiah to wonder “whether all this military help . . . is logical,” much less “helpful to the cause of socialism.”<sup>43</sup>

At that time, Washington's economic aid to India still exceeded Moscow's. Gandhi charmed President Lyndon B. Johnson even while lambasting his conduct of the Vietnam War and refusing to cooperate in getting Soviet help to extricate U.S. forces from the war. She figured that “the military assistance we get from the Soviet Union and the economic assistance we get from both sides are not a reflection of moods of charity of the donor countries, but are based on their appreciation of the significance and importance of India in terms of their own interests.”

She dismayed both superpowers by her opposition to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which they were trying to negotiate for their own reasons.<sup>44</sup> Moscow fumed that India's position was “the most negative of all those that opposed or have reservations” about the NPT. New Delhi justly criticized the treaty for aiming to prevent proliferation at the “horizontal level” while “the nuclear powers not only would not give up the production of atomic weapons, but would not even undertake to cease the production of those weapons . . . in the future.” India invoked the “psychological effects of the Chinese nuclear program” as justification for not wanting to “give up the option of nuclear weapons if the NPT is not a step toward total nuclear disarmament by all nations.”<sup>45</sup>

In opposing the treaty, India found an ally in the Soviet bloc. At a contentious meeting of the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee in 1965, Romanian leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej argued passionately, if disingenuously: “We have voiced our support for the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons innumerable times, but do not want it to be used by someone, even a country like India with which we have good relations, to condemn China.” By linking “the question of nonproliferation . . . with the much broader question of concluding a treaty on nuclear disarmament,” Gheorghiu-Dej not

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43. Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966–1982* (New Delhi: Sage, 1984), p. 135; Report by East German Embassy in Moscow, 23 July 1966, pp. 1–9, in C 1743/76, MfAA, PAAA; Report by Hungarian Embassy in Moscow, 1967, in Küm, India Tük 1967, 45. Doboz, 003949/3, MOL; Bulgarian Report on Gandhi-Kosygin Talks, 30 October 1967, in Record 23, File 1107, DAMFA; and Record of Conversation between Niculescu-Mizil and Basavapunnaiiah, 23 October 1967, pp. 2–137, in CCFR 89/1967, ANR.

44. Record of Humphrey-Gandhi Conversation, 20 February 1966, in *FRUS, 1964–1968*, Vol. 25, pp. 575–576; and Notes by Haksar for Gandhi's Speech to Army Commanders, 18 April 1968, in P. N. Haksar Collection, NMML.

45. Report by Hungarian Embassy in Moscow, 6 October 1967, in India Tük 1967, 45. Doboz, 003949, MOL; Record of Ceaușescu-Mehta Conversation, 16 September 1966, pp. 2–6, in CCFR 77/1967, ANR; and Memorandum of McNamara–L. K. Jha Conversation, 18 April 1967 (dated 25 April 1967), in NSArchive.

only was maneuvering for Chinese backing in Romania's quest for independence from Moscow but was also trying to constrain the Soviet Union in wielding nuclear weapons.<sup>46</sup>

"If a large majority of countries did not sign the treaty, then the nuclear powers would be forced to take into consideration their opinions," Gheorghiu-Dej's successor, Nicolae Ceaușescu, told the Indian ambassador. The Romanian and Indian positions converged in demanding that the NPT include steps toward the elimination of nuclear arsenals, guarantees for all countries against nuclear attack, no limitations on peaceful use of nuclear energy, and a system of controls based on equality and noninterference. When Gandhi met Ceaușescu, she assured him that India had "no intention to produce nuclear weapons for the time being"; nor would it entertain such an intention "in the future."<sup>47</sup>

The Soviet Union was more inclined than the United States to blame China for India's recalcitrance regarding the NPT. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara cautioned his Indian interlocutors against "overreacting to the Chinese threat," noting that "India's military forces are already too large." The USSR, itself prone to overreact, reasoned that "one cannot support China, but one must not support bourgeois nationalism in India either." Soviet leaders regarded arms shipments as a way to thwart "Indian reactionaries who want the nuclear bomb to make the country give up its policy of non-alignment and take further steps to accomplish chauvinistic, expansionist goals."<sup>48</sup>

Faced with Indian demands for a security guarantee, the Soviet Union tried unsuccessfully to push for a UN Security Council guarantee, for which the responsibility would be shared with the United States as a fellow permanent member of the council. In the end, India did not join the NPT when it was signed on 1 July 1968, and it has declined to do so ever since. Yet India managed to keep its options open and remain in Soviet good graces—no mean accomplishment. When Gandhi wrote to Kosygin in mid-July 1968 in protest at Moscow's continued arms sales to Pakistan, the Soviet premier

46. Record of Meeting of Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee, 20 January 1965, in KC PZPR, 2662/152-90, AAN.

47. Record of Ceaușescu-Mehta Conversation, 16 September 1967, pp. 2–6, in CCFR 77/1967, ANR; and Record of Ceaușescu-Gandhi Conversation, 30 October 1967, pp. 1–19, in CCFR 88/1967, ANR.

48. Memorandum of McNamara-Jha Conversation, 18 April 1967 (dated 25 April 1967), in NSArchive; Memorandum of Ponomarev-Axen Conversation, 30 September 1967, in DY 30/IV A 2/20, No. 638, SAPMO; Report by Hungarian Embassy in Moscow 1967, in Küm India Tük 1967, 44. Dobož, 60-10, 001059/2, MOL; and Report by Hungarian Embassy in Moscow 1967, in Küm India Tük 1967, 44. Dobož, 60-10, 00505, MOL.

rushed to assure her that “every country in the world could envy Soviet-Indian relations.”<sup>49</sup>

A month later, India, true to form, refused to vote for the UN resolution condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. “A government cannot be swept away by emotions,” Gandhi explained to the parliament. At the same time, she signaled her readiness to open border talks with China without preconditions. Such was the background of Moscow’s offer of a bilateral treaty, first extended informally by Kosygin in February 1969 to substitute for the guarantee and then broached formally by Defense Minister Marshal Andrei Grechko during his visit to India a month later.<sup>50</sup>

Grechko’s visit coincided with the outbreak of hostilities on the Soviet border with China that brought the two Communist giants to the brink of war. When in Delhi two months later, Kosygin assured the Indians that “if your great country is threatened at its borders, then we will be there to help you.” But actually it was the USSR itself that felt threatened, so much so that its leaders started making threats of a preventive strike against Beijing’s nuclear facilities. In June, Brezhnev linked the prospective Soviet-Indian treaty with a master plan for a collective security system in Asia, intended to contain China.<sup>51</sup>

Announced at a Moscow conference of the world’s Communist parties boycotted by China, the project followed the model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was originally conceived by the Soviet Union to position itself as the guarantor of security in Europe. Gandhi deftly sidetracked Moscow’s overtures by emphasizing her preference for a less intrusive system of guarantees through the UN or by agreements between great powers and smaller Asian states. Her foreign minister, Dinesh Singh, attempted to “graft” the different schemes while arguing that economic cooperation should be enough. Once tension with China subsided, Soviet leaders seemed content to move more slowly but stressed that “it was important to launch the idea” and that “it is up to the Asian states to express their opinion.” Subsequently, the USSR kept pushing for a pact with India against the “unpredictable enemy from the North.”<sup>52</sup>

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49. Record of Gromyko-Rusk Conversation, 23 June 1967, in NSArchive; and Hemen Ray, *The Enduring Friendship: Soviet-Indian Relations in Mrs. Gandhi’s Days* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1989), p. 15.

50. Mansingh, *India’s Search for Power*, pp. 139, 244; and A. G. Noorani, *Brezhnev Plan for Asian Security: Russia in Asia* (Bombay: Jaico, 1975), pp. 58–59.

51. Interview with A. K. Damodaran by Hari Dev Sharma, 14 September 2000, in NMML; and Eberhard Schneider, *Nach der KSZE das KSA? Kollektives Sicherheitssystem als Grundmuster sowjetischer Asienpolitik* [After the CSCE a CSA? Collective Security System as a Basic Pattern of Soviet Policy in Asia] (Cologne: Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien, 1976).

