



Hindustan- Soviet Union Treaty on 9 August 1971

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Abstract

One of the most outstanding events in contemporary world affairs was the signing of the Hindustan-Soviet twenty-year Treaty of Peace, friendships, and Co-operation in New Delhi, on 9 August, 1971. We have referred earlier to a shift in the Soviet policy in 1965 because growing Sino-Soviet difference gave Moscow an interest in curbing Chinese influence in Pakistan. Ayub Khan's visit to Moscow in April 1965 had given the first intimations of a change, soon to be reflected in the neutral attitude of Russia over the Rann of Kutch incident.¹ In the Larger conflict in September 1965, Moscow carefully maintained this equi-distance to be able to play the peace-maker at Tash-kent, in January 1966.² Kosygin went to Pakistan for the first visit by a Soviet Prime Minister³, followed by the arms contracts in mid-1968.⁴ But this flirtation proved unrewarding for despite the arms supply, Islamabad proved totally unwilling to endorse the Russian moves for a regional trade and transit treaty. Worse still, Islamabad's reaction to the subsequent Soviet proposal for collective security in Asia was almost identical to that of China, presumably under the pressures of Nixon and the Shah of Persia. This led to a re-evaluation of Soviet policy towards Pakistan, culminating in the tapering of arms supplies. These had ceased well before the Bangladesh crisis erupted in full fury in March 1971, but the fact was made known by Russia only after Podgorny, the Soviet President, had publicly intervened in favour of a political settlement to resolve the crisis.⁵

Key words: Treaty of Peace, friendships, Co-operation, maintained, unwilling, subsequent, collective, security

Revision of Soviet Policy in 1969. However, certain new developments that took place around 1969 led to some changes in the foreign policies of India and Soviet Union realized the failure of its new policy towards Pakistan. Its efforts to win over Pakistan did not bear any fruit and Pakistan continued to be a pro-China and pro-US country.⁶ In 1969, Soviet leader Kosygin went all out to assure Mrs. Indira Gandhi that the Soviet Union wanted to see a strong, prosperous, non-aligned India playing its natural role in this region and beyond, and that the Soviet Union would be happy to render any possible assistance in this regard. Arms supplies to Pakistan under the contacts signed in 1968 had come to an end by the end of the 1969-70 fiscal year.⁷

The Soviets were demonstrably pleased with the victory of Mrs. Gandhi in the 1971 parliamentary elections which the Soviet Prime Minister described as 'historic victory'.⁸ Moscow highlighted the outright rejection by the electorate of rightwing alternative and the overwhelming support for socio-economic changes. The election result was also to Moscow a



further indication and expectation of a pronounced shift to the left in the countries of the third world.⁹

Moscow's policy evolved within these perimeters but the tilt towards India was as apparent as the US tilt towards Pakistan. Moscow had already abandoned the attempt at simultaneous friendship with India and Pakistan and had decided to support India's standpoint although with as much caution and care as possible under the circumstances.

The first step in this direction was a Soviet appeal to Pakistan for moderation and for a political solution to the East Bengal problem. The Bangladesh crisis provided the crucible to the Soviet leaders to testify verily the reconsideration of its policy option.¹⁰ Within a week of the eruption of the crisis in East Pakistan, soviet President N.V. Podgorny on April 2, 1971 wrote a letter to the President of Pakistan with an insistent appeal for the adoption of the most urgent measures to stop the bloodshed and repression against the population of east Pakistan and further emphasized upon him the need to resort to methods of peaceful political settlement of the crisis.¹¹

Yahya, knowing well of the backing from China and USA, turned down Podgorny's appeal, called the East Bengal movement's supporters 'anti-national and unpatriotic elements', declared he would not countenance subversion and accused India of open and unashamed interference in order to 'inflame the situation further by encouraging and materially assisting a handful of people to create disturbances. Pakistan was determined, he told Podgorny, not to allow any country to interfere in Pakistan's internal affairs¹².

