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PANCHSHEEL—THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE

BY

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Recently China commemorated 60th anniversary of the declaration of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence or Panchsheel as known in India and invited the Vice President of India and the President of Myanmar to China. The event was coupled with organization of a seminar on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, affiliated to China's Foreign Ministry wherein delegations from India and Myanmar participated. Other participants included former Chinese officials, diplomats as well as eminent Chinese scholars, dealing with Asia. All the activities, including the speech of the Chinese leader Xi Jinping, were extensively covered in the Chinese media.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence first formally appeared in the Preamble to the *Agreement between the Republic of India and People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India*, which was signed on 29 April 1954. The Five Principles are: (a) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (b) mutual non-aggression; (c) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; (d) equality and mutual benefit; and (e) peaceful coexistence. Prime Minister Nehru and Premier Zhou further elaborated their vision of Panchsheel in a Joint Statement on 28 June 1954 in New Delhi, as a framework agreement for the conduct of relations not only between their respective countries, but also for the conduct of their relations with other countries. Subsequently, these principles were incorporated and expanded into ten principles and formed the core of the Bandung Declaration issued in April 1955 at the historic Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia.

The then leaders of India and China hoped that after the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence were enunciated the newly independent countries, after decolonization and freed from colonial bondage after many years, would be able to develop a new and a more widely acceptable approach to international relations. The principles were emphasized by Prime Minister Nehru, in a broadcast speech made at the time of the Asian Prime Ministers Conference at Colombo just a few days after the signing of the 1954 Trade Agreement in Beijing. Prime Minister Nehru in his speech at Colombo emphasized that, "If these principles were recognized in the mutual relations of all countries, then indeed there would hardly be any conflict and certainly no war."

However, less than three months after the 1954 Agreement on Tibet was signed, China decided to test the waters and signal that it did not accept the Sino-Indian boundary alignment as shown by India by transgressing it in the Barahoti area. With the situation in Tibet deteriorating allegedly due to the high handedness of Chinese officials; it was only a matter of time before Tibet witnessed open revolt. Meanwhile clashes took place on the Sino-Indian border at Longju and Kongka La [Pass] that eventually led to the 1962 conflict.

Indian Perceptions

The 1954 India-China Agreement on *Trade and Intercourse between India and the Tibet Region of China* was essentially a trade agreement that was valid for eight years. It was the first internationally negotiated agreement between an independent India and the People's Republic of China that conceded that Tibet was an autonomous region of China. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Nehru was keen to bind China to some internationally accepted norms of behavior in the conduct of relations between nations. He was aware that China had not yet been accepted as a member of the UN, and could thus absolve itself from behavior that was expected of a UN member mandated to observe the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. It was Nehru's belief, however illusory it may have proved, that the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence filled the gap that existed from China's non-membership of the UN and that China would be bound to observe these principles in the conduct of relations with India in particular and with other countries in general. It was also Nehru's belief that Sino-Indian differences, particularly on the boundary question, would be resolved peacefully without recourse to force. This was particularly an important issue for him, since he sensed that India, as the weaker military power, needed time to develop its defences on the Sino-Indian border in the wake of Chinese occupation of Tibet.

The 1954 Trade Agreement, which contained the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, lapsed in early 1962 and was not renewed as most Indians felt that it had not served its purpose; in that the boundary issues were not settled peacefully. The belligerence shown on the Sino-Indian border areas was not in consonance with the spirit of Panchsheel and this led to a general disenchantment with the very concept. The Joint Statement issued after the visit of Prime Minister Zhou to India in 1960 for border talks with Prime Minister Nehru, for the first time did not contain any reference to Panchsheel.

Chinese Perceptions

As soon as the People's Republic of China was established it was beset with political isolation and subjected to economic blockade by the western powers, soon after its military intervention in Korea. It also faced a host of diplomatic issues; including non-recognition and the possibility that Taiwan may never be reunited with the mainland. China was looking for a way out of its isolation and it found that expressing its adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence was one way of lessening the hostility of other countries to it and for China to express its peaceful intentions. Therefore with Nehru's assistance at the Bandung Conference, Premier Zhou was able to establish China's peaceful intentions as well as gain the confidence of other Asian leaders and countries.

Is It A New Doctrine in International Relations?

The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, when they were enunciated, were not new; the UN Charter contains most of them. However, these principles were put in a concise form and limited to the most important. This was because the countries concerned did not want elaborate declarations that might not be understood easily. In that way, it was hoped, they would be much easier to implement as elaborate declarations sometimes cause confusion and are thus difficult to implement.

It was during the Afro-Asia Conference at Bandung that the idea developed that newly liberated countries from the Afro-Asian world had something special to offer in terms of inter-state relations. It was also a demonstration that Afro-Asian countries need not follow western concepts of inter-state relations, but could evolve their own principles that were not only just but gave each newly independent country satisfaction that its hard won independence would not be threatened so easily again.

Despite several decades having elapsed these principles still retain their relevance. The Five Principles that India and China initiated many years ago along with Myanmar, can still be considered to be the basic norms that govern state-to-state relations. In Asia today, there are many territorial and other disputes, which are of a long standing duration. Many have been left over from colonial times. In this context, the two principles of non-aggression and peaceful co-

existence assume great importance. All disputes, no matter how complicated and protracted, can and should be settled peacefully, without the use of force. This is the very essence of these principles.

Another important point was that relations be conducted on the basis of equality. This was an important point in colonial times as most Afro-Asian countries were economically exploited by colonial countries and their economic resources plundered. For the first time the newly independent countries tried to arrange their economic relations in such a way that no country could use the old colonial tactic of economic exploitation. All such relations, in the future, were to be conducted on the basis of mutual benefit and equality. If these principles are applied today; much of the exploitation that Third World countries suffer from would disappear. Therefore, Third World countries have a continuing relevant stake that their present day economic relations be conducted taking into account the Five Principles.

There is hardly any doubt that the Five Principles are value-based Asian principles. However, it is logical to evaluate implementation of the Five Principles in bilateral relations. The sixty year journey of the Five Principles suggests that conflicts were the result of a failure to convert these principles into practice.

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