Arms for South Asia?

By

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In connection with proposed U.S. military aid for Pakistan, though the precise form in which the proposal might be implemented is not yet known, a number of statements recently have been made, both about the value of such an arrangement and about India's foreign policy. Many of these statements, particularly those which have been in the form of side references to countries other than the U.S.A. and Pakistan, have been misleading, and if accepted, might well precipitate serious misunderstandings and dangerous consequences. It therefore may be of value to scrutinize the facts involved, to correct, wherever necessary, the picture that has been presented, and to suggest alternative approaches for the U.S.A.

I.

Nehru has been accused of being a fence-sitter in the major struggle of our time - the implication being that he is waiting to see to which side it eventually might be in his best interest to go. The fact is that Nehru has by no means followed such a policy. On the contrary, under his leadership, India has remained a member of the Commonwealth of Nations - in itself an act of positive association. Second, India has, from the very beginning, been an active member of the United Nations, where its record has included voting for the U.N. resolution naming North Korea an aggressor in June, 1950.

Most countries and objective observers would admit that, rather than fence-sitting, India consistently has attempted to find
ways and means - both inside and outside the framework of the United Nations - to reduce tensions, rather than simply to permit international strains to increase unchecked. In doing so, Nehru repeatedly has said, even as recently as December 14, 1953, "We look at every issue on its merits," which does not mean remaining "aloof," but rather playing "our part."

India worked indefatigably to formulate a truce resolution for Korea, which resolution finally proved acceptable to all countries save the Russian group. Although it was known that there was but slight chance that the latter group would adopt the resolution, India introduced it, nevertheless, feeling it right to do so.

Again, in the Western Powers Disarmament Resolution, adopted by the U.N. on November 18, 1953, it was India that originally suggested the clause calling on the main atomic powers to meet informally for the purpose of reaching agreement. It was this one clause in the resolution to which President Eisenhower referred in his U.N. speech on December 8, 1953. He stated that the U.S. government was willing to go ahead at once with the private talks that had been suggested.

In attempting to define the essential quality of the "free" world, one would say that the countries that form a part of it should love freedom and be genuinely democratic in their internal government. As for love of freedom, India's record for the past 35-40 years under Gandhi and Nehru, has been a remarkable one. There can be no doubt that it has been in the forefront of the nations championing freedom for colonial areas. And, as far the democratic nature of its own government, surely few countries in what generally is called the free
world have experienced country-wide, democratically conducted elections, to compare with those recently held by India, for the filling of over 4000 seats in its federal and state legislatures. For, in those elections, made possible by a fully democratic and secular constitution - in terms of which equality of franchise was granted irrespective of religion, caste, race, color or sex - 107 million people went to the polls, with full freedom for all parties, and a secret ballot.

Would it not then be absurd to call a nation which is democratic in this, as in all other essential respects; which quite independently has made and is making an important contribution to the peace of the world, a fence-sitter, simply because it honestly believes that on certain specific issues neither the U.S. nor Russia necessarily has proposed a line that seems wholly acceptable to it?

Had India not decided to retain and exercise this kind of discretion, conceivably we would not have had the U.N. truce resolution, which marked so important a step toward achieving a cease fire in Korea.

II.

The allegation has been made that Nehru makes no secret of his ambition to represent Asia, and that India seeks to dominate and to weaken her neighbors.

The fact is that Nehru has neither a secret nor a disclosed ambition to represent Asia. Neither is there any discernible basis for the charge that India seeks to dominate or to weaken her neighbors. Not only is each concept totally incorrect, but the facts are entirely to the contrary.
What are the facts? Before India attained independence, in the spring of 1947, an Asian Relations Conference was held in New Delhi by the Indian Council of World Affairs. Nehru had much to do with inspiring the calling of that conference. It marked the first time that the countries of Asia - almost all of which still were under colonial rule - had met together, and it was an expression of peoples engaged in a common struggle for freedom. There was, however, no question of anyone leading, or attempting to lead the others.

During the final phase of Indonesia's fight against the Dutch, a meeting again was called in New Delhi by Nehru, which helped to hasten the winning of Indonesian independence.