The Soviet Union's support and sympathy for the people of East Pakistan can be seen in the backdrop of its high praises for Mujibur Rahman's Awami League Party during the election prior to the eruption of the crisis. As one authority says: "one of the most influential parties is the Awami League led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It speaks for the Bengali national bourgeoisie, intellectuals and the democratically minded middle section of East Pakistan, and its main demand is for wide political and economic autonomy for East Pakistan. In the sphere of foreign policy, the League is for Pakistan's withdrawal from CENTO and SEATO and for the promotion of friendly relations with all countries.¹³ The Soviet Union found in the foreign policy outlook of Mujibur Rahman, the lessening of influence of China on Pakistan and the fruition of its evenhanded policy towards both India and Pakistan. Thus a Soviet journal appreciated the foreign policy stand of Awami League which envisaged its determination to withdraw from all military blocs and adhere to a policy of peaceful co-existence with all countries and the peaceful settlement of disputes with neighbouring countries.¹⁴

The situation in East Pakistan, which has taken a tragic turn of late and whose principal victim is the peaceful population, indicated that it is precisely a political settlement and not a military solution that would correspond to the interests of the entire Pakistani people, and to the cause of maintaining peace in this region and throughout the world."¹⁵

The flow of refugees into India inevitably brought the crisis to India's doorstep. The influx of refugees made inroads into Indian territory as well as the Indian economy. Moscow now executed very deftly, another subtle shift in India's favour. Soviet responses became definitely sympathetic to India's predicament. The plight of the refugees was dwelt upon in



detail while condemnation of Pakistan became more vehement. But the main theme remained the achievement of a peaceful solution based on a political settlement.¹⁶ The report by S. Bulantsev and V. Skosyra detailed the difficulties faced by the refugees and by India. It underlined that the inability to create peaceful conditions in East Pakistan for the safe return home of the millions of refugees was the root of the problem.¹⁷

Commenting on the cause of tension between India and Pakistan, v. Vasin noted,

“The problem of Pakistani refugees creates particular strain in the relations between the two countries. The condition of violence against the civilian population in the Eastern portion of Pakistan forced millions of residents, chiefly peasants to abandon their land, property and shelter and seek refuge in neighboring India.... they now exceed 6 million.”¹⁸

Soviet appreciation of India’s difficulties was made explicit by stating that, ‘so massive an influx of refugees’ had an extremely adverse affect on India’s already tight (strained) economy, which created additional difficulties....¹⁹ Vasin underlined Soviet desire to ‘promote good neighbourly relations’ and ‘peaceful resolution of problems’ between India and Pakistan.

Apart from the concern for the fate of 75 million of East Bengalis, the reported involvement of SEATO and CENTO in the support of Pakistan’s military regime caused a serious concern to the Soviet Union. Pakistan was reported to have invoked bloc obligation of mutual help for the use of British base on the Island on Gan in the Indian Ocean to carry its troops to East Bengal. The visit of army officers from Turkey and Iran to Pakistan was considered in connection with the crisis.²⁰

Thus the Soviet Union did not prefer to be silent in the crisis. So it came out to give statements and appeals which would expose all the nations of the world to the need of providing at least a moral support to the freedom struggle in East Pakistan.²¹ Since it was a question of self-determination and democratic aspiration of majority of the people of East Pakistan, the Soviet Union Deemed its statement to be a morale booster to the freedom fighters.²²

Hence the outcome was the signing of the Hindustan-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation on August 9, 1971.²³

Mid-1971 highlights the remarkable dynamism that Soviet diplomacy had acquired. Chinese support to Pakistan was no doubt an irritant to Soviet operational tactics. But such support was only to be expected. Moscow’s modus operandi was far too sophisticated to be taken in by the now-familiar Chinese factices of electing open Soviet support for India through Peking’s advocacy of the Pakistani cause.

Gromyko arrived in Delhi on 8 August on a five-day visit and within an hour and a held of his arrival he was closeted with Swaran Singh in serious discussions.²⁴ This reflected the Soviet Government’s concern at the tense situation prevailing then in the sub-continent.²⁵ The treaty was signed the next day. Within 24 hours of the signing of the treaty in Delhi, the Soviet Council of Ministers approved it and submitted it to the Supreme Soviet whose joint Foreign Policy Commission gave its unanimous support on 11 August. In India the President put his signature to the treaty on 11 August.²⁶

However, while the treaty was quite unlike any of the treaties of peace and friendship India had yet signed, it was very much in line with some entered into by the Soviet Union



because the Soviet has been much longer in the business. Moreover, such articles as those that dealt with the duration of the treaty 20 years or that named fields in which contacts would be developed-science, art, literature, etc.,-were so similar to comparable provisions in the recent Soviet treaties with Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary as to suggest that the treaty was indeed a document of Russian origin.²⁷

Contents of the Treaty

The whole treaty contains about 1300 words²⁸ and has 12 Articles.

