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Not at the Cost of China: New Evidence Regarding US Proposals to Nehru for Joining the United Nations Security Council

By Anton Harder, March 2015



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Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Telephone: (202) 691-4110
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**Not at the Cost of China:
New Evidence Regarding US Proposals to Nehru for Joining the United Nations Security
Council**

Anton Harder

Introduction

The issue of India's right to a seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a controversial one in India today, but it is not new. The historical controversy has centered on the culpability of independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in not seizing several alleged opportunities for India to join the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member in the 1950s. Nehru's critics, then and now, accuse him of sacrificing India's national interest on dubious grounds of international morality. The question, however, goes beyond Nehru's reputation, as it provides rare insights into India's relations with the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the beginning of the Cold War.

A peculiar atmosphere of rumor surrounds India's history as a possible permanent member of the Security Council. An online search will lead one to heated debates on the existence, or not, of an early offer to India of a permanent seat on that august body. In 2005, "This Day That Age," a column in *The Hindu*, featured a reprint of a 1955 story on Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's denial in Parliament of the rumors of a recent offer of a UN Security Council seat by the Soviet Union, showing both the interest in the topic in 1955 and 2005.¹ Despite Nehru's denial then, and online debates now, the 1955 offer from the Soviets is in fact well-documented, although perhaps not widely known. The angst over these rumors merges history and contemporary politics, with those arguing that such offers existed, and were refused, keen to ram what they consider to be another nail into the coffin of Jawaharlal Nehru's reputation, India's sometime socialist and avowedly secular first Prime Minister, who it is argued, in his idealism, failed to secure India's national interest.²

¹ "This Day That Age," *The Hindu*, September 28, 2005,
<http://www.hindu.com/2005/09/28/stories/2005092800270900.htm>

² AG Noorani, "The Nehruvian Approach," review of *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, second series, vol. 29, edited by H. Y. Sharada Prasad and A. K. Damodaran, *Frontline* 19, no. 2 (January-February 2002),
<http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1902/19020810.htm>. Noorani refers to the Hindu nationalist *Sangh Parivar's* attack on Nehru for failing to secure India's national interest

That the 1955 incident was publicly discussed in 2002 in print by AG Noorani, a major scholar of modern Indian history and politics, has not ended the rumor-mongering.³ However, new evidence of an even earlier offer—by the US in August 1950—to assist India in assuming a permanent seat at the UN Security Council has recently emerged, adding substantially to what Noorani earlier wrote. Nehru's rejection of the US offer underlined the consistency of his conviction that the PRC's legitimate interests must be acknowledged in order to reduce international tensions. Integrating the PRC into the international community by conceding its right to the Chinese seat at the Security Council was in fact a central pillar of Nehru's foreign policy. Nehru's skepticism about accepting this offer, and thereby disrupting the dynamics of the UN, revealed the reverence he had for the international organization, despite its flaws. Furthermore, his principled rejection of the US's suggestion indicates Indian agency in its difficult relations with the US at this time. Finally, Nehru's sense that India deserved recognition as a great country was made plain, although this was qualified by his refusal to compromise core principles to gain such recognition. That the US made such an approach to India also suggests that the traditional emphasis on the US's early attempt to pursue an even-handed approach to the subcontinent's major powers and defer to the UK's greater experience in the region ought to be reconsidered. Furthermore, this episode enriches our understanding of the US government's internal wrangling over how to bend the UN to its interests in this early stage of the Cold War.

The documents critical to answering these questions are stowed away in the Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit papers held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi, India. The importance of Pandit's papers lies in her relationship to her brother, the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and her high-profile diplomatic posts in the 1940s and 1950s, which included the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Nations. Furthermore, while the published Nehru papers contained in his voluminous *Selected Works* and *Letters to Chief Ministers* are a rich and under-utilized resource for studying the Nehru period, unfortunately they are still only a partial record and they cannot be supplemented by reference to his papers at the NMML, which are restricted. The status of Nehru's personal collections amplifies the significance of the Pandit papers for understanding Nehru's thinking on foreign affairs in the 1940s and 1950s. The Pandit papers have of course been used before for general histories of