52. Noorani, *Brezhnev Plan*, p. 76; Kripa Sridharan, *The ASEAN Region in India’s Foreign Policy* (Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth, 1996), pp. 65, 78; Memorandum of Elsner-Fomin Conversation,

## The Friendship Treaty and Its Rewards

The Soviet-Indian pact was expedited once the Sino-American rapprochement provided a stimulus. Three weeks after the announcement of President Richard Nixon's forthcoming trip to Beijing, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko rushed to Delhi to sign the pact on 7 August. The timing suggested Indian more than Soviet management. If for Moscow the perception of a threat from Beijing was paramount, the chief factor for Gandhi was the civil war in Pakistan, which promised to dispose of India's principal adversary by splitting it in two parts.

Until the papers of the Indian prime minister's office become available, Indira Gandhi's true motives can only be speculated about. The well-informed Krishnaswamy Subrahmanyam, at the time director of the Indian government's main think tank, claims that "we signed the treaty . . . mainly to convince our own bureaucracy and armed forces that national security would be protected." Similarly unpersuasive was the explanation Moscow gave its allies after the treaty was signed, citing a catalogue of advantages it brought both parties and conspicuously stressing its supposed conformity with long-term Soviet policy.<sup>53</sup>

The document was much more an Indian than a Soviet accomplishment. Moscow trumpeted the "friendship" treaty, with its platitudes about the "lofty ideal of equality of all peoples and nations, . . . universal peace and security" as a step toward the realization of Brezhnev's collective security project. More pertinent to what was happening on the ground, however, was the signatories' pledge not to assist "any third party that engages in armed conflict with the other" and their commitment to "mutual consultations." This clause allowed Gandhi to do what she wanted in connection with the impending breakup of Pakistan precipitated by the Pakistani army's atrocities and the flood of refugees to India.<sup>54</sup>

Subrahmanyam describes the treaty as a deterrent to China once the Soviet Union supported India. Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger, concurs in his retrospective assessment that "with the treaty, Moscow

24 September 1969, pp. 74 ff., in C 995/71, MfAA, PAAA; and Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 455.

53. Subrahmanyam, interview; and Soviet Appraisal of the Treaty, 1971, pp. 17–24, in C 1743/76, MfAA, PAAA. The persisting lack of inside evidence is highlighted in Hari Vasudevan, "New Delhi, 1971: Der indisch-sowjetische Vertrag und seine Bedeutung" [The Soviet-Indian Treaty and Its Significance], in Andreas Hilger, ed., *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), pp. 181–200.

54. "Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation," 9 August 1971, in Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India*, pp. 299–302. See also, Robert Litwak, "The Soviet Union in India's Security Perspective," in Timothy George, Robert Litwak, and Sharam Chubin, eds., *Security in Southern Asia*, Vol. 2, *India and the Great Powers* (Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1984), pp. 69–109.

threw a lighted match into a powder keg.” But declassified Soviet documents show that Soviet leaders were dismayed by the prospect of Pakistan’s dismemberment and the transformation of its eastern part into an Indian satellite. Moscow considered the socialist leader of the insurgency in Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibur Rajman, a “bankrupt bourgeois” and hoped that the state of Bangladesh he was trying to establish with Indian assistance was a “fiction” and a “farce.” The Soviet Union did not want to make any “decisions that correspond to the wishes of certain nationalist elements in India but neglect clear strategic interests of the socialist countries.”<sup>55</sup>

When Gandhi came to Moscow in September to seek support for her Bangladesh policy, Soviet leaders advised her to desist from military action, but she reportedly snapped that “we are going to do it and you have to decide whether you are our friends or not.” The arrival a month later of a high-ranking Soviet military delegation in India amid increased shipments of Soviet weaponry seemed to indicate that the Soviet authorities had decided. Perceptive U.S. analysts concluded that by “visibly demonstrating their support for India, the Soviets may [have hoped] to deter the Paks from taking any rash actions.” Brezhnev’s foreign policy adviser, Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, has claimed that Moscow wanted to make a political gesture against the U.S.-Chinese rapprochement and that Soviet leaders were stunned by the subsequent use of Soviet-supplied arms against Pakistan.<sup>56</sup>

Kissinger’s overall assessment was that “the Indians are bastards anyway. They are starting a war there.” After Gandhi’s visit to Washington in early November, known as the “dialogue of the deaf,” he and Nixon concluded that “while she was a bitch, . . . she will not be able to go home and say that the United States didn’t give her a warm reception and therefore in despair she’s got to go to war.” Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatolii F. Dobrynin, too, estimated that war was not likely. By the end of the month, however, Gromyko was not so certain. In a secret message to Warsaw Pact foreign ministers, he said that another Indo-Pakistani war would be a “terrible catastro-

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55. Subrahmanyam, interview; Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 867; and “Guidelines for Consultation with the Communist Party of East Pakistan during the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of India,” 30 September 1971, in DY 30/IV A 2/20, No. 642, SAPMO.

56. Subrahmanyam, interview; Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 243; Briefing for Nixon, 29 October 1971, in *FRUS*, 1969–1975, Vol. 11, p. 483; and A. M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva: Vospominaniya diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, pomoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, Yu. V. Andropova, K. U. Chernenko i M. S. Gorbacheva* [From Kollontai to Gorbachev: Memoirs of a Diplomat and Adviser to A.A. Gromyko and Aide to L.I. Brezhnev, Yu. V. Andropov, K.U. Chernenko, and M.S. Gorbachev] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1994), pp. 218–220.

phe” that must not be allowed “under any circumstances.” Two days later, Pakistan’s rash action provoked it.<sup>57</sup>

Once Pakistan, in a telling reversal of the 1962 Indian-Chinese scenario, foolishly provoked a war for which India had well prepared itself and which it quickly started winning with its Soviet-made weapons, the USSR lost little time in backing the winner. Moscow’s veto paralyzed the UN Security Council until India’s victory was complete. Kissinger made the futile gesture of dispatching the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* to the war zone, presumably with nuclear weapons on board, to deter India and its Soviet ally from destroying what was left of Pakistan, which they did not intend to do anyway.<sup>58</sup>

As a result, the image of the United States as a treacherous bully and the Soviet Union as a friend in times of need became engrained in Indian minds. According to the Indian version of events, once New Delhi notified Moscow of the intruder and invoked the friendship treaty, Soviet submarines promptly began trailing U.S. warships, the *Enterprise* hastily turned around, and India was saved. The “realist” Indian strategist Bharat Karnad has argued that because of the treaty, India “plugged into the vast Russian military machine” and thus “for all intents and purposes, came under Soviet nuclear protection.” However, because the extent of Moscow’s commitment was by no means obvious, he and other advocates of India’s own nuclear deterrent have also cited the alleged U.S. threat as a rationalization.<sup>59</sup>

In an apparent bout of approaching senility, Brezhnev reportedly considered supplying India with nuclear weapons technology but was talked out of the idea by saner heads around him. No Soviet leader in his right mind would have done so after Khrushchev’s experience with China and Cuba. Nor would Gandhi necessarily have wanted the help. Sensing that nuclear weapons “only bring danger where there was none before,” she fought the Bangladesh War to make her country the dominant power in its region, balancing China by conventional means.<sup>60</sup>

Soviet leaders exulted that for “the first time in history the United States and China have been defeated together,” but the true winner was Gandhi. She

57. Record of Nixon-Kissinger-Haldeman Conversation, 5 November 1971, Doc. 150, in FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. E7, at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/d150>; “Summary of Memorandum by Kissinger on Conversation with Dobrynin on 18 November 1971,” 25 November 1971, in FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. 11, p. 525; and Speech by Gromyko, 1 December 1971, in DY 30/5235, SAPMO.

58. U.S. policy is explained in Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), pp. 295–322.

59. Bharat Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy* (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 2002), pp. 288–289, 303.

60. Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva*, p. 242; and George Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 114.

had gotten from the Soviet Union what she wanted, and they had to accept what she had done. A secondary winner was East Germany, which obtained its vaunted diplomatic recognition by India as a reward for recognizing Bangladesh before the Soviet Union did. In doing so at the USSR's behest, East Germany advanced in its quest for recognition as Moscow's most valuable proxy in the Third World.<sup>61</sup>

The East Germans did their part by trying to convince Indian officials that "strengthening peace in Asia" required "using European experiences." Gandhi's success nourished Soviet hopes of her receptiveness to Brezhnev's pet project for collective security. But she saw the 1971 bilateral Soviet-Egyptian treaty as a more attractive model, better suited to maximize Indian and minimize Soviet influence in the region. When Brezhnev promoted his project in a speech to the Indian parliament in 1973, the response was tepid, despite his garnishing the proposal with a fifteen-year agreement to provide India with massive economic assistance on generous terms.<sup>62</sup>

Brezhnev envisaged India as the Soviet Union's privileged strategic partner in the Third World. This meant, as a Soviet diplomat in New Delhi explained to an East German colleague, "creating conditions that would make India the socialist countries' bridgehead in Asia," an effort to which, he emphasized, they must all contribute. "We have to give what we have," the East German jotted down the assignment. The expectation was that eventually only "Soviet machines and equipment and no items from capitalist countries would be produced in India."<sup>63</sup>

Gandhi did not allow India to become a Soviet bridgehead despite her willingness to take advantage of Moscow's largesse. She made "the Indian act of taking Soviet support while giving little tangible in return [into] one of the more outstanding feats of the contemporary international scene."<sup>64</sup> The support allowed her to achieve her main goal of making India the region's hegemonic power. By comparison, Brezhnev never achieved his main goal of establishing a Soviet-dominated security system in Asia. Moreover, the European security model turned out differently from what he expected once the

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61. Soviet diplomat at UN quoted in *The Hindu*, 13 December 1971, cited in Barry Buzan et al., *South Asian Insecurity and the Great Powers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 225; and Johannes H. Voigt, *Die Indienpolitik der DDR: Von den Anfängen bis zur Anerkennung (1952–1972)* [The GDR's India Policy: From the Beginning to Recognition] (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), pp. 652–675.

62. Notes for and Minutes of Winzer-Singh Conversation, 26 May 1973, pp. 1–99, in C 801/75, MfAA, PAAA; Sridharan, *The ASEAN Region in India's Foreign Policy*, p. 67; and Report on Brezhnev's Visit to India, 17 December 1973, pp. 39–45, in C 1743/76, MfAA, PAAA.

63. Memorandum of Kwaretzke-Gordoplov Conversation, 7 February 1974, pp. 46–53, in C 1743/76, MfAA, PAAA.

64. Thomas Perry Thornton, "The Security of South Asia: Analysis and Speculation," in Stephen P. Cohen, ed., *The Security of South Asia: American and Asian Perspectives* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 218.



“Helsinki process,” with its promotion of human rights, started undermining Soviet security. How well did Gandhi’s achievement serve Indian security?

## Indira Gandhi and India Embattled

Pakistan’s humiliation in the Bangladesh War did not make India more secure. This was not because of a rising threat from Pakistan, but because of rising pressure from Gandhi’s own strategic establishment and nuclear scientists, who induced Gandhi to authorize India’s May 1974 “peaceful” nuclear test. Subrahmanyam, who as “the country’s leading security guru” wanted India to get the bomb because China had it, has remembered that Soviet leaders “sent their congratulations.”<sup>65</sup> Before they did, however, they sought to prevent it, according to briefings they gave their Eastern European allies.

Having been notified by India in advance about the test, the Soviet Union exerted “strong pressure to forestall it” but relented after concluding that the threat of a right-wing turn in Indian politics required support for Gandhi to “mitigate her conflict with nationalist forces.” In the end, Moscow reluctantly accepted the *fait accompli* and the official claim that the blast had been peaceful but considered it “unfavorable to us” because of the bad example it set to other countries.<sup>66</sup>

Soviet analysts conceded that the test diminished China’s stature but did not believe it could affect the military balance in Asia as a whole. What it did affect was the regional balance in South Asia, prompting Pakistan to start its own nuclear weapons program and appoint as its director the notorious Abdul Quadeer Khan, with deplorable consequences for nuclear proliferation. The chain of events could have been avoided if Pakistan’s proposal for a nuclear-free zone in the region, which complemented a similar one by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), had been acted upon in the aftermath of the Indian test.<sup>67</sup>

When India’s new foreign minister, Sardar Singh, visited the Soviet Union in September 1974, he described the Pakistani and ASEAN proposals

65. B. G. Verghese, “The Legend That Is K. Subrahmanyam,” *Rediff.com*, 5 October 2004, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2004/oct/05spec1.htm>; and Subrahmanyam, interview.

66. Report by Hungary’s Permanent Mission to UN in Geneva, 23 May 1974, in India Tük 1974, 50. Dobož, 60–406, 003439, MOL; Report by Hungary’s Permanent Mission to UN in Geneva, 3 September 1974, in India Tük 1974, 50. Dobož, 60–406, 003434/8, MOL.

67. S. R. Valluri, “Lest We Forget: The Futility and Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons for India,” in Raju G. C. Thomas and Amit Gupta, eds., *India’s Nuclear Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2000), pp. 263–273; and Shafiah Fifi Muhibat, *Third World States in the Midst of the Cold War: A Study of ASEAN’s Decision to Establish the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality* (Jakarta: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2004).

as directed against his country, but he was prepared to discuss them. Gromyko reserved judgment, but once China voiced support for Pakistan's proposal, Moscow joined New Delhi in opposing it unless China agreed to become part of the zone, thus killing the project. Afterward, Pakistan kept looking for help to build its own bomb but did not find help until China promised it during Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's visit to Beijing in June 1976. The promise was Mao's parting shot four months before he died, and his successors, for whatever bad reasons, felt compelled to honor it before they joined the NPT in 1992.<sup>68</sup>

The 1974–1976 period was critical in the transformation of the security environment in South Asia and of Soviet-Indian relations. Unlike the U.S.-Soviet process of arms control, developments in South Asia had the effect of multiplying military conflicts, raising the prospect that the region would become the world's first nuclear battlefield. At the same time, Soviet-Indian relations became increasingly disconnected from the East-West rivalry and instead influenced by India's worsening domestic strife, which was difficult for Moscow to understand in Marxist terms.

Soviet officials had long been worried about the split within India's ruling Congress Party and what they saw as a struggle between "urban and agrarian bourgeoisie." They worried about the danger of a military coup, Chilean style. Concerned about Gandhi's ability to govern "with left slogans impossible to implement," Soviet diplomats solicited advice from Indian Communists who, however, were themselves splitting into pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese factions, the latter voicing the alarming idea that a Chinese invasion would be good to "revolutionize Indian masses."<sup>69</sup>

The Soviet Union welcomed Gandhi's decision in 1975 to impose emergency rule, which seemed indicative of convergence between two authoritarian regimes. In a remarkable personal letter to none other than East German leader Erich Honecker, Gandhi emulated Honecker in posing as a champion of democracy. After professing belief that India must be ruled by democratic means, she asked rhetorical questions to justify why it should not be: "Should small groups with the backing of big finance, press and foreign friends, but

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68. Memorandum of Bauer-Nikitin Conversation, 18 September 1974 (dated 23 September 1974), pp. 54–59, in C 1743/76, MfAA, PAAA; Memorandum of Sindermann-Rao Conversation, 30 November 1974, in DY 30/J IV 2/2J, 5578, SAPMO; Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, p. 114; and R. Jeffrey Smith and Joby Warrick, "A Nuclear Power's Act of Proliferation," *Washington Post*, 13 November 2009, pp. A1, A14.