In 1947 and the years immediately following, many Asian countries - including Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, Pakistan and India itself - regained their independence, thus removing the basic urge which had brought them together in the original Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi. Consequently, although these countries had drawn up the forms for Asian cooperation, as well as for the holding of periodic meetings, the machinery for this purpose never has been utilized.

Had Nehru been planning to become the leader of Asia, or to dominate it, it is curious indeed that he should have allowed this machinery to remain unused.

The truth is that not just Nehru, but the whole of India spontaneously sympathizes with all freedom movements against colonialism, whether in Asia or Africa. Although this sympathy often
is expressed, it is totally unrelated to any desire for leadership. The suggestion at this juncture for periodic conferences of the Prime Ministers of the South Asian countries has come from the Prime Minister of Ceylon. Had it come from Nehru eye brows certainly would have been raised. In fact, India, which itself has suffered so greatly from outside domination, and which freed itself under Nehru and the party now in power, is most unlikely to think in terms of leading or dominating others, particularly those countries that have not yet gained their independence, or only recently have done so. On this issue Nehru has said, "Our long struggle for freedom" in India has "led us to an understanding of, and a deep sympathy with, similar struggles in other countries. That was the basis of our policy, even when we worked for our own independence. That policy inevitably continues today not only as an inheritance from the past but as an understanding of the present. Peace, it has been said, is indivisible. So also is freedom, and no structure of world peace can be built on the denial of freedom to countries and large masses of people. It is a matter of deep regret to us that this basic fact is not recognized and given effect to in many countries."

Nehru repeatedly has stated not only that India does not desire leadership in Asia, but that if only the world were more peaceful, it would be possible for India to devote all of its energies wholeheartedly to the solution of its own internal accumulation of economic and social problems. He has stated also that his wish is that those countries that have suffered under imperialism, might grow in internal strength as a result of winning freedom.
Finally, it must be noted that it was Gandhi who evolved for oppressed peoples—particularly for those in colonial areas—a new kind of technique for the achievement of freedom. There can be little wonder, then, that other countries should be interested in the use of this technique. That such interest may have been influenced by what has occurred in India does not, however, signify that India, for its part, wishes either to lead or to dominate others, or that others who have been influenced by it think that it is trying to do so. The point is simply that the Gandhian method happens to have a wide appeal. India knows that it would be preposterous—indeed completely un-Gandhian—for it to claim that the use of the Gandhian method by other countries possibly could give it the right to interfere with the destiny of those countries, through assuming any power over them.

It has been asserted that Nehru has spoken of Asia for the Asians. What Nehru has said is that Asia is not for the colonial powers. This is no more than to say that the United States opposes domination of America by other nations. Nehru also has said that the continent of Asia should not be ignored or by-passed.

He has pointed out that, although, in terms of the United Nations Charter, it was perfectly in order for anyone wishing to do so to vote against inclusion of India in a proposed Political Conference on Korea, the decision to exclude it, made during the last session of the U.N., was based on the vote of 17 South American States, the U.S.A., Greece, Pakistan and Nationalist China. He has called to the attention of the world the fact that, although one-half
of the world population (1.2 billion) happens to be in Asia, a mere handful – those representing only 85 million – the Pakistanis, plus Formosa – voted to exclude an Asian country from a conference table at which matters largely affecting the fate of Asia were to be discussed. Surely, merely to comment on so significant a fact is not to speak of "Asia for the Asians."

While stressing that India itself was not a candidate for the U.N. Security Council, Nehru also has questioned the present composition of that Council, in which only one of the 11 members – Lebanon – a small country on the fringe of Asia, alone has the task of speaking for the peoples of Asia. Since most of the Asian countries have recognised the Chinese People's Republic, he excluded "Formosa" as speaking for Asia.

Whether or not one agrees with Nehru's conclusions, it would be difficult to impute that they reveal either a desire, a design or an ambition on his part to rule or to "lead" Asia. The fact being merely that India feels, quite apart from whether or not it, or any other Asian country, represents Asia, that certainly the colonial powers do not do so – nor can the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R.