ARTICLE – I

The high Contracting Parties solemnly declare that enduring peace and friendship shall prevail between the two countries and their people. Each Party shall respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other Party and refrain from interfering in the other's internal affairs. The High Contracting Parties shall continue to develop and consolidate the relations of sincere friendship, good neighbourliness and comprehensive Co-operation existing between them on the basis of the aforesaid principles as well as those of equality and mutual benefit.

ARTICLE – II

Guided by the desire to contribute in every possible way to ensure enduring peace and security of their people, the High Contracting Parties declare their determination to continue their efforts to preserve and to strengthen peace in Asia and throughout the world, to halt the arms race and to achieve general and complete disarmament, including both nuclear and conventional, under effective international control.

ARTICLE – III

Guided by their loyalty to the lofty ideal equality of all peoples and nations, irrespective of race or creed, the High Contracting Parties condemn colonialism and racialism in all forms and manifestations and reaffirm their determination to strive for their final and complete elimination.

The High Contracting Parties shall cooperate with other states to achieve these aims and to support the just aspirations of the peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial domination.

ARTICLE – IV

The Republic of India respects the Peace-loving policy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics aimed at strengthening friendship and co-operation with all nations.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics respects India's policy of non-alignment and reaffirms that this policy constitutes an important factor in the maintenance of universal peace and international security and in the lessening of tensions in the world.

ARTICLE – V

Deeply interested in ensuring universal peace and security, attaching great importance to their mutual co-operation in the international field for achieving those aims, the High Contracting Parties will maintain regular contacts with each other on major international problems affecting the interests of both the states by means of meetings and exchanges of views



between their leading statesmen, visits by official delegations and special envoys of the two Governments, and through diplomatic channels.

ARTICLE – VI

Attaching great importance to economic, scientific and technological co-operation between them, the High Contracting Parties will continue to consolidate and expand mutually advantageous and comprehensive co-operation in these fields as well as expand trade, transport and communications between them on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and most-favoured-nation treatment, subject to the existing agreements and the special arrangements with contiguous countries as specified in the Hindustan-Soviet Trade Agreement of December 26, 1970.

ARTICLE – VII

The High Contracting Parties shall promote further development of ties and contacts between them in the fields of science, art, literature, education, public health, press, radio, television cinema, tourism and sports.

ARTICLE – VIII

In accordance with the traditional friendship established between the two countries, each of the High Contracting Parties solemnly declares that it shall not enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other Party.

Each High Contracting Party undertakes to abstain from any aggression against the other Party and to prevent the use of its territory for the commission of any act which might inflict military damage on the other High Contracting Party.

ARTICLE – IX

Each High Contracting Party undertakes to abstain from providing any assistance to any third party that engages in armed conflict with the other Party. In the event of either Party being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultation in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries.

ARTICLE – X

Each High Contracting Party solemnly declares that it shall not enter into any obligation, secret or public, with one or more states, which is incompatible with this Treaty. Each High Contracting Party further declares that no obligation exists, nor shall any obligation be entered into, between itself and any other state or states, which might cause military damage to the other Party.

ARTICLE – XI

This Treaty is concluded for the duration of twenty years and will be automatically extended for each successive period of five years unless either High Contracting Party declares its desire to terminate it by giving notice to the other High Contracting Party twelve months prior to the expiration of the Treaty. The Treaty will be subject to ratification and will come into force on the date of the exchange of Instruments of Ratification which will take place in Moscow within one month of the signing of this Treaty.

ARTICLE – XII



Any difference of interpretation of any Article or Articles of this Treaty which may arise between the High Contracting Parties will be settled bilaterally by peaceful means in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

Conclusion

The Soviet-Indian Treaty of Peace, Friendship and co-operation, the treaty between the first country of victorious socialism and the highest peaceable Asian country, is a durable basis for Soviet-Indian relations. Its influence on the development of our bilateral relations can hardly be overestimated. But this treaty has an outstanding international importance also. Its favorable influence on the entire situation in Asia

The geo-strategic significance of India to the Soviet Union was the main consideration behind the signing of the treaty by which, due to the climate of changing political patterns in the international field, the Soviet Union assumed greater significance. Similarly, the immediacy of local interests involved in Bangladesh necessitated the emergence of a potential, strong India to withstand it which India seemed to have got from such a treaty²⁹.

This association was consecrated in the Treaty we concluded in 1971, providing a comprehensive framework for our relationship. Like our friendship, the Treaty is not aimed at any other country; its intention and its effect are to strengthen the force of peace and stability in the world.

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