69. Summary of Briefing by Maltsev on 28 June 1977, 4 July 1977, in DY 30/IV B 2/20, No. 443, SAPMO; Memorandum of Norden-Krishnan Conversation on 1 October 1975, 15 October 1975, in DY 30/J IV 2/2J, 6030, SAPMO; and Memorandum of Thun-Fomin Conversation, 24 December 1969, pp. 69 ff. in C 995/71, MfAA, PAAA.

without support of the masses, be allowed to force their ideas upon the majority? . . . Will there be democracy, when India is weakened?”<sup>70</sup>

In subsequent years, the Soviet Union showered India with goods and commodities. In 1976, Brezhnev extended Gandhi a lavish welcome but did not change her view that “India is indispensable for [the] Soviet Union in Asia, not its client.” Moscow continued to worry about her politics, particularly the growing prominence of her authoritarian-minded but pro-Western son Sanjay as her anointed successor. Once she was voted out of office in 1977, Soviet officials decried her “abuse of power,” “destruction of democratic norms,” and negligence in keeping “left-wing and democratic forces” united.<sup>71</sup>

The new coalition government of Morarji Desai, who had little in common with Indira Gandhi, signaled a desire for rapprochement with both Washington and Beijing. Desai on his first visit to Moscow treated Soviet leaders condescendingly, “with his characteristic sense of moral superiority.” When Brezhnev and his colleagues made the sacrifice of serving tea instead of liquor, he brusquely told them he had stopped drinking tea forty years ago. But they found him a “realistically thinking and open partner in negotiations,” underscoring the extent to which cooperation with Moscow had become orthodoxy for any Indian government. The flow of Soviet military hardware reached its peak during Desai’s premiership.<sup>72</sup>

## “Maneuvering and Compromising”

Indira Gandhi’s return to power in 1980 nevertheless elated the Kremlin, especially after Sanjay’s premature death eliminated her likely successor. Moscow hailed the “congruence of fundamental interests” between the two countries as “an objective factor of global significance.” As Soviet-Chinese relations went from bad to worse, the Soviet Union saw India as a “counterweight” to China. Soviet and Indian interests coincided in the Indian Ocean, designated by both sides as a “zone of peace” in an effort to eject from there the U.S. air and naval base on the island of Diego Garcia, which had been reinforced in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution in Iran.<sup>73</sup>

70. Gandhi to Honecker, 11 July 1975, pp. 24 ff. in DY 30/2448, SAPMO.

71. Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India*, p. 297; and Soviet Memorandum on Internal Situation in India, 6 April 1977, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO.

72. T. P. Sreenivasan, “When Morarji Snubbed the Soviets,” *Rediff India Abroad*, 11 January 2006, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/jan/11tps.htm>; and Memorandum of Firiubin-Bierbach Conversation, 11 April 1979, pp. 19–23, in C 5058, MFAA, PAAA.

73. Report by East German Embassy in Moscow, 28 January 1980, in DY 30/IV B 2/20, No. 443,

Gandhi wanted India to be seen as indispensable for the global balance but not used as anybody's balancer. She condoned a Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean but successfully resisted pressure for the establishment of Soviet military facilities in India. The Indians responded to the initiative of the post-Mao leadership in Beijing to resume discussions about the border issue despite Moscow's warnings that China's "smiles diplomacy" was a ruse to make its territorial gains permanent through "gradual normalization."<sup>74</sup>

During Indira Gandhi's second premiership, the Soviet Union was better positioned to impose its strategic preferences on her rather than vice versa—not because it had gotten stronger but because she was getting weaker. According to the then Indian ambassador to Moscow Inder Gujral, the Soviet Union "never put any pressure on us." Yet, when the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan intruded into an area of India's prime strategic interest, New Delhi parroted the Soviet line that Afghanistan had been invaded at the invitation of its government. Even after the truth about the invasion was confirmed by Soviet sources 25 years later, Gujral still whitewashed the aggression by attributing it to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, which, he claimed, had wanted to ensnare Moscow in a Vietnam-like situation.<sup>75</sup>

Gandhi privately criticized the Soviet action but expressed understanding. "Why should they listen?" she confided to an interviewer. "No power listens when it is a matter of national interest." When Gromyko came to Delhi in February 1980 to defend the invasion, he found her sympathetic. Later that year, Moscow extended to India a \$1.6 billion 15-year credit for military purchases, making India one of the world's largest importer of arms, 85 percent of which were Soviet. As the war in Afghanistan dragged on, Soviet leaders learned to appreciate her "realistic and balanced response."<sup>76</sup>

In Indira Gandhi's last years, her manipulative skills seemed to be failing her. She yielded to Soviet pressure to recognize the Cambodian government installed by the Vietnamese army with Soviet backing even though the move strained her relations with China. Her quest for better relations with Washington strained ties with Moscow, which was leery of her "maneuvering and compromising." India's former satellite Bangladesh turned against it, eliciting Gandhi's fears that the Chinese army might be invited to intervene in that

SAPMO; and Memorandum of Hain-Surovtsev Conversation, 20 June 1979, pp. 9–14, in C 5058, MfAA, PAAA.

74. Information on Moscow Visit by President Neelam S. Reddy on 29 September–7 October 1980, 14 October 1980, in DY 30/IV B 2/20, No. 275, SAPMO.

75. I. K. Gujral, "India's Response to the Soviet Military Intervention in Afghanistan (1979–80)," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January–March 2006), pp. 124, 129.

76. Mansingh, *India's Search for Power*, 158; Information on Gromyko's Visit to India in February 1980, 10 March 1980, in DY 30/IV B 2/20, No. 443, SAPMO; and Information on Gandhi's Visit to the Soviet Union, 30 September 1982, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO.

country's bloody internal strife. In 1984, another round of fighting erupted with Pakistan over a Kashmir glacier took place on the world's highest battlefield.<sup>77</sup>

The precipitous deterioration of India's security environment paralleled the Soviet Union's incipient terminal decline. In September 1982, Gandhi came to Moscow amid signs of Brezhnev's impending demise. This was when he reportedly welcomed her as Mrs. Thatcher because his prompt said so. "Both positive and negative aspects of Indian foreign policy" were discussed, and "an intensive exchange of opinion" ensued, with the two parties more or less "in agreement, or else close to each other," which "under the circumstances," Moscow considered "of special importance."<sup>78</sup>

Two months later, Brezhnev was dead, and Gandhi declared three days of mourning in memory of a friend who "showed a consistent understanding of our problems and stood by us in our moments of need." He was "a very emotional man [who] gave us whatever we wanted," another former Indian ambassador to Moscow, Krishnan Raghunath, has pertinently observed. Gandhi never met with Brezhnev's successors, and India's relationship with Moscow would never be the same.<sup>79</sup>

Gandhi tried to revive the Nonaligned Movement under Indian leadership by returning it to the "principles of 1961"—the principles compromised when the movement brought in spurious nonaligned countries such as the Soviet clients Cuba and Vietnam. In a reaffirmation of the ideals of her father, she attempted to refocus the movement on the campaign against the nuclear arms race, targeting both superpowers. Moscow put a pleasant face on the nonaligned summit she organized in Delhi in 1983, but the new Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, saw a trap in her proposal to bring the world's heads of state together at the UN, fearing that President Ronald Reagan might steal the show.<sup>80</sup>

When the Cold War still appeared to be a lasting situation, the Indian-

77. Information on Gandhi's Visit to the Soviet Union, 30 September 1982, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO; and Report by Hungarian Embassy in Delhi, 30 July 1981, in India Tük 1981, 64. Dobož, 005011, MOL.

78. Bruce F. Adams, *Tiny Revolutions in Russia: Twentieth-Century Soviet and Russian History in Anecdotes* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 116; Thomas Perry Thornton, "The USSR and Asia in 1982: The End of the Brezhnev Era," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1983), pp. 11–25; and Soviet Information on Gandhi's Visit, 30 September 1982, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO.

79. Thakur and Thayer, *Soviet Relations with India*, p. 275; and Interview with Raghunath by Surjit Mansingh, 4 January 2008.

80. Information for SED Politburo, 4 April 1983, in DY 30/ 11645, SAPMO; Soviet Communist Party Central Committee to Communist Parties of Non-socialist Countries, 14 April 1983, in DY 30/ 14006, SAPMO; and Memorandum of Andropov-Honecker Conversation on 4 May 1983, 7 May 1983, in J IV/827, SAPMO.