In related manner, Americans, no doubt, scarcely would consider that the government of Bulgaria represents Europe. Equally, it would be well to recognize that any country or government subsisting largely under American or British or Russian tutelage or backing cannot, in the eyes of Asians, represent Asia. Thus, it would be a tragic blunder if the Western powers, while being quite clear about the absurdity of Bulgaria representing Europe, should be blind to the
fact that only those countries in Asia which value and maintain their independence, can carry any weight in the councils of Asia.

III.

It has been charged that the storm raised as a result of the discussion of a possible military aid pact between the U.S. and Pakistan has been inspired largely by India - or more particularly by Nehru.

This view ignores not only the governmental protests of the Soviet Union and China, which were, of course, to be expected, but also press references to protests from Nepal and Afghanistan. It also ignores the fact that various Arab countries have expressed their doubts about such arms aid, even though the proposal is itself supposed to strengthen the position of the free world precisely in the Middle East. Even Britain appears somewhat disturbed.

Thus the storm has not at all been simply Indian. And, as for having been inspired by Nehru, anyone with even the most superficial acquaintance with India and Pakistan would realize that Nehru has been attempting to direct the upsurge of feeling in his country against the proposed pact, into the kind of peaceful, non-violent channels favored by Gandhi.

The technique of holding mass protest meetings in India in British times was developed by Gandhi as an alternative to the use of conspiratorial or violent methods. Indeed, it is not Nehru, but
quite other factions in India, that have called for strong action as a result of the proposed pact. It is Nehru who, on the contrary, has attempted to restrain these factions.

In recent days, a prominent leader of the Sikhs - the people who immediately before the British took over North India, ruled most of the area now included in West Pakistan - openly has called upon the government of India to enter into an arms pact with Russia and China, in order to counteract the proposed U.S.-Pakistan move. Similarly, orthodox Hindu groups and Communists in India have been demanding strong action in opposition to it. If Nehru truly wished to foment trouble, he would encourage, not restrain these groups. His interest, however, is in tempering violence. Moreover, he has spoken out in opposition to demonstrations against either Pakistan or the United States, even while disapproving of the proposed arrangements between them.

Which leads to the all important question of why the U.S. seems to favor arms aid to Pakistan, and why India, among other neighboring territories, has been so alarmed at the possibility that it may become a reality?

IV.

It is claimed that it is necessary for America to arm Pakistan because of the alleged power vacuum that has resulted from the disruption of the British empire in the east - a vacuum that America thus far seems to have been unsuccessful in filling.

What are the facts? In the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, Pakistan maintains a standing army of approximately 200,000 men.
It is alleged that this army is ill-equipped. The truth is that it is far better equipped than was the Indian army of British days. It has additional equipment and, to some extent, has continued to be trained by British officers.

Moreover, Pakistan's present army is larger than the peacetime army Britain maintained on the entire sub-continent, before the partition of India and Pakistan.

India also has a larger army than the British maintained for the protection of the entire sub-continent, and the Indian and Pakistan armies together are now more than twice as large as the former British-Indian army. Thus, if there is a threat to the sub-continent, one cannot help but ask whether what is needed is not a lessening of tensions - such as over Kashmir - between Pakistan and India, which could result in cooperation between the two countries for the defence of the area as a whole rather than the building up of the army of one of these countries by an outside power.

It was the imperial nature of British control that made it possible for her to police certain areas in Asia. It must clearly be realized that no country today could repeat what Britain was able to do in this area in an era of colonialism. (Britain's difficulties in keeping troops in the Suez, the Persian Gulf, and other areas in the Middle East, derive from the fact that such areas refuse to submit to the continuation of the old imperial system. The same feeling obtains in South Asia.)

It would be totally incorrect for the United States to imagine that if it arms Pakistan, the latter's troops will be able
to take over the old British imperial function in surrounding areas, and thus fill the power vacuum that is said to exist, since, obviously, this would not be tolerated by the other countries concerned.

In short, if there is a low power area in South Asia, then the only acceptable solution would be to help strengthen the countries of the region socially and economically. Any attempt to set up the military forces of one country in the area as a protective force for the area as a whole, will be to reintroduce elements of imperialist domination, which the countries concerned consistently have rejected and spurned. Thus any effort in this direction inevitably must arouse the opposition of the neighboring countries.