³ Noorani, "The Nehruvian Approach."

independent India and broad examinations of Indian foreign policy, but they have not been deployed thus far in studies focused on India's relationship with China.⁴

The 1955 Soviet Offer

In 2002, AG Noorani wrote a defense of Nehru's decision to reject Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin's offer of a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in 1955. He wrote Nehru was right to do so, as really the offer was just a "feeler to test India." Noorani was reviewing the new, and then most recent, volume of the second series of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*.⁵ He was also taking aim at those political figures who had attacked Nehru's decision to reject this offer based on a reference in the well-known Sarvepalli Gopal biography of Nehru (1979) in which Gopal wrote: "He [Jawaharlal Nehru] rejected the Soviet offer to propose India as the sixth permanent member of the Security Council and insisted that priority be given to China's admission to the United Nations."⁶ Utilizing the new evidence available in the *Selected Works*, Noorani argued that Nehru was correct in making little of this offer, as the offer was in fact unlikely to materialize in reality; and even if the Soviets were sincere about facilitating India's accession to the Security Council as a permanent member, this would have caused major problems for India's overall foreign policy strategy by complicating its relations with China and the major powers. Noorani quoted the following exchange offered in the *Selected Works* to bolster his claims:

[Nikolai] Bulganin: Regarding your suggestion about the four power conference we would take appropriate action. While we are discussing the general international situation and reducing tension, we propose suggesting at a later stage India's inclusion as the sixth member of the Security Council.

JN [Jawaharlal Nehru]: Perhaps Bulganin knows that some people in USA have suggested that India should replace China in the Security Council. This is to create trouble between us and China. We are, of course, wholly opposed to it. Further, we are opposed to pushing ourselves forward to occupy certain positions because that may itself create difficulties and India might itself become a subject to controversy. If India is to be admitted to the Security Council, it raises the question of the revision of the Charter of the UN. We feel that this should not be done till the question of China's admission and possibly of others is first solved. I

⁴ One problem remains: the NMML allows only a quarter of any file to be photocopied, so researchers must transcribe many documents they wish to obtain in full.

⁵ *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, second series, vol. 29 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund 2001).

⁶ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, vol. 2 (London: Cape, 1979), 248

feel that we should first concentrate on getting China admitted. What is Bulganin's opinion about the revision of the Charter? In our opinion this does not seem to be an appropriate time for it.

Bulganin: We proposed the question of India's membership of the Security Council to get your views, but agree that this is not the time for it and it will have to wait for the right moment later on. We also agree that things should be taken one by one.⁷

Noorani suggested that Bulganin's response to Nehru's reservations indicated that the "offer" was not a real one, but more a means of sounding out India's views, as Bulganin agreed with Nehru that the time was not right for pushing a new permanent member into the Security Council. Furthermore, the exchange shows that India had already rejected a similar suggestion made by the US. Nehru ascribed the American offer to its desire to disturb Sino-Indian relations. The status of the People's Republic of China in the UN, Nehru argued, should take priority, before any consideration be given to the necessary revision of the UN Charter required for the admittance of any new permanent members. What exactly Nehru meant in terms of "others" whose admission possibly also should be settled prior to India is unclear, but he probably had in mind the newly independent nations not yet admitted as members of the UN.

Noorani subsequently wrote about a note penned by Nehru while still touring the USSR in June 1955, which provided more detail on the earlier offer from the US:

Informally, suggestions have been made by the United States that China should be taken into the United Nations but not in the Security Council and that India should take her place in the Security Council. We cannot of course accept this as it means falling out with China and it would be very unfair for a great country like China not to be in the Security Council. We have, therefore, made it clear to those who suggested this that we cannot agree to this suggestion. We have even gone a little further and said that India is not anxious to enter the Security Council at this stage, even though as a great country she ought to be there. The first step to be taken is for China to take her rightful place and then the question of India might be considered separately.⁸

Noorani drew attention to the fact that volume 29 of the *Selected Works* not only clarified the nature of the Soviet offer of 1955, but unearthed tantalizing evidence of a previously

⁷ Noorani, "The Nehruvian Approach;" the quote comes from *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, second series, vol. 29, 231

⁸ See Noorani, "The Nehruvian Approach;" the quote comes from *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, second series, vol. 29, 303.

little known earlier offer by the Americans to similarly assist India assume a permanent seat at the UNSC.