Soviet partnership could plausibly be regarded as a success,<sup>81</sup> but the appearance was deceptive. India's militarization with Soviet help had failed to make the country more secure, and Gandhi's quest for regional domination fueled more hostility. At a time of incipient globalization, the Soviet model of economic development hitched India more tightly to the obsolescent Soviet wagon. In 1984, when Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards dramatized her inability to handle her domestic adversaries as astutely as she did the men in Moscow, the partnership was in decline. The partnership received an unexpected boost when her inexperienced other son, Rajiv, reluctantly succeeded her as prime minister and when another improbable leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, came to power in Moscow shortly thereafter.

## The Unlikely Visionaries

The change of guard introduced an atypical period in relations between the two countries. The two principals developed a personal relationship different from that between any of their predecessors in both their closeness and their common aspirations. "It is just amazing how much we have in common," Rajiv marveled. "Also on international issues," Gorbachev affirmed.<sup>82</sup> Another thing they had in common, however, was that they were both poor politicians, facing internal problems that were beyond them. But more remarkable is how long their partnership lasted before it started unraveling.

The new Soviet leaders initially feared that India might "be moved by the United States and China in directions unfavorable to the Soviet Union." Rajiv had been following his mother's footsteps by encouraging private enterprise and trade with the West and by sponsoring in January 1985 a declaration of six nonaligned countries opposing an arms race in outer space and nuclear testing. The Indian-sponsored declaration proclaimed that "progress in disarmament can only be achieved with an informed public applying strong pressure on Governments," including the Soviet government. Rajiv's first talks in Moscow five months later were described as merely "businesslike" and "open."<sup>83</sup>

Gorbachev likewise marched in the footsteps of his predecessors by agreeing to provide India with more military hardware and a billion-ruble loan.

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81. As Duncan argued in *The Soviet Union and India*.

82. Record of Gandhi-Gorbachev Meeting, 18 November 1988, in NSArchive.

83. Soviet Information on Gandhi's Visit to Moscow, 4 June 1985, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO; and "Delhi Declaration on Nuclear Arms Race," 1 January 1985, *UN Chronicle*, available at [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/\\_/print/PrintArticle.aspx?id:3581826](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/_/print/PrintArticle.aspx?id:3581826).

But the Soviet leader's "new thinking" was already showing in his disarmament initiatives, which were compatible with Rajiv's. The concept of a "common European house," originally designed by Gorbachev to rally West European support against U.S. opposition, paralleled his call for an "all-Asia forum" during Rajiv's visit. In a departure from Brezhnev's failed hegemonic scheme, the forum was to serve "united efforts of Asian governments to develop comprehensive approach to security in Asia." The proposed arrangement was no longer directed against China, but, like the planned European house, it excluded the United States.<sup>84</sup>

A year later, India had not yet responded to the forum proposal, but Gorbachev had reason to be gratified, if puzzled, by Rajiv's defense of Soviet policy in Afghanistan, from which Gorbachev was trying to extricate himself. Gandhi sounded more Soviet than Gorbachev in suggesting that "it would be worse for all developing countries of the region if imperialism succeeded in strangling the revolution in Afghanistan." It is hard to tell whether Rajiv was pretending rather than believing or whether he simply did not know better.<sup>85</sup>

When talking to Soviet dignitaries, Rajiv railed against the United States, accusing it of waging "economic warfare" to destabilize India. But when dealing with U.S. officials, he "handled himself calmly and with dignity," a pleasant change, they thought, "from the preachy, arrogant Indian stereotype." He made "an excellent impression" in Washington, awakening there hopes for "a new start" in India's relations with the United States. The new start, however, took place in relations with the Soviet Union, spurred not by Gandhi but by Gorbachev.<sup>86</sup>

Once Gorbachev's disarmament initiatives met with a favorable response in Europe, he elaborated his Asian concept in his July 1987 Vladivostok speech. In his memoirs, where he tends to present himself as more prescient than he was, he denied that he had expected, as Brezhnev did, that European developments could be replicated in Asia. But what he outlined in the speech came close to an "Asian Helsinki" in its emphasis on confidence-building and disarmament. He challenged the United States to start withdrawing its military forces from Asia, offering to reciprocate. When the United States de-

84. Leszek Buszyński, *Gorbachev and Southeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 60–61. See also, unpublished account based on Soviet archival documents by Sergey Radchenko, "Gorbachev and Asia, 1986–1991," presented at conference, "Nexus Years in the Cold War," McGill University, 16–17 October 2009. Radchenko also has a forthcoming book on the subject.

85. Information on Gorbachev–Li Peng Meeting, 22–23 December 1985, in DY 30/J IV 2/2A, 2844–2846, SAPMO.

86. Report by East German Embassy in Moscow, 30 May 1986, in DY 30/12382, SAPMO; Memorandum of Axen–R. Gandhi Conversation on 23 December 1985, 7 January 1986, in DY 30/J IV 2/2A, 2846, SAPMO; and Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941–1991* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1992), pp. 403–404.



clined, Gorbachev started withdrawing Soviet forces unilaterally from the Chinese borders, as he did in Eastern Europe in December 1988.<sup>87</sup>

Although reconciliation with China took priority, Gorbachev's larger goal was a "global" strategic partnership with India as "a model of interstate relations for the future." He went to Delhi in November 1986 "to extend Soviet initiatives to Asia [and] gain Indian cooperation in the campaign for banning nuclear weapons." Gorbachev wanted to gain India's support for the Warsaw Pact's appeal for conventional force reductions and otherwise "activate Indian policy to bring it closer to Soviet positions." By then, the Soviet leader had become reassured that Rajiv, having "freed himself from his earlier illusions about rapprochement with the United States, was now leaning toward the Soviet Union amid ongoing re-evaluation of India's priorities."<sup>88</sup>

As usual, the Soviet Union was prepared to pay more than it received. The cash-strapped Soviet government extended to India a credit exceeding all previous loans combined and followed it with an ambitious program of long-term cooperation in science and technology. Gorbachev's speech to the Indian parliament elicited euphoria, and the adoption of a joint "Declaration of Principles of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free and Non-Violent World" at the end of his visit was celebrated as "a logical combination of the most important Marxist values, Leninist foreign policy . . . and the great Indian tradition of culture and history." More to the point, as a perceptive Soviet commentator observed, it "by far exceeded the limits of bilateral Soviet-Indian relations."<sup>89</sup>

The declaration amounted to a sweeping repudiation of the principles of power politics that had been the foundation of Soviet-Indian partnership. The statement conveyed a new understanding of security, positing its indivisibility and defining it expansively. The document urged setting target dates for the elimination of nuclear arsenals and basing security on international covenants rather than deterrence. To ensure "harmonious development of the individual," it called on governments to address such security threats as food scarcity, population growth, illiteracy, and communal violence. By including threats to the air and the oceans as the "common heritage of mankind," it addressed environmental security as well.<sup>90</sup>

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87. Mikhail Gorbachev, *On My Country and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 197; and Ramesh Thakur and Carlyle A. Thayer, *The Soviet Union as an Asian Pacific Power: Implications of Gorbachev's 1986 Vladivostok Initiative* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 93–112.

88. Soviet Information on Gorbachev's Visit to India, 18 December 1986, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO.

89. Shri Nath Sahai, *The Delhi Declaration, Cardinal of Indo-Soviet Relations: A Bibliographical Study* (New Delhi: Mittal, 1990), p. 1; and Linda Racioppi, *Soviet Policy towards South Asia since 1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 166. The commentator was scientist Leonid I. Sedov.

90. "Declaration of Principles of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free and Non-Violent World," 27 November 1986; and Kaul, *A Diplomat's Diary*, pp. 228–231.