It has been asserted that the key to the security of much of South Asia and the Middle East is Pakistan. The thesis has been advanced that India's 1500 to 2000 mile frontier with Communist China is secured by the Himalayas, whereas Pakistan, which has no frontier at all with Russia or China (although a very small and inaccessible northern tip of Pakistan is close to the Soviet Union and China) is vulnerable to Russian attack. No one with any knowledge of the geographical features, and the political or military history of the areas involved, can accept so facile and incorrect a statement.

To the north of Kashmir and Afghanistan, between Pakistan and the Soviet Union, lie the mighty Hindukush mountains, which are, in fact, but a continuation of the Himalayas, and raise their barriers in what is even more difficult and inaccessible territory. In consequence, since the time of the Indo-Aryans, and then of Alexander, all egress into India from the northwest has been through the Khyber and Bolan passes. Both lead into the Indo-Pakistan continent through
Afghanistan. Thus, any military ground-forces must traverse Afghanistan before coming into Pakistan. Which means that it is Afghanistan that is vulnerable from the north. Yet this non-Communist country is among those protesting against the proposed U.S.-Pakistan military aid arrangement.

Afghanistan has had an admirable record where freedom is concerned, having resisted all attempts at domination. In Czarist times - thinking in the same manner as America now does of Communist Russia - the British waged two wars against it, in 1840 and 1878. On the earlier of these two occasions, Palmerston saw in the then Russian expansion in Central Asia "an imminent peril to the security and tranquility" of the British Empire in India. In both these wars the British were defeated, and were unable to secure a foothold in Afghanistan. As for Russia, to date there has been no ascertainable Russian encroachment upon, or infiltration into Afghanistan.

In view of such facts, one must wonder what constitutes a possible threat from the north and northwest to the security of Pakistan that does not also obtain for India? In addition, quite obviously, if there is a threat from the air, whether mounted from Sinkiang or from other Communist bases, then surely that threat must be as great to India - with its long common frontier with the Communist world - as to Pakistan. But if it is primarily an air threat that has to be guarded against, the answer presumably would be bases and not simply more ground forces. However, there have been categorical denials by spokesmen both of the U.S.A. and of Pakistan that bases are sought or to be given; and, in any event, the entire case with respect to military aid applies at this juncture with equal force to the establishing of bases.

One further point about Afghanistan: The Afghans themselves
have been having border difficulties with Pakistan, alleging that the latter is in wrongful possession of considerable territory, in which some 7 million tribal peoples live. Thus, not only have the Afghans expressed their fear about the possibility that Pakistan's armed forces may be strengthened from the outside, but it is possible also that, if the U.S. does give armed aid to Pakistan, Afghanistan will tend to look to Russia or elsewhere, for armed assistance. Should this occur, then, for the first time, real insecurity will have been brought directly to the very gateways to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, the Khyber and Bolan passes.

Similarly, peaceful though India is under the influence of the Gandhi-Nehru tradition, any arming of Pakistan by an outsider will give tremendous impetus to those forces in India which, like the United States, believe in bargaining from strength. Should these forces gain the ascendency, the result will be the thorough-going militarization of a country of 365 million people. Should not the United States then stop and ask itself whether this would be a desirable result, in the interests of peace, and the well-being of the free world, more particularly as such militarisation would develop against action now contemplated by the U.S.A.?

Indeed, since it is doubtful whether there is any land-borne Russian threat to Western Pakistan at this time - except through Afghanistan - and since there is no present Afghan threat to Pakistan, then the only other land-borne threat that anyone could have in mind in arming Pakistan would be one from the other flank of its territory - namely India. Is one to assume that Pakistan is to be strengthened
against India? If so, one cannot help but ask why. Especially as Nehru repeatedly has offered a no-war pact to Pakistan, but has received no response to his proposals.

Moreover, it must be recalled, at the time of the armed conflict in Kashmir, it was Nehru who took the lead in asking for a cease-fire order from the U.N., and talks are still in process with respect to attempting to resolve the Kashmir issue by peaceful means. Why then, one wonders, should India be accused of plotting to attack Pakistan, when Nehru consistently attempts to quell, not fan, the flames of hatred expressed by extremist elements both in India and Pakistan?

