

Jawaharlal Nehru: World Peace and Cooperation (1955)

[Speech in the closed session of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, 22 April 1955.]

Mr Chairman, the turn this discussion has taken is a much wider one than that we had expected. In fact, it has covered the whole major heading. We have just had the advantage of listening to the distinguished leader of the Turkish delegation who told us what he, as a responsible leader of the nation, must do and must not do. He gave us an able statement of what I might call one side representing the views of one of the major blocs existing at the present time in the world. I have no doubt that an equally able discourse could be given on the part of the other bloc. I belong to neither and I propose to belong to neither whatever happens in the world. If we have to stand alone, we will stand by ourselves, whatever happens—and India has stood alone without any aid against a mighty empire, the British Empire—and we propose to face all consequences.

What has the “reality” led us to? What has the reality of the peace that followed the last war led us to? I would like the honourable delegates to realise that, to appreciate that. This so-called realistic appreciation of the world situation, where has it led us to? It has led us to the brink of war, a third world war. It has been stated by eminent persons who know about it that if there is another war there will be total destruction of mankind. That is to say, a third world war would bring us not only to the abyss of civilisation and culture but would mean total destruction. We have to face that.

The delegate for Turkey has gone through the history of the past ten years. Perhaps that history could be, here and there, interpreted differently. Much of it may be true and much of it may be interpreted differently. It is hardly possible for us to discuss the history of the past ten years because we have been living in revolutionary times. Following this last world war, in Asia great things have happened. There is that great nation, China, which has risen after hundreds of years of

strife and oppression. That is a major fact of the situation. There is India which does not presume to possess any military might but presumes to have the strength to face any danger, whenever it may come.

We do not agree with the communist teachers, we do not agree with the anti-communist teachers, because they are both based on wrong principles. I never challenged the right of any country to defend itself; it has to. We will defend ourselves with whatever arms and strength we have, and if we have no arms we will defend ourselves without arms. I am dead certain that no country can conquer India. Even the two great power blocs together cannot conquer India; not even the atom or the hydrogen bomb. I know what my people are. But I know also that if we rely upon others, whatever great powers they might be, if we look to them for sustenance, then we are weak indeed.

True, our outlook is different. Ideologies are talked about. Let us not talk about ideologies. What did the honourable delegate from Turkey talk about ideology? He talked about it all the time. If I am to talk about another ideology, the Gandhian ideology, I can go on for hours, but I do not want to impose it on honourable members here. I know that Gandhi won my freedom. I am afraid of nobody. I suffer from no fear complex; my country suffers from no fear complex. We rely on nobody except on the friendship of others; we rely on ourselves and none others.

I do not want to take up the time of honourable delegates here but I wish to tell this House that I neither believe in the communist nor the anti-communist approach to this question. So far as we are concerned, we have adopted a line of action and we propose to adhere to it, come what may. But let us examine the situation as it is today. What does it lead to? Some delegates have pointed out the dangers of the situation. One side says, “Let us arm, and arm and arm because the other party is arming” and the other party says, “Let us arm, and arm and arm because the other party is arming.” So, both sides go on making arms.

My country has made mistakes. Every country makes mistakes. I have no doubt we will make mistakes; we will stumble and fall and get up. The mistakes of my country and perhaps the mistakes of other countries here do not make a difference; but the mistakes the great powers make do make a difference to the world and may well bring

about a terrible catastrophe. I speak with the greatest respect for these great powers because they are not only great in military might but in development, in culture, in civilisation. But I do submit that greatness sometimes brings quite false values, false standards. When they begin to think in terms of military strength—whether it be the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union or the USA—then they are going away from the right track and the result of that may be that the overwhelming might of one country will conquer the world. Thus far the world has succeeded in preventing that; I cannot speak for the future. But you have today two mighty colossuses, neither of whom can put an end to each other but obviously they can ruin each other and the rest of the world. There is no other way out. Everybody recognises it; the great statesmen of England, Russia and America recognise it. Let us admit that we have all committed mistakes. Let us admit that one has committed more mistakes than the other. However, that is immaterial, except in academic debate.