Gorbachev showed that he was serious by advocating in his speech an intrusive role for international organizations, particularly the UN—a radical departure from previous Soviet thinking. Despite Gorbachev's rapturous reception, however, he made no progress toward recruiting India as a strategic partner in pursuit of a new international order. Realizing that the problem was China—"an obsession" in India—he conceived of a "triangular" relationship with both of them. Rajiv "seemed to applaud the idea," but, when reminded of the border problem, he mumbled that "it seems as if it were settled, but we did not become friends." Gorbachev lamented that one would need to "knock them head to head" but did not get discouraged.<sup>91</sup>

An admirer of Nehru, Gorbachev became infatuated with India much as Nehru had been with the Soviet Union. In welcoming the Indian president Ramaswamy Venkataraman in July 1988, he waxed lyrical about

the formidable accomplishment [of] two nations in different parts of the world, with over a billion population, diverse ethnic makeup, highly original spiritual traditions, very different customs, habits, way of life, [each with its] own special role in their parts of world and in international politics, . . . so combining their political, spiritual, and intellectual traits as to create a common platform and unique common creed, thus morally and politically enriching the contemporary world.<sup>92</sup>

"I have in mind the Delhi Declaration," he explained.

Rajiv appeared as serious as Gorbachev in following up their declaration with his 1988 "Action Plan" for the stage-by-stage elimination of nuclear weapons over 25 years—another impressive document now nearing its deadline. He sounded sincere in his dismissal of "the view that 'terror,' balanced or otherwise, would stabilize anything" and of nuclear deterrence as the "ultimate expression of the philosophy of terrorism." Gandhi rightly saw "the root causes of global insecurity far below the calculus of military parity." Unlike Gorbachev, however, he did not translate words into deeds.<sup>93</sup>

In trying to reassure the Western adversary, Gorbachev in 1987 reversed the Soviet strategy in Europe from offensive to defensive and, over the resis-

91. See the text of Gorbachev's speech in *Pravda*, 28 November 1986, p. 1, Record of CPSU Politburo Session, 4 December 1986, reproduced in Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works], Vol. 5 (Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2008), p. 276; and "Record of CPSU Politburo Session, 24 November 1988," in Anatolii S. Chernyaev et al., eds., *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS: Po zapisiyam Anatoliya Chernyaeva, Vadima Medvedeva, Georgiya Shakhnazarova* [In the CPSU CC Politburo: From the Notes of Anatolyi Cheryaev, Vadim Medvedev, and Georgii Shakhnazarov] (Moscow: ALBB, 2006), p. 421.

92. Notes for Meeting with Venkataraman, 8 July 1987, in NSArchive.

93. "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," Speech by Gandhi, 9 June 1988, [www.indianembassy.org/policy/Disarmament/disarm15.htm](http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/Disarmament/disarm15.htm). Quotations are from Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb*, p. 264. See also Sergio Duarte, *Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons* (Delhi: Centre for Strategic and International Studies and Indian Council for World Affairs, 2008).

tance of his military, started to reorganize the Soviet army accordingly. That same year, Gandhi approved a series of maneuvers by his military designed to test what India's adversaries—Pakistan and China—might do in another war. In so doing, he came close to provoking one. Gorbachev started reversing the arms race in accordance with his conviction, shared with Ronald Reagan, that nuclear weapons were both dangerous and useless and should eventually be eliminated. Rajiv, having proclaimed his Action Plan, secretly authorized the production of nuclear weapons in continuity with the belief of his strategic establishment that the weapons were crucial to India's security.

Rajiv's motives are not likely to be clarified any time soon. The establishment luminary Bharat Karnad has credited him with a clever ploy of advancing a "deliberately ambitious" plan to put the "big powers . . . on the defensive." More plausible is the explanation by the prime minister's chief policy adviser, Gopi Arora, that the Action Plan was simply "not followed up because the Ministry of External Affairs had no heart in it. It was not a serious move because India wanted nuclear weapons." Soviet leaders had come to suspect this as early as 1986. In 1988, an East German party delegation returned from Delhi with the assessment that the Indian government "aims to create appropriate conditions for capitalist development, and therefore supports disarmament, but, at the same time, wants to keep India's nuclear options open to preserve its dominance in the region."<sup>94</sup>

## Partnership Unraveling

Rajiv was more constrained by India's dysfunctional democracy than Gorbachev was by the still functioning Soviet autocracy. After returning from India, Gorbachev received from his aide Anatolii Chernyaev an alarming analysis of India's political, economic, and social crisis. Indian Communists concluded that Rajiv, having "failed in domestic policy, was looking for an alliance with reactionary forces." When Gorbachev called Rajiv's attention to those forces, the Indian leader blamed his country's "deficit of ideology," ascribing this shortcoming to the pro-Western bias of India's free media and its society's "pragmatic approach to life."<sup>95</sup>

By 1988, Gorbachev had moved from confrontation to cooperation with

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94. Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security*, pp. 353–354; Arora, interview; "Record of CPSU Politburo Session, 4 December 1986," in Chernyaev et al., eds., *V Politbyuro Tsk KPSS*, p. 116; and Information on Visit by East German Party Delegation on 17–25 February 1988, 1 March 1988, in DY 30/6264, SAPMO.

95. Memorandum by Chernyaev, 26 June 1987, in NSArchive; and Record of Gandhi-Gorbachev Conversation, 2 July 1987, in NSArchive.

the United States. In his speech in Krasnoyarsk in September, he proposed to form with the United States another triangle, including China but not India—a “working committee” of the three Asian-Pacific members of the UN Security Council that would negotiate restrictions on naval activities in the area. The speech rankled Indian officials because of the emphasis on China. Gorbachev’s final visit to India in November 1988 was described by Arora as “his way of thanking India, but nothing more.” In the official Soviet estimate, however, the trip was “exceptionally constructive and productive.”<sup>96</sup>

“Whatever changes in either country and around them, [our] cooperation will continue,” Gorbachev told Rajiv when they met. They agreed to move to a higher stage of cooperation in such fields as information technology, biotechnology, and genetic engineering and reaffirmed their commitment to “demilitarization, democratization, and humanization of international relations” in a “reliable comprehensive global system of international security.” The two leaders called for “international control of new technologies that can potentially be used for military purposes” and a “global strategy of environmental protection” under UN auspices.

All of this remained in the realm of intentions, but the agreement to coordinate policy toward China bore results. On separate (but complementary rather than competitive) missions to Beijing in 1989 to seek reconciliation, Rajiv and Gorbachev were satisfied with what they accomplished—so much so that they agreed to keep quiet about what happened to demonstrators at Tiananmen Square shortly after Gorbachev left town.<sup>97</sup> If the Chinese threat thus no longer cemented the Moscow-Delhi partnership, neither did the quest for rapprochement with China drive them apart. The partnership started unraveling because of the turn Gorbachev’s policies took in relation to Europe, although the personal rapport between the two leaders continued to hold.

In a landmark speech to the UN in December 1988, Gorbachev affirmed his commitment to the Helsinki principles, which he subsequently followed in allowing the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe. In trying to make his country qualify as a bona fide inhabitant of the “common European house,” he was inspired by European ideas of cooperative security, which he promoted more actively in Asia. Significantly, his revised concept of an Asian forum aimed to bring in the United States as “indispensable,” and although there was “still no clarity about the geographical scope . . .

96. Speech of M.S. Gorbachev, *Pravda*, 17 September 1988, p. 3. The other comments are from Arora, interview; and Soviet Memorandum on Gandhi-Gorbachev Meeting, 5 December 1988, in DY 30/13941, SAPMO. See also, “Record of CPSU Politburo Meeting, 24 November 1988,” in Chernyaev et al., eds., *V Politbyuro TsK KPSS*, pp. 420–422.

97. Record of Gandhi-Gorbachev Conversation, 15 July 1989, in NSArchive.

no interested state was to be excluded.”<sup>98</sup> The concept would eventually materialize in ASEAN's Regional Forum.