The 1950 American Offer

What was the context of the US offer for India to join the UN Security Council? Nehru's reference to the USA's offer is frustratingly vague with no hint of the circumstances or timing in which it was made. However, research done in the correspondence of Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister, and holder of various major diplomatic positions in the late 1940s and early 1950s, illuminates the subject. In late August 1950, Pandit wrote to her brother from Washington, DC, where she was then posted as India's Ambassador to the United States:

One matter that is being cooked up in the State Department should be known to you. This is the unseating of China as a Permanent Member in the Security Council and of India being put in her place. I have just seen Reuter's report of your answer to the same question. Last week I had interviews with [John Foster] Dulles and [Philip] Jessup, reports of which I have sent to Bajpai. Both brought up this question and Dulles seemed particularly anxious that a move in this direction should be started. Last night I heard from Marquis Childs, an influential columnist of Washington, that Dulles has asked him on behalf of the State Department to build up public opinion along these lines. I told him our attitude and advised him to go slow in the matter as it would not be received with any warmth in India.⁹

Nehru's response within the week was unequivocal:

In your letter you mention that the State Department is trying to unseat China as a Permanent Member of the Security Council and to put India in her place. So far as we are concerned, we are not going to countenance it. That would be bad from every point of view. It would be a clear affront to China and it would mean some kind of a break between us and China. I suppose the state department would not like that, but we have no intention of following that course. We shall go on pressing for China's admission in the UN and the Security Council. I suppose that a crisis will come during the next sessions of the General Assembly of the UN on this issue. The people's government of China is sending a full delegation there. If they fail to get in there will be trouble which might even result in the USSR and some other countries finally quitting the UN. That may please the State Department, but it would mean the end of the UN as we have known it. That would also mean a further drift towards war.

⁹ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 24 August 1950, in Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Papers 1st Installment (Pandit I), Subject File No. 59, Subject: 1949-51, Letters to Jawaharlal Nehru from VL Pandit sent during her tenure as Indian Ambassador to the United States of America, 132, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (NMML).

India because of many factors, is certainly entitled to a permanent seat in the security council. But we are not going in at the cost of China.¹⁰

The context for this discreet move by the US State Department towards India needs to be emphasized. The tensions of the Cold War were spreading to East Asia, while Europe appeared to be in deadlock. Specifically, the emergence of an apparently communist government in control of China had created a new fault-line. The other mega-state of Asia, democratic India, was burnishing its independence from the democratic camp by refusing to acknowledge this fault-line and had gone as far as transferring its diplomatic recognition of China from the defeated nationalists on Taiwan to the unknown revolutionary guerrillas in Beijing. In mid-January 1950, the USSR had walked out of the UN in protest of the People's Republic of China being blocked from taking the Chinese seat at the UN. Therefore, when the Korean crisis exploded on 25 June 1950, the United Nations Security Council, unimpeded by the threat of a Soviet veto, passed a US sponsored resolution to condemn the aggression. India willingly supported this resolution, as it naturally opposed North Korea's decision to use force to unify the peninsula.

US leaders would have been pleased that India, having so often talked about the value of non-alignment, was in fact lining up with Washington to thwart communist aggression. For the Americans there was also other evidence that Nehru was starting to take a more reasonable approach towards communism. The State Department had watched with approval the Indian Prime Minister's June 1950 tour of Southeast Asia and concluded:

Nehru's statements are to be interpreted as an extension into the international field of his domestic campaign against Communist tactics. If Communism does not change its tactics in South and South-east Asia he may continue to take the offensive against it, not only in India but elsewhere. In speaking so frankly Nehru served our interests admirably. Following Nehru's visit to Indonesia our representatives were informed that Indonesia had no intention of recognizing Viet Minh or of convoking an Asian conference on Indonesia.¹¹

¹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 30 August, 1950, in Pandit I, Subject File No. 60, Subject: 1949, 1950-51, Letters received by V.L. Pandit as Ambassador to Washington from Jawaharlal Nehru concerning India's relations with US, Pakistan and other countries and developments at home, 137, NMML