The cardinal feature of the situation in the Indian subcontinent is that the recent carving out of the two states was a delicate operation, which has left points of high tension that tend to be overlooked in the larger world context, but which are full of potentially dangerous consequences to the subcontinent itself. There is little doubt that the strengthening of the armament of either of the two countries through outside aid would bring some of these dangers to a head. Thus, John Callahan, writing for the New York Times on November 21, 1953, points out the following: "Actually, Pakistan is more inclined to build her military strength as a bargaining factor in dealing with India on the Kashmir issue than as a defense against other countries, including the Soviet Union. This is a common admission, privately expressed."

Admissions in the same vein have been made by leading Pakistan spokesmen to representatives of Middle East countries. If these statements, which certainly have been made, represent feelings in
Pakistan, then American aid to that country is likely to be deflected from the U.S. objective of building military strength against communism, and used in the course of internecine struggles on the sub-continent, a result that would be applauded only by the enemies of the free world.

It is sometimes argued that U.S. arms aid to Pakistan would re-enforce strength in Pakistan, and that this would be preferable to temporizing with weakness in India. If this means that today Pakistan is strong, whereas India is weak, then there is no apparent need for giving armed aid to Pakistan. Moreover, such an argument totally contradicts the other oft repeated claim that the U.S. is strengthening Pakistan because the latter is on the verge of collapse. If Pakistan is in truth on the verge of collapse then America immediately should give that country greatly increased economic aid, which should be practicable now in view of contemplated curtailment of such aid to Europe. Moreover, India itself repeatedly has stated that there could be no possible objection to such aid, nor would other neighboring countries oppose it.

Surely if America considers that her relationship with India is unsatisfactory, then this calls for direct, objective and honest analysis of the reasons why this is so. After such consideration it could be decided what steps should be taken to establish a better relationship between the two countries.

To set up increased armament for a neighbor of India under the circumstances is to evade the real issue of how to establish a healthy relationship between two parts of the world comprising as much as one-quarter of the total population of the world, or one-third of
the free world, which is what the combined populations of India and the U.S. represent. This does not mean that there is not also great need to maintain good relations between the United States and Pakistan. If the U.S. can help to build a healthy Pakistan, then certainly aid for this purpose should be given. Since, obviously, the main needs of Pakistan are for economic and social advance, there is large scope for positive measures to be taken by the United States in this direction. Additional industry, fertilizer plants, community development schemes, etc. could be set up in Pakistan with U.S. aid, which, most assuredly, could bring about increased strength and prosperity in that country.

The differences between Pakistan and India that might be intensified by proposed military aid to Pakistan - differences which involve some 450 million people - cannot lightly be brushed aside or exacerbated. Dangerous tensions, which would negate precisely that strength and security in the area which the proposed military aid allegedly seeks to establish, would be created. Especially with respect to a solution of the Kashmir dispute, and in the light of the recent progress toward a solution of that problem that has been made by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, nothing could be more untimely than the suggested aid in spite of all guarantees and safeguards against its use for other than defensive and similarly authorized purposes. Since military force has been used by both sides in Kashmir, the sudden possibility of increased military strength for one side inevitably becomes relevant to the situation. There would be no such relevancy or complicating factor, were the planned aid for Pakistan economic, no matter how substantial the amounts involved might be.
Indeed, in terms of the picture that emerges, it would seem that if a way is to be found to compose the weaknesses and the strengths that exist in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, in order to create integrated strength, then India and Pakistan should be encouraged to cooperate, not only in economic matters, but also for self-defense. Much more would be gained by the free world if this crucial opportunity were taken by U.S. statesmen gently to persuade both countries that their best interest lies in common action for their mutual defense. Should success be achieved in this endeavor, then the considerable military forces of the sub-continent might well re-learn to act together, as they did so recently in British-Indian times. If thus cooperation were established, and tensions between the two countries removed, the modernization of military equipment for the sub-continent as a whole would fall into an entirely different and more acceptable perspective.

V.