We have to face the position as it is today, namely, that whatever armaments one side or other might possess, war will lead to consequences which will result in not gaining an objective but ruin. Therefore, the first thing we have to settle is that war must be avoided. Naturally war cannot be avoided if any country takes to a career of conquest and aggression. Secondly, we countries of Asia have to consider whether we can, all of us put together, certainly not singly, prevent the great powers or big countries going to war. We certainly cannot prevent the big countries going to war if they want to but we can make a difference. Even a single country can make a difference when the scales are evenly balanced. What are we going to do? Are we going to throw our weight in the scales on the side of peace or war? It is no use blaming the Soviet Union or America. It is perfectly true that at the present moment we, not only in Asia but in Europe as well, have every reason to dislike and oppose, not only external aggression, but internal subversion and all the rest of it.

Let us then talk of the steps we can take. The first step is to make our view clear that these things should not happen. So far as I am concerned, it does not matter what war takes place; we will not take part in it unless we have to defend ourselves. If I join any of these big groups I lose my identity; I have no identity left, I have no view left. I may ex-

press it here and there generally but I have no views left. If all the world were to be divided up between these two big blocs, what would be the result? The inevitable result would be war.

Therefore every step that takes place in reducing that area in the world which may be called the “unaligned area” is a dangerous step and leads to war. It reduces that objectivity, that balance, that outlook which other countries without military might can perhaps exercise.

Honourable members laid great stress on moral force. It is with military force that we are dealing now but I submit that moral force counts and the moral force of Asia and Africa must, in spite of the atomic and hydrogen bombs of Russia, the USA or another country, count! Unfortunately, in discussing this very desirable proposition put forward by the Prime Minister [U Nu] of Burma, we have drifted to all kinds of other things. On the face of it, nobody can challenge the proposition of the Prime Minister of Burma. All that may be said of it is that it does not go far enough, that it is rather reiterating, even repetitive, of the Charter. Every truth that you say is likely to have originated somewhere or other. The point is that a certain truth has a certain application at a particular moment. If it has no application at a particular moment, it will be forgotten. Why does this simple word “coexistence” raise all sorts of turmoil in peoples’ minds? Because it has a significance in the present state of the world. Otherwise everybody recognises it. What is the alternative to peaceful coexistence? There may be coexistence, not peaceful, but something in the nature of cold war. Why then be afraid of the word? Are we choosing war deliberately or moving unconsciously towards war, which cold war implies. I say that there is no alternative for any country, unless it wants war, but to accept the concept of peaceful coexistence. In some countries the very word, peace, is looked upon with horror. It is most amazing. That word is considered dangerous.

So I submit, let us consider these matters practically, leaving out ideologies. Many members present here do not obviously accept the communist ideology, while some of them do. For my part I do not. I am a positive person, not an “anti” person. I want positive good for my country and the world. Therefore, are we, the countries of Asia and Africa, devoid of any positive position except being procommunist or anti-communist? Has it come to this, that the leaders of thought who

have given religions and all kinds of things to the world have to tag on to this kind of group or that and be hangers on of this party or the other carrying out their wishes and occasionally giving an idea? It is most degrading and humiliating to any self-respecting people or nation. It is an intolerable thought to me that the great countries of Asia and Africa should come out of bondage into freedom only to degrade themselves or humiliate themselves in this way. Well, I do not criticise these powers. They are probably capable of looking after themselves and know what is best for themselves. But I will not tie myself to this degradation. Am I to lose my freedom and individuality and become a camp-follower of others? I have absolutely no intention of doing that.

A reference was made to these various attacks made in the Middle East, South-East Asia and so on. The whole course of the discussion has proceeded on that theme. Mr Mohammad Ali [Prime Minister of Pakistan] put forward an excellent resolution. Certainly the first four points in that resolution are acceptable to us all. The fifth deals with self-defence, singly or collectively: I do not deny the right of any country to defend itself. It is a natural right that cannot be denied. Then why is it put there? It has been put there because of these pacts that have been organised in Western and Eastern Asia. If that is the position I am not prepared to accept it. If that point is put there to cover those pacts, how can we accept it? I do not challenge Mr Mohammad Ali's right to enter into any pacts although I may disagree with him, but under cover of words to ask this Conference to accept the principle of those pacts is, I submit, something that should not be done. It is open to him to have those pacts. It is open to me not to have them. But to bring in this way the collective defence pacts made in the last year is going far beyond our subject and bringing in things which are highly controversial and which tend to lead to fundamental differences of opinion.