¹¹ Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (Hare) to the Secretary of State, 3 July 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume V, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 1466

However, this was only a temporary convergence of interests between India and the United States. The second US-sponsored resolution at the Security Council, which proposed to offer whatever help was necessary to South Korea to resist the north, was backed only very reluctantly by India, and under great pressure from the UK. Soon after, on 7 July, India refused to vote in favor of a third resolution which gave US full command over UN forces in Korea.¹² India's commitment to America's prized theory of international collective security was therefore thrown into doubt.

Thereafter, the differences between the US and India developed even further, as is revealed by the correspondence between Pandit and Nehru. Another letter from Pandit, dated 29 June 1950, captured competing Indian and American concerns at this time. She had told the Americans that the Korean conflict should not have been linked up with other Asian issues such as Taiwan, Indochina, and the Philippines, and that this widening of the issue made it difficult for Asian governments to support the US. Meanwhile, she noted that the US President regretted that India was "holding aloof from the democratic nations and still desired to preserve an independent and neutral foreign policy."¹³ July saw further divergence between India and the US, as Indian diplomacy focused on persuading all parties that international tensions could best be diffused—and the Korean crisis localized—if the PRC were to take the Chinese seat in the UN. Indeed, India's Ambassador in Beijing optimistically briefed Zhou Enlai that they believed the UK and Egypt would support the PRC's assumption of China's Security Council seat, giving it majority support. India only needed Beijing and Moscow's support for this attempt to solve the problem of Korea by pushing for Beijing's admission to the UN.¹⁴ Furthermore, US belligerence unnerved the Indians, as can be seen from Pandit's letter to Nehru on 13 July 1950, in which she complained about US Secretary of State Dean Acheson's references to possible use of the atom bomb.¹⁵ Nehru's conviction that the best solution was to have the PRC enter the UN would only have been strengthened by Pandit's communication in late July with rogue elements of the

¹² Robert Barnes, "Branding an Aggressor: The Commonwealth, the United Nations and Chinese intervention in the Korean War, November 1950-January 1951," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 2 (2010): 235; See also, "16th October, 1950," in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-1964*, vol. 2, ed. G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1986), 227, footnote 8

¹³ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 29 June, 1950, in Pandit I, Subject File 59, 109, NMML

¹⁴ "Record of Conversation with Indian Ambassador Panikkar of Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice-Minister Zhang Hanfu about the Korean Problem and the Problem of Restoring China's Seat at the United Nations," 1 July 1950, Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 105-00009-01(1), 1.

¹⁵ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 13 July, 1950, in Pandit I, Subject file 59, 112, NMML

Chinese Nationalist movement who, having severed links with Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), wanted to help India achieve PRC entry to the UN as a way of containing the Korean conflict.¹⁶ Meanwhile, Acheson made it clear to Pandit that though he appreciated the “moral tone” which India brought to the UN’s resolutions, his policy was constrained, he pleaded, by US public opinion.¹⁷ Then, on 1 August the USSR returned to its seat in the UN, ending the US advantage in the Security Council.¹⁸

So it was in the context of Washington’s continuing regard for India’s moral stature, and despite the still-born hopes for Indian diplomatic support and anti-communist solidarity (and also the Soviet return to the Security Council), that Pandit was approached by the State Department about the UNSC. While she did not say when the conversations with Dulles and Jessop took place, we can infer that it was sometime in early or mid-August, as she wrote to Nehru on 24 August. This approach to India by the US State Department, though informal and not quite at the highest level, should nevertheless be regarded as quite sincere. Mrs. Pandit was well respected in the US and with good reason was seen as a reliable channel to her brother. Even if, as with the Soviet “offer” a few years later, the prospects of this offer actually coming to fruition were unlikely, it could still be seen as a significant display of a desire in the US for a more trusting relationship with India. India had backed the US resolutions at the UN calling for collective action to thwart North Korea’s aggression. This support had, to some extent, restored hope in the US that India would align with it in the emerging Cold War, despite Indian insistence earlier in 1950 that it would recognize the new communist government of China, which the US government could not bring itself to do.