In 1989, the Soviet Union started to establish a “system of contacts” with ASEAN, scheduling a series of high-level meetings with representatives of its member-states from Singapore to the Philippines, and endorsed the organization's 1971 project for a nuclear-free zone, which India had opposed. Rajiv agreed with Gorbachev that the time had come for such regional groupings as ASEAN or the European Community and lauded them as expressions of “man's desire to belong to human community,” but he did no more.<sup>99</sup>

Moscow saw its hands tied by “its persisting consideration of Indian interests” and considered its relations with other Asian countries “underdeveloped” because of conflicts “connected with Indian policy, which continues to be aimed at a dominant role in the region.” Soviet leaders vainly hoped that India would reconsider its “still existing extreme positions,” such as its refusal to sign the NPT.<sup>100</sup> As Indira Gandhi used to think of Soviet policy, Gorbachev now concluded that

In India, we are faced with a great-power policy. At the same time, [they] understand that they cannot implement it without us and that we do not want ‘to give them the leading role’. . . . India wants for everyone to ‘rotate’ around it. . . . It wants to have a ‘patrimony’ with vassals in the region. That's why it is not reacting well to our initiatives about naval disarmament in the Indian Ocean.<sup>101</sup>

When Gorbachev and Rajiv met for the final time in July 1989 in Moscow, the Soviet Union was on the verge of losing its vassal regimes in Eastern Europe and Rajiv his premiership. Neither of them expected what was awaiting them. Rajiv, having recently shifted to left-wing populism, was overconfident about his political future, and Gorbachev was unduly confident about the East European states' future loyalty. They were also remarkably confident that their partnership would last.

Despite disappointing results, the two leaders agreed to expand economic cooperation, including Indian assistance to the Soviet Union in banking and international business. As a follow-up to the Delhi declaration, they decided to prepare at their next meeting a joint document on Asian security, with an emphasis on economic and ecological dimensions. Rajiv endorsed Gorbachev's concept of an Asian forum as well as the triangle with China. On closer

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98. Report by East German Embassy in Moscow, 17 April 1989, in DY 30/12382, SAPMO.

99. Memorandum on Current Aspects of Soviet Relations with ASEAN Countries, 9 February 1988, in DY 30/12382, SAPMO; and Record of Gandhi-Gorbachev Meeting, 18 November 1988.

100. Report by East German Embassy in Moscow, 7 April 1989, in DY 30/12382, SAPMO.

101. Record of CPSU Politburo Session, 24 November 1988, p. 421.

reading, however, the record of their conversation shows cracks in the partnership.<sup>102</sup>

Rajiv was at pains to emphasize common “principles of our philosophy,” but Gorbachev was evasive when asked to support India’s policy toward its neighbors. Rajiv was also “conspicuously” critical of the United States, decrying Washington’s “feudal, colonialist approach” and lashing out at Americans for caring “little about deeper things,” such as not appreciating that “the most important is the heart, not the mind.” Gorbachev conceded that Europeans “sense better the spirit of the times,” alluding to the slowdown of arms control negotiations after the end of the Reagan administration, but he foresaw for the United States an “active and full role in building the European house.”<sup>103</sup>

In one of his better insights, Rajiv predicted “a very difficult period once [the Americans] realize that everything in the world is changing, and they cannot resist it. And if they don’t grasp that it is necessary to change the existing line, we all will be in trouble.” He and Gorbachev were in trouble, however, not because of anything the United States did or did not do but because they were unable to manage their internal problems. Rajiv was voted out of power the month the Berlin Wall came down, presaging Gorbachev’s own fall from power and the downfall of the Soviet Union.

When Rajiv’s successor, Vishwanath Singh, came to Moscow in July 1990 to seek reassurance, Gorbachev tried to offer it but was no longer in a position to deliver. He promised to renew the 1971 friendship treaty, which was due for renewal in August 1991. This turned out to be the month the Soviet military and security apparatus attempted to overthrow Gorbachev. Shortly before the Soviet Union expired, in one of its last gasps, the Soviet delegate voted in the UN for a Pakistani-sponsored resolution favoring the nuclear-free zone that India continued to oppose, thus indicating how much the Indian-Soviet partnership had eroded.<sup>104</sup>

The partnership between the two visionaries had not been an aberration. Their visions were not utopian but premature. Gorbachev and Rajiv not so

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102. Record of Gandhi-Gorbachev Meeting, 15 July 1989. See also, Devendra Kaushik, “India, USSR and East Europe: Emerging Trends under Rajiv Gandhi,” in Verinder Grover, ed., *International Relations and Foreign Policy of India*, Vol. 7, *USSR and India’s Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep, 1992), pp. 435–446.

103. Soviet Information on Gorbachev-Gandhi Conversation, 25 July 1989, in DY 30/2389, pp. 279–283, SAPMO.

104. Peter J. S. Duncan, “The Soviet-Indian Model: Continuity in a Changing Environment,” in Margot Light, ed., *Troubled Friendships: Moscow’s Third World Ventures* (London: British Academic Press, 1993), p. 41; C. Raja Mohan, “Indo-Soviet Relations: The Return of Common Sense,” *The Hindu*, 8 August 1990, p. 7; and Jyotsna Bakshi, “Russian Policy towards South Asia,” *Strategic Analysis* (New Delhi), Vol. 23, No. 8 (November 1999), pp. 1367–1398.

much failed as were failed by their countries, both of which were not credible champions of the ideas their leaders espoused. The unexpected turn in Indian-Soviet relations under their stewardship was nevertheless a reminder that things can always change, even unexpectedly. In view of that experience, how did their successors heed Rajiv's advice "to change the existing line [when] the world is changing"?

## The Aftermath

Nowhere was the demise of the Soviet Union more bemoaned than in India. The way the Cold War ended—with the Soviet state not defending its vital interests while it still could before it imploded—contravened the realist paradigm, of which India had been the "quintessential follower."<sup>105</sup> India has nevertheless remained a devotee of realism, as has Russia, despite initial indications to the contrary.

The collapse of Soviet support precipitated a severe economic crisis in India. "Had India realized earlier that the cold war had ended," its foreign minister Jaswant Singh commented in retrospect, "it would not have been left behind." In particular, India had fallen behind the thriving states of Southeast Asia that had not followed the Soviet model of development and had established close economic ties with the West. Reluctant to accept that the Soviet Union was doomed, India lost opportunities to establish lucrative ties with the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and to recruit unemployed Russian scientists. Deprived of Soviet largesse, India had to endure the indignity of seeking help from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.<sup>106</sup>

The initiation in 1992 of Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's new "Look East" policy along with reforms that propelled India's economic takeoff was an overdue response to the crisis. Starting to look at its neighbors as partners rather than vassals, New Delhi developed relations with ASEAN. Both Rao and Gorbachev's successor, Boris Yeltsin, showed they understood that times had changed when they reaffirmed the 1971 friendship treaty while deleting its anti-American and anti-Chinese clauses. Rao also understood where the times were moving by concluding with China an agreement on the

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105. G. V. C. Naidu, "India and East Asian Multilateralism," in Narendra S. Sisodia and Sreeradha Datta, eds., *Changing Security Dynamics in Southeast Asia* (New Delhi: Magnum Books, 2008), p. 356.

106. Jerome M. Conley, *Indo-Russian Military and Nuclear Cooperation: Lessons and Options for U.S. Policy in South Asia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), p. 89; and S. Krishnaswamy, "Need to Remove Constraints," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July–September 2007), pp. 16–23.



“Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control,” emphasizing “mutual and equal security.”<sup>107</sup>

India tried to save what was left of its Russian trade—mostly arms trade—to ensure a continued supply of weapons and spare parts for its military, an indication that the country’s insecurity persisted. So did Russia’s, as suggested by the joint “Declaration on the Protection of Interests of Pluralistic States,” adopted during Yeltsin’s next visit. Both he and Rao lost power amid continued political and ethnic unrest.<sup>108</sup>

The rise to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (the Hindu nationalist party) opened the door to the testing in 1998 of India’s first “real” nuclear bomb, hailed by Defense Minister George Fernandes as the advent of “new realism of India’s threat perception.” He meant the old realism—the notion that the bomb was needed to protect against China, as in Brezhnev’s days. Unlike then, however, Russia was no longer aligning itself with India against China. In 1998, Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov proposed an alignment with both countries, as Gorbachev had proposed in his “triangle,” but found scant interest in either country.<sup>109</sup>

In trying to reassert Russia’s great-power pretensions, Vladimir Putin championed a “strategic partnership” with India as soon as he became president. On his first visit to Delhi in 2000, he echoed Brezhnev by invoking the “congruence of long-term national and geopolitical interests.” Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee proved responsive to the call for resurrection of the former partnership, though with an emphasis on struggling against international terrorism and religious extremism.<sup>110</sup>

India’s flaunting of nuclear weapons, followed by Pakistan’s own test and another military encounter between the two countries, strained Delhi’s relations with Washington more than with Moscow. Putin, like his Soviet predecessors, accepted the *fait accompli*. In a 2002 joint declaration, he and Vajpayee pledged that neither government would “take any action which will threaten the security of each other’s country, . . . including in the sphere of military-technical cooperation.” Putin reassured India that Russia would

107. “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation,” 28 January 1993, in Kaul, *The Diplomat’s Diary*, pp. 248–251; and “Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas,” 7 September 1993, <http://www.stimson.org/southasia/?sn?sa20020114287>.