I submit to you, every pact has brought insecurity and not security to the countries which have entered into them. They have brought the danger of atomic bombs and the rest of it nearer to them than would have been the case otherwise. They have not added to the strength of any country, I submit, which it had singly. It may have produced some idea of security, but it is a false security. It is a bad thing for any country thus to be lulled into security.

The distinguished delegate of Turkey referred to NATO. I have nothing to say against NATO. It is open to the European countries to join it for self-defence. I cannot challenge it in the slightest. But I should like to point out to this assembly that this conception of the NATO has extended itself in two ways. It has gone far away from the Atlantic and has reached other oceans and seas. Leave that alone. Secondly, do honourable members of this Conference realise that the NATO today is one of the most powerful protectors of colonialism? I say that explicitly. I am not saying that indirectly, but directly and explicitly. Here is the little territory of Goa, in India, which Portugal holds. We get letters from the NATO powers—mind you, Portugal is a member of NATO—and Portugal has approached its fellow members in the NATO on this point—telling us, “You should not do anything in regard to Goa, you should not do this and that.” I will not mention these powers; they are some of the so-called big powers. It does not matter what powers they are, but it is gross impertinence. The Republic of India told them that it is gross impertinence on their part. Let there be no doubt about it, we shall deal with this little matter in the way we like.

The distinguished delegate of Iraq was eloquent about Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Does he realise that these three territories would probably have been independent if it were not for NATO? Today because of the assistance given by these great powers NATO has bases for various purposes in these parts of the world. So we must take a complete view of the situation and not be contradictory ourselves when we talk about colonialism, when we say “colonialism must go”, and in the same voice say that we support every policy or some policies that confirm colonialism. It is an extraordinary attitude to take up.

So I do submit that we must for the moment leave out past history, as to what happened in Potsdam, at the Cairo Conference and at Yalta, as to what President Roosevelt said or Winston Churchill said and what somebody else did. All post-war confusion has arisen from all kinds of steps taken, right or wrong, in the past. And we have to suffer today because of this confusion, because it clouds our view of the total world situation. Turkey said that the US and other powers disarmed rapidly after the war. Let us admit that. What happens today? Can we forget that the situation we have to face today is that the world, a good

part of it, is ranged with one big bloc or other, both having a certain ideology? I do not know the ideology of the Western bloc. Certainly it is not one single ideology; those in it differ, but in a military sense they hold together. There are other countries in the world which have not aligned themselves in this way. Some may sympathise with this bloc or the other, and some may not. Two big colossuses stand face to face with each other, afraid of each other.

Today in the world, I do submit, not only because of the presence of these two colossuses but also because of the coming of the atomic and hydrogen bomb age, the whole concept of war, of peace, of politics, has changed. We are thinking and acting in terms of a past age. No matter what generals and soldiers learned in the past, it is useless in this atomic age. They do not understand its implications or its use. As an eminent military critic said: "The whole conception of war is changed. There is no precedent." It may be so. Now it does not matter if one country is more powerful than the other in the use of the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb. One is more powerful to cause ruin than the other. That is what is meant by saying that the point of saturation has been reached. However powerful one country is, the other is also powerful. It is the world that suffers; there can be no victory. It may be said perhaps rightly that owing to this very terrible danger, people refrain from going to war. I hope so. The difficulty is that while governments want to refrain from war, something suddenly happens and there is war and utter ruin. There is another thing: because of the present position in the world there is not likely to be aggression. If there is aggression anywhere in the world, it is bound to result in world war. It does not matter where the aggression is. If one commits aggression there is world war.