The US was undoubtedly disappointed that India’s initial support for it at the UN diminished over time, and that Washington and Delhi’s prescriptions for resolving the Korean crisis had diverged so much. However, Dulles’ August 1950 *démarche* suggests at this point that at least the US State Department still saw the potential for closer Indo-US relations and genuinely desired to demonstrate this with a gesture, and perhaps draw India more closely to it.

¹⁶ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 27 July, 1950, in Pandit I, Subject file 59, 122, NMML

¹⁷ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 20 July, 1950, in Pandit I, Subject file 59, 122, NMML

¹⁸ William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 59. On 4 August 1950, the USSR’s newly returned representative at the Security Council Jacob Malik sought to turn debate there from the Korean War to the subject of the PRC’s representation at the UN; he also attacked the US’s bombing of North Korea

Andrew Rotter's argument that US-Indian relations in the early Cold War era lacked a culturally sensitive "gesture" of goodwill from America to India is therefore challenged by this episode.¹⁹ However, the exchange between brother and sister Nehru showed that this gesture was not well received in India, leaving one to wonder what sort of gesture might have been more successful. Besides demonstrating a continuing hope that India could yet be prevailed upon to more firmly link hands with the US-led camp in the Cold War, this initiative also challenges the assumption that the US was committed to a strategy of equidistance from Pakistan and India as suggested by some.²⁰ Clearly, Pakistan would have felt somewhat alienated from the US if it had found out that Washington was assisting India's assumption of a permanent seat at the Security Council, giving it significant advantages in the Kashmir issue.

This communication between Pandit and Nehru also sharpens what we know about US thinking regarding the UN in the aftermath of that body's decision to intervene in the reignited Korean civil war. The early action at the UN to counter North Korea's military move into the South, including the two resolutions of 25 and 27 June 1950, were regarded by the US and others at the UN as a positive example of collective action to thwart communist aggression.²¹ However, although India had voted with the US on these resolutions, appearing therefore to choose sides in the Cold War, it had then continued to follow its policy of supporting the PRC's right to the Chinese seat at the UN. Then, in August, the Soviets returned to the UN, ending the US's advantage there. In the months prior to and following this approach to India, there were various discussions occurring within the US about how the UN could best serve US interests, in particular regarding the subject of China's seat at the UN Security Council and in the UN more generally.²² The idea was certainly being proposed by some that the US move to have the Chinese Nationalists excluded but still keep the Communists from taking the vacant seat.²³ The

¹⁹ Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 249-280.

²⁰ In particular, on the topic of US policy to South Asia in the early Cold War, see H.W. Brands, *The Cold Peace: India and the United States* (Boston: Twayne, 1999).

²¹ Stueck, *The Korean War*, 12, 56, 368

²² Various opinions were expressed in official circles in the US as to whether the UN might be reorganized to better serve the US. For instance former President Hoover advocated a new UN organized *without* any Communist national representation. See in Draft Statement for Possible Use by President Truman, 3 May 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume II, The United Nations; the Western Hemisphere* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1976), 8-9.

²³ FRUS 1950, Vol. II. The idea that China's UN General Assembly seat should be allowed to be vacant was put forward in several discussions in September in preparation for the forthcoming session, for example see, Minutes of

Pandit-Nehru exchange of late August suggests how far these sorts of discussions had gone. Rather than reorganize the UN entirely, Indian admission to the UNSC might make it a body more amenable to US interests. Alternatively, the US could have been trying to trade support for India joining the UNSC with an end to India's policy of proposing the PRC's rights in the UN. However the move is to be interpreted—and more evidence of specific US discussions on this topic is needed—it certainly adds to an overall picture of the US wrestling with the challenges of maintaining and extending the UN's ability to serve its interests as it had in the immediate response to North Korea's attack on the South. Hence, the approach to India could be seen as part of on-going diplomacy at the UN to mold that organization to US interests of which the September "Uniting for Peace" resolution proposed at the General Assembly also formed a part.²⁴