108. “Declaration on the Protection of Interests of Pluralistic States,” 30 June 1994, in Kaul, *The Diplomat’s Diary*, pp. 252–254.

109. George Fernandes, Foreword to D. R. Mankekar, *The Guilty Men of 1962* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998), p. iii; and John Cheria, “The Primakov Visit,” *Frontline*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2–15 January 1999), <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1601/16010520.htm>.

110. John Cheria, “A Strategic Partnership,” *Frontline*, Vol. 17, No. 21 (14–27 October 2000), <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1721/17210100.htm>.

not sell arms to Pakistan. Weapons sales to India went up, including advanced T-90 tanks, an aircraft carrier, and licensed production of SU-30 combat aircraft.<sup>111</sup>

Eight years later, however, the carrier was still on its way amid mutual re-priminations about the steady “nose-dive” of the defense relationship. The repayment of India’s former Soviet debts failed to stimulate trade. The two countries had agreed to move from a “buyer-seller” relationship to collaborative research and development, joint production of weapons systems, and strategic cooperation in oil and natural gas exploration, but mutual trade nonetheless remained “abysmally low.” China overtook Russia as India’s largest trading partner, showing that Russia was not in the same class as either of the two.<sup>112</sup>

When Putin came to India in 2007 as the guest of honor for the sixtieth anniversary of India’s independence, the former ambassador to Moscow Satinder K. Lambah eulogized Russia as an “anchor of certainty in a sea of strategic flux.” He named it “a lead partner for India in reconfiguration of the Asian strategic landscape” as well as in nuclear technology, and even admonished both countries not to try too hard to look for other markets. However, as India became increasingly integrated into the global market with prospects much brighter than Russia’s, and as it established an influential ethnic community in the United States, the Indian government increasingly looked to the United States as its preferred strategic partner.<sup>113</sup>

As early as 1998, Vajpayee designated the United States as India’s “natural ally” even while deploring the U.S. government’s reluctance to accommodate India’s “irreducible security needs.” The reluctance diminished once President George W. Bush, having embraced the realist creed, started moving toward a “global strategic partnership” with India by tolerating its nuclear ambitions. India was one of the few countries in which America’s popularity soared rather than plummeted during Bush’s presidency. The prominent Indian strategist C. Raha Mohan predicted confidently, if prematurely, that “a unilateral America and a revisionist India had a solid strategic fit.”<sup>114</sup>

Barack Obama’s coming to power elicited forebodings in India’s strategic

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111. Ilya Bulavinov, “Vladimir Putin Told the Indian Comrades Success of Russian Economy,” *Kommersant* (Moscow), 5 December 2002, p. 7.

112. Rajat Pandit, “After Gorshkov, Moscow-Delhi Spar over Submarine,” *Times of India*, 18 January 2008, p. 5; and Vladimir Radyuhin, “Putin Visit: Chance for Course Correction,” *The Hindu*, 23 January 2007, p. 3.

113. Satinder K. Lambah, “In a New Context,” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July–September 2007), pp. 1–7.

114. K. P. Nayar, “Vajpayee Describes India and US as Natural Allies,” *Telegraph* [Calcutta], 29 September 1998, p. 1; and C. Raja Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States, and the Global Order* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2006).

enclave, where his commitment to global nuclear disarmament qualified as a “good pastime for retired men.” “India must be wary of [his] foreign policy initiatives,” warned former ambassador to Moscow Kanwal Sibal, cautioning, with an eye on Russia, against any “geopolitical interference in [India’s] neighborhood aimed at undermining its legitimate interests.” Unsurprisingly, the advent of the new administration reawakened the call for renewal of the “time-tested strategic partnership with Russia.”<sup>115</sup>

## Conclusion

With the perspective of time, the Indian-Soviet partnership may seem *passé*. The partnership, which was a product of a unique set of circumstances in the early phase of the Cold War that are no longer relevant, was little more than a sideshow in the larger drama of the Cold War. In the post-Cold War world, dynamic India and stagnant Russia have been in a reverse relationship. Nehru’s concept of nonalignment, so important in inspiring the historic partnership, has been rendered obsolete, and Nehru himself is now widely regarded even in India as a dilettante in foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the new evidence shows the partnership’s abiding relevance to U.S.-Indian relations, India’s enduring sense of insecurity, and the remarkably retrograde thinking of the Indian strategic establishment. Exposing the “congruence of fundamental interests” as a fiction, the Soviet experience does not offer a good example to be emulated by the United States. Despite rhetoric about affinities between the world’s oldest democracy and its largest democracy, the United States has less in common with India than the Soviet Union had during the Cold War. For better or for worse, the making of foreign policy is more centralized and elitist in New Delhi than it is in Washington.

If Nehru’s foreign policy legacy has by now been largely repudiated, Indira Gandhi’s realism continues to inspire strategists in New Delhi, where Rajiv Gandhi, much like Gorbachev in Russia, is mostly remembered as naïve, or worse. India’s rise as the region’s dominant power during the Cold War, achieved with Soviet arms, continues to be admired as Indira’s lasting accomplishment. The belief in Delhi that other countries should recognize Indian preponderance as being in their best interests goes far toward explaining

115. Brahma Chellaney, “Stop Chasing Illusions,” *The Times of India*, 11 March 2008, p. 11; Kanwal Sibal, “Let’s Not Get Carried Away,” *The Times of India*, 14 November 2008, p. 13; and Rajiv Sikri, “The Limits of Indo-US partnership,” *Rediff.com*, 2 January 2007, <http://in.rediff.com/news/2007/jan/02guest2.htm>. Sikri elaborates on his *Rediff* article in *Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India’s Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Sage, 2009).

why South Asia remains the least integrated part of the world as well as the most explosive. The volatility comes not despite but because of India's nuclear policy—the most contentious issue in its otherwise cordial entente with the Soviet Union.<sup>116</sup>

In contrast to Indira's purposeful use of force, her latter-day successors' "affluence-led military buying spree" has lacked both political direction and clear strategic objectives.<sup>117</sup> It has conveyed both pervasive insecurity and a warped sense of history. As if the Cold War had not ended, the otherwise perceptive Jaswant Singh has asked rhetorically: "If deterrence works in the West, by what reasoning will it not work in India?"<sup>118</sup> Bharat Karnad, a frequent adviser to Indian governments, wrote in earnest as late as 2005 that "the present era, if it resembles any period in history, it does the 1820s." Allowing for the difference nuclear weapons make, he advised: "These weapons have tremendous utility, and provide absolute security in an international milieu characterized by the clash of aggressive ambitions and predatory instincts. They, moreover, provide a wider margin of safety to pursue regional and global interests."<sup>119</sup>

Historians can do their part to promote sanity. Yet Indian historians have been conspicuous by their invisibility, particularly in the thriving international field of Cold War studies. One can only hope that Indian scholars become inspired to do methodical research and that their government will help them by opening its Cold War-era files, thus allowing India's recent past to be studied from its own records rather than having to rely on what its former foreign friends, no matter how reliable, had to say. The results can make a key difference not only for academic reasons but also in preventing politicians from drawing wrong lessons from history.

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116. S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 127–152; and Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

117. On this point, see Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

118. Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 5 (September–October 1998), p. 43. See also, Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace," pp. 127–152.

119. Karnad, *Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security*, pp. 492, 494, 609.

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