It has been said that Nehru's attitude toward the possibility of U.S. military aid to Pakistan is a challenge to the sovereign right of the two countries to enter into arrangements for their mutual self-defense. In this matter, a distinction must be made between the obvious right of sovereign countries to do as they please, and the desirability or wisdom of certain courses of action, particularly at a time when the requirements of collective security must take into account the repercussions of such actions in neighboring free countries. It is, after all, only to the latter that Nehru has directed his remarks. Thus, in his recent statement in the Indian Parliament, on December 24,
1953, he said that he accepted the good faith of the U.S. and Pakistan, but that, as a friend, he felt compelled to draw attention to the dangers of the proposed move.

It would be a tragic mistake for the U.S. to misunderstand the nature of such protests from India or those from other neighbors of Pakistan.

VI.

Although the case for refraining at this stage from giving armed aid to Pakistan seems compellingly strong, the crucial question that remains in the minds of many Americans is, "What would be India's attitude in the event of Soviet aggression?" For it is perhaps doubt on this point, above all, that is leading America to consider whether arrangements with another country in that area should not be made.

On the general question of aggression, Nehru repeatedly has made categorical statements that should leave in no doubt whatever either those who apprehend aggression, or those who might contemplate it as a course of action.

Nehru has stated that peace cannot be preserved by "surrendering to aggression," "by compromising with evil or injustice." "Aggression," he has declared firmly, "has to be met." Again he has said, "When man's liberty or peace is in danger we cannot and shall not be neutral; neutrality then would be a betrayal of what we have fought for and stand for."

In view of those and similar statements, the crucial question would appear to be satisfactorily answered.

Then, why does Nehru oppose the setting up of beachheads, or
points of counter-attack in South Asia at this time?

In general terms, the reply has been given in this memorandum. In military terms, would Nehru not be entitled to say that not only Pakistan, but India and other freedom-loving countries in South Asia, already are equipped with military installations, which certainly could be used in an emergency situation? Would he not be entitled to argue that if an aggression should take place, it would be for the free peoples of free Asia to express their will at that time as to the measures that they should take in dealing with it? Surely, judging by his own statements, made over the years, he could be expected to favor putting to use all the available resources of his own country, if clear and large-scale aggression were to take place.

In certain circumstances, however, such as a small frontier foray, he might prefer instead to urge that the U.N. Security Council, or General Assembly, or some other ad hoc machinery, deal with the situation in the first instance. Until all such measures had been taken, he well might regard it as premature and dangerous for military commanders to embark on large-scale activities in other parts of the world, and he might consider the mobilization of India itself at this stage as not being an immediate issue.

It is for reasons such as these that, in military terms, the matter of setting up beachheads or bases in South Asia at this juncture seems to him to be untimely and ill-advised.

In addition to these considerations, which are relevant mainly to global military strategy, there are also cogent military reasons pertinent to the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent itself, and even to other
neighboring countries, to some of which attention already has been drawn, which militate strongly against an injection of military aid to one country in the area by the U.S. at this time.

VII.

One further consideration: President Eisenhower has made an appeal for a new approach to the solution of world tensions, particularly between Russia and the United States. He has said that the U.S. is willing to sit down with other countries to examine the disarmament issue. He has made proposals for a common pool of atomic power for peaceful purposes, and has confirmed U.S. willingness to enter into a 4-power conference. These are important peace moves. One cannot hazard a guess as to what Russia is planning to do with respect to making new military pacts, or creating new armies at this time. The United States is itself, however, taking the possible risk of deciding to reduce its own army. In the context of these events, it is all the more bewildering that U.S. arms aid for Pakistan should seem to be a current necessity. If the Russian reply to President Eisenhower's recent appeal holds out a better hope that definite steps toward the solution of some of the major international conflicts of our times may be taken, then prudence should dictate that all factors be taken into account before we give military aid to Pakistan at this crucial moment.

If, at some time in the future, the free world should seek military cooperation from its South Asian members, then, meanwhile, sustained trust of and intensified economic cooperation with the area as a whole, will produce a broad and realistic basis for an alliance
as against the relatively limited area of military strength which the present proposal might succeed in creating at the expense of alienating most of South Asia and perhaps even other near-by countries.