Nehru's Rejection of the US Offer

Nehru's determined rejection of the US plan to place India in China's seat at the UN Security Council reflected the particular reverence and centrality placed on the UN by what one might call a "Nehruvian" foreign policy. The UN was important to Nehru because he regarded it as the venue for the resolution of international conflict on the basis of sustained dialogue and

Briefing Session of the United States Delegation to the General Assembly, Washington, Department of State, 7 September 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume II, The United Nations; the Western Hemisphere*, 273. However, official position was maintained that Chinese Nationalist representation at the Security Council must be continued for the indispensable voting support this gave the US. See, Minutes of the First Meeting of the United States Delegation to the General Assembly, New York, 18 September 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume II, The United Nations; the Western Hemisphere*, 294.

²⁴ "Position Paper Prepared in the Department of State," 1 September 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Volume II, The United Nations; the Western Hemisphere*, 327. The position paper read, "The forthcoming General Assembly session will open at a critical moment in the history of the United Nations. Through the accident of Soviet absence from the Security Council, and with an impetus stemming principally from the United States, the Organization, with the unanimous support of the free world, has faced up to aggression in a manner hardly believed possible by its strongest supporters. In September, for the first time since hostilities began in Korea, the entire membership of the United Nations will meet to consider its future policy. The Assembly may seize the opportunity to capitalize on recent developments by strengthening the United Nations' capacity and reaffirming its determination to cope with aggression; or it may sink from this task and lose a unique chance to consolidate its newly found strength. As it was at the outset of the Korean affair, the attitude of the United States can be decisive." So we can see here the US starting to consider other ways to maintain its advantage at the UN, by September turning to the UN General Assembly as more malleable forum than the UN Security Council with a returned Soviet delegate.

attempts at internationalism; to keep this effort up was to forestall war.²⁵ So the sound development of the UN was an essential component to his foreign policy emphasis on dialogue and inclusiveness.²⁶ One need not go as far as Mithi Mukherjee to accept that the UN was viewed as critical by Indian policy-makers in the 1950s.²⁷

Nehru's argument for rejecting the State Department's plan was strongly influenced by his concern that it would undermine the integrity of the UN to the extent it would cease to exist "as we have known it" and marking therefore a "further drift towards war."²⁸ Nehru had strong hopes that the UN would prove to be a body that would, through dialogue, provide a forum for peaceful resolution of conflict and mitigate the growing tensions of the world. One cannot underestimate how imminent Nehru and others felt a conflict of at least an equal degree to the Second World War was. He also valued the UN as an arena to condemn and even constrain immoral action by states, and this hope had in fact been partly realized through Indian action over nascent apartheid legislation concerning citizens of Indian origin in South Africa.²⁹ What is interesting is that Nehru's hopes for the UN had not suffered overly at this stage, despite Indian frustration of seeing what was considered India's just cause over Kashmir being obstructed by US and UK meddling in the UN.³⁰ Pandit had even wondered in 1949 if Kashmir would be the price of a seat in the Security Council.³¹

²⁵ "However difficult the path, it has to be pursued by repeated attempts at co-operation on the part of all nations. Once that attempt is given up, the consequence can only be a preparation for conflict on a world-wide scale and ultimately, the conflict itself." See "A Problem for the United Nations, Message broadcast by the United Nations Radio network from Lake Success, New York," 5 May 1950, in *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, vol. 2 (Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India), 130.

²⁶ For an impressive explanation of Nehru's faith in diplomacy, and particularly his and India's own diplomatic skills, see, Andrew Bingham Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁷ Mithi Mukherjee, "'A World of Illusion': The Legacy of Empire in India's Foreign Relations, 1947-1962," *The International History Review* 32, no 2 (2010): 253-271. Mukherjee argues that the leaders of Independent India transferred the pre-Gandhi era Congress loyalty to the imperial metropolis to the UN as the ultimate source of justice in international affairs.