I want the countries here to realise it and not to think in terms of any limitation. Today, a war however limited it may be, is bound to lead to a big war. Even if tactical atomic weapons, as they are called, are used, the next step would be the use of the big atomic bomb. You cannot stop these things. In a country's life-and-death struggle, it is not going to stop short of this. It is not going to decide on our or anybody else's resolutions but it would engage in war, ruin and annihilation of others before it allows itself to be annihilated completely. Annihilation will result not only in the countries engaged in war, but

owing to the radioactive waves which go thousands and thousands of miles it will destroy everything. That is the position. It is not an academic position; it is not a position of discussing ideologies; nor is it a position of discussing past history. It is looking at the world as it is today.

The leaders of the great nations like the President of the United States have to carry a world of responsibility in having to face this position. So are the leaders of United Kingdom and Russia. It is a tremendous burden. I do not know at what time an error might be made this way or that way which would lead to war.

Now, therefore, are we, the Asian and African countries, going to look on it passively or are we going to take a step which will upset the balance on one side or the other? This is not a question of security. Will not security be damned if war comes? Who is going to protect us if war comes and if atomic bombs come? Of course, every country will look after itself, but it will be difficult to do that with atomic bombs, radioactive waves and all that. Therefore, I would beg this Conference to appreciate the gravity of this situation. It is a very grave situation indeed. We have not discoursed Formosa and the rest, nor is it necessary for us to discuss the merits of the question. But the fact is that in the Far Eastern countries the situation is very grave. One does not know where it will lead to. Therefore, can we not in our own way say something peacefully, and in a friendly way, firmly declaring something, which will set the scales in favour of peace? That is the problem.

I do submit that the so-called five principles (whatever the number may be, they have more or less been included in the resolution of the Prime Minister of Burma) is not a magic formula which will prevent all the ills of the world. But it is something which meets the needs of the day. It lessens tension; it does not harm anybody, criticise anybody, condemn anybody. And I assure you, broadly speaking, President Eisenhower is in agreement with those principles. I know that the present Prime Minister of England [Anthony Eden] has said so in a public address given to our Members of Parliament. Some of us here may disagree with it, but surely that is the reverse of the right step for us to take. I therefore beg of this Conference to consider the matter in the light of the actualities of today. I am entirely one with the honourable head of the Turkish delegation when he says that we must take a real-

istic view, a view which is related to facts of today, not yesterday or the day before yesterday.

Between the day before yesterday and today there have been wars and vast revolutions have taken place; many changes have taken place and all kinds of things have been happening. So that one must consider things as they are today. If the honourable delegate of Iraq represents the right viewpoint, I can say that the world is going to ruin. It is not an approach to this question and his speech is full of irritation, hatred and disregard. His whole speech is a tirade. It is not a balanced speech. Let us not align ourselves as independent nations of Asia and Africa, but take a line of our own. I do not say that it should be a single line. I do submit that the resolution put forward by the Burmese Prime Minister is the correct solution. A word may be changed here and there. It works on a correct basis, a friendly basis for all countries. It does not say anything which might irritate anybody.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan says that it is good but not enough, and he wanted to add many things. There is some resolution which he had about colonialism. We have dealt with it already. You take away the force of the resolution if you add all these things. He said something about the peaceful solution of disputes. Have a resolution or an amendment; but he has referred to all kinds of things. Some people have said: "Let us have the Charter". As a matter of fact, some of the honourable delegates were not present when the Prime Minister of Burma proposed his resolution. So, Mr President, with your permission, I shall read it out again:

"The nations assembled at the Asian-African Conference declare that their relations between themselves, and their approach to the other nations of the world, shall be governed by complete respect for the national sovereignty and integrity of other nations. They will not intervene or interfere in the territory or the internal affairs of each other or of other nations, and will totally refrain from acts or threats of aggression. They recognise the equality of races and of nations, large and small. They will be governed by the desire to promote mutual interest and cooperation, by respect for the fundamental human rights and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

I do submit that there is not a word in this resolution to which anybody can object. As a matter of fact, the word "coexistence" is not used at all, although we are discussing this resolution under that head. Unless one thinks that there is no alternative to this except war, and to be prepared for war, this resolution has to be accepted.