²⁸ See note 9 above

²⁹ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Mazower's history of the UN's origins includes a focus on how Nehru challenged and destroyed the imperial internationalism of Jan Smuts between 1946 and 1950, though he failed to prevent the development of apartheid in South Africa

³⁰ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 2 September, 1949, in Pandit I, Subject File No. 59, 47, NMML. Pandit complained to Nehru of an attempt by the US to put India "on a par" with Pakistan at the UN over Kashmir. For Nehru's early frustration with the US and UK for their backing of Pakistan at the UN over Kashmir see, Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 72; Stueck, *The Korean War*, 81; Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004), 180

³¹ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru, 2 September, 1949, in Pandit I, Subject File No. 59, 47, NMML.

The crucial role Nehru believed the UN could play in international affairs meant he was loath to destabilize this venue with moves which would fundamentally change its charter, as would be necessary for India to take China's seat. He pointed out to his sister that the forthcoming General Assembly session, to begin in September 1950, could well see a final crisis at the UN with divisions over China splintering the organization beyond repair and leading to an ever increased risk of war. He would do nothing to exacerbate those dangers.³²

To Nehru's mind the sound development of the UN required that it was truly representative of the world's nation states. Hence it was logical that Chinese representation was held by the PRC and this was a key component of Nehru's UN policy.³³ This was, however, part of a wider priority placed on China by Nehru. Nehru did not want India to come into conflict with China, and felt China's international "socialization" and integration would help prevent any turmoil. Nehru believed that international divisions could be solved not by drawing up armed camps to guarantee the balance of power, but rather by displays of trust that brought everyone into the international community and reduced the prevailing sense of paranoia. The West had erred, according to Nehru, by encircling the Soviet Union in its early history to the detriment of that state's sense of security, and in many ways had created the bipolar confrontation.³⁴ This Nehruvian reading of history drove the Indian Prime Minister to seek accommodation with China on behalf of India and the world.

That Nehru so adamantly made clear that India did not want to replace China in the UN Security Council, and furthermore, that the issue of China's representation in the UN must take priority over any possible consideration of India gaining a permanent seat in that body underlines the centrality of China to Nehru's foreign policy. If there was an identifiable core to Nehru's foreign policy it was that China, whether it was communist or not, was going to be central to the post-war international world. This was a fact that could not be ignored whether one welcomed it or not because it was an aspect of the general resurgence of Asia that Nehru welcomed and hoped to spur forward. Any attempt to confine China, simply because of its allegiance to any

³² "14th September, 1950," in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-1964*, vol. 2, ed. G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1986), 194. Nehru reiterated that the most important issue at the UN was that the PRC take China's seat

³³ "14th September, 1950," in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-1964*, vol. 2, ed. G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1986), 194

³⁴ See Brands, *The Cold Peace*, 51, 63, on Nehru's assessment that world must avoid making same mistake of isolating China as West did in early history of Soviet Union

particular political ideology, was misguided and bound to incite resistance and lead to international instability.

Nehru's position was clear even before the PRC was founded. In July 1949, he had written to Pandit in Washington instructing her to decline an invitation to join a "Pacific Pact" with anti-Communists in Asia: "As a realist, one has to recognize that Communists control the greater part of China and may, before long, control the whole of that country. In broader interest of international peace, it is not desirable that we should do anything that would make cultivation of normal friendly relations with the new China difficult, if not impossible."³⁵ In August 1950, India had only recently recognized the PRC and was very anxious to improve relations. Nehru's whole foreign policy was based on demonstrating to the world that China could be an international partner and thus reduce Cold War tensions, just as Nehru argued that if the West had not been so paranoid about the Soviet Union when it was first established they might well have developed a less confrontational relationship.

Conclusion

Before concluding, one could add that the exchanges with Pandit still demonstrated Nehru's unambiguous view that India was a great power and should receive the designation of a permanent seat on the Security Council. He added, almost as an afterthought to his 30 August 1950 letter to his sister, that there were "many factors" that meant India was "certainly entitled to a permanent seat in the security council."³⁶ India's centrality to Asian and even international affairs was a constant refrain of Nehru's and he pointed to historical, geographical, and even moral justifications for this. Nehru's detractors, then and now, tend to agree with his assessment of India's greatness, but it was his principled conditions that drew their ire: the concern that India would not take a place in the UNSC "at the cost of China." Therefore it would be interesting to examine further evidence, if it exists, of discussions on the Indian side about this offer. It would also be valuable to know the origins of this gambit on the American side, or if there was more

³⁵ Cable to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, New Delhi, 19 July, 1949, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 12, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1991), 389

³⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 30 August, 1950, in Pandit I, Subject File No. 60, Subject: 1949, 1950-51, Letters received by V.L. Pandit as Ambassador to Washington from Jawaharlal Nehru concerning India's relations with US, Pakistan and other countries and developments at home, 137, NMML

communication about this with the Indians. Nevertheless, as confirmation that some discussion was initiated by the US and was rejected by India, it is very welcome.

Knowledge of this episode adds to our understanding of various aspects of US and Indian attitudes and foreign policies in the middle of 1950. It is evidence of the US making a major attempt to draw India closer to it at a crucial stage of the emerging Cold War. This challenges both the notion of the US taking a balanced subcontinental approach prior to the military agreement with Pakistan that emerged in late 1953, and also suggests the initial policy of leaving Cold War management of subcontinent affairs to the old-hand, Great Britain, was being reconsidered prior to China's intervention in the Korean War.³⁷ This offer should also be seen as an important event in the US's struggle to bend the UN to the purposes of fighting the Cold War. The US fear of communist China was so great that Washington considered the risky move of expelling its spent ally Jiang Jieshi and instead anointing India at the highest table of global politics, thereby inoculating it against further troublemaking and tilting the Security Council, to which the Soviets had just returned, irreparably beyond Communist influence.

Nehru's response to the US's offer underlined Indian agency in its difficult relations with the US. He rejected what might have been perceived as a very generous US proposal to support India's national interests on grounds of principle, indicating the difficulty the US would have in finding a common diplomatic language with India through the 1950s. The exchange revealed Nehru's continuing respect for the institution of the UN as a critical aspect of his foreign policy, even following the perceived disadvantage that India felt it had been put to in the UN forum on the question of Kashmir. More than anything else however, Nehru's letter to Pandit confirmed the centrality of China to a "Nehruvian" foreign policy, seen again later in the 1955 exchange in Moscow, but shown to be firmly in place also in 1950. Nehru was neither a fearful nor blindly infatuated "panda hugger," but pursued a foreign policy constructed around the responsible view that the PRC was too big for the international system to ignore.³⁸ Finally this demonstrated Nehru's conviction that India did deserve a seat on the Security Council, but this was not to be gained at the cost of firm principle.

³⁷ See Brands, *The Cold Peace*, 40-41, on the US's initial "Commonwealth" policy of delegating security issues on the sub-continent to Great Britain, and the attempt to keep out of Indo-Pak quarrels. For Brands' suggestion that this strategy was only reconsidered following China's intervention in the Korean War, see Brands, *The Cold Peace*, 60.

³⁸ Brahma Chellaney quoted in Tsering Topgyal, "Charting the Tibet Issue in the Sino-Indian Border Dispute," *China Report* 47 (May 2011): 115-113.

The ultimate isolation of the PRC from the world, India, and even its closest ally, the USSR, by the time of Nehru's death in 1964 suggests his policy of engagement and socialization had failed. Indeed, it has been said that the 1962 war with China "killed" Nehru.³⁹ However, to argue that Nehru's reputation must be assessed in light of this failure it to ignore that he was powerless to hold significant influence over Beijing, where the leadership was under the sway of a powerfully radical ideology. The PRC's continued distance from the West and the growing disputes with India in the late 1950s, followed by the Sino-Indian War in 1962, all seemed to prefigure the eventual split with Moscow, an event riddled with the esoteric imperatives of the socialist bloc's competitive interpretations of ideology. On the contrary, Nehru must take some credit for the earlier period when Beijing pursued a broad engagement with the world, despite the US's attitude. It is quite possible that, without Nehru's accommodating approach to the PRC, Beijing might have turned its back on a suspicious world far earlier than it did in the end.

³⁹ Ramachandra Guha, "The War That Killed Nehru," essay based on the Ingalls Lecture delivered at the Harvard-Yenching Institute on 29 March 2011.

Anton Harder is a PhD candidate in the International History Department of the London School of Economics. His dissertation is on Sino-Indian relations from 1949-1962.