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## **The Role of Democratic Socialism in Nehru's Foreign Policy and Non-Alignment Movement**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the ideological underpinnings of Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy with a particular focus on the role of democratic socialism in shaping India's approach to international relations. It investigates how Nehru's commitment to democratic socialism influenced the formation and leadership of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), and how this approach sought to balance idealism with realism in a bipolar world order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. Nehru's vision uniquely sought to reconcile the political freedom of parliamentary democracy with the economic equality of socialism, primarily through the mechanisms of a Mixed Economy and centralized state planning (the Planning Commission and Public Sector Undertaking). They offer a vital intellectual framework for addressing the escalating crisis of economic inequality following three decades of market reforms, safeguarding India's secular and democratic character against rising majoritarianism, and reinforcing the state's crucial role in providing public goods (health, education) as a counterbalance to purely market-driven outcomes. Through an analysis of Nehru's speeches, writings, and key foreign policy decisions, the paper examines the impact and legacy of his socialist worldview on



**Introduction:** Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, played a crucial role in defining the country's foreign policy in the post-independence period. At the heart of Nehru's diplomatic vision was the philosophy of democratic socialism, which not only guided India's domestic development but also shaped its external relations. Nehru viewed foreign policy as an extension of national values, advocating for peace, anti-colonialism, economic justice, and the sovereignty of nations. His international vision was rooted in a belief that newly independent countries could forge a new world order free from the dominance of imperialist or capitalist powers.

Nehru's leadership came at a time when the global political landscape was being rapidly reshaped by the Cold War. The bipolar division of the world into American and Soviet spheres of influence posed significant challenges for developing nations like India. Nehru rejected the idea of subordinating India's foreign policy to the strategic interests of either superpower bloc. Instead, he sought to pursue an independent and principled path guided by ethical diplomacy and cooperation among equals. This aspiration culminated in India becoming a founding member of the Non-Alignment Movement, a coalition of states advocating independence in foreign policy.

This ideological framework sought to fuse the political liberties of parliamentary democracy (inherited from the West and cemented by universal adult franchise) with the socio-economic goals of socialism (aiming to eliminate poverty and inequality through state intervention). Influenced by British Fabianism and Soviet planning, but fundamentally committed to non-violence and individual dignity, Nehru's model became the defining political and economic consensus of post-independence India.

This paper examines how Nehru's socialist convictions influenced India's position in the international arena, especially through the framework of the Non-Alignment Movement. It explores how his belief in democratic socialism informed not just India's internal governance, but also its approach to global issues such as disarmament, decolonization, and economic development. By analyzing Nehru's ideological influences and the practical execution of his foreign policy, the study seeks to evaluate the enduring significance of Nehruvian socialism in shaping modern India's global posture.

**Early Life of Jawaharlal Nehru** Jawaharlal Nehru was born on November 14, 1889, in Allahabad, India, into a wealthy and politically influential family. His father, Motilal Nehru, was a prominent lawyer and an early leader in the Indian National Congress. Nehru received his early education at home and later attended Harrow School in England. He went on to study natural sciences at Trinity College, Cambridge,



and completed his legal training at the Inner Temple in London. During his time in Britain, Nehru was exposed to various political ideologies, including liberalism, socialism, and nationalism, which significantly shaped his intellectual and political outlook. On returning to India, he joined the Indian National Congress and quickly rose through its ranks, becoming a key figure in the struggle for independence under the mentorship of Mahatma Gandhi. His early experiences, both in India and abroad, played a pivotal role in shaping his commitment to democratic principles and social justice.

**Democratic Socialism: Ideological Foundations** Nehru's democratic socialism was influenced by a combination of Western liberal ideals, Marxist thought, and Gandhian ethics. He envisioned a socio-economic structure that prioritized equality, justice, and the welfare state while maintaining democratic freedoms. These values extended into his international outlook, where Nehru opposed imperialism, colonialism, and economic exploitation, advocating instead for peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and multilateralism.

#### The Pillars of Nehruvianism

1. **Democratic Commitment:** Unlike many post-colonial leaders who adopted authoritarian models, Nehru's non-negotiable faith in parliamentary democracy, secularism, and the rule of law formed the essential political container for his economic goals. He believed that socialism could only be achieved through peaceful, evolutionary change and not violence or class dictatorship.

2. **The Mixed Economy:** The core economic model was the Mixed Economy, where the state controlled "the commanding heights" (heavy industry, defence, infrastructure, energy) through Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), while the private sector was permitted to operate under regulation. This was institutionalized through the Planning Commission and the system of Five-Year Plans.

3. **Scientific Temper and Modernization:** Nehru saw science and technology as the only way to modernize a deeply traditional society. He established key national institutes (IITs, AIIMS, atomic research centres) to build the human capital necessary for a modern industrial state, promoting a "scientific outlook" that rejected superstition and irrationality.

**Foreign Policy Principles Rooted in Democratic Socialism** Nehru believed that foreign policy should reflect a nation's internal values. Consequently, India pursued a foreign policy rooted in moral diplomacy, anti-colonial solidarity, and support for global disarmament. Nehru's rejection of military alliances and his insistence on peaceful resolution of conflicts reflected his socialist belief in dialogue and equity among nations.



**The Genesis and Philosophy of the Non-Alignment Movement** The Non-Alignment Movement, formally established in 1961, emerged from Nehru's vision of a third path that avoided alignment with either of the Cold War superpowers. His democratic socialism emphasized sovereignty, self-determination, and equitable global development, making non-alignment a natural extension of his worldview. Nehru saw the movement as a platform for newly independent nations to assert their autonomy and collective strength.

**Nehru's Leadership in the NAM** Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, was a central architect of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a coalition of states that chose not to align with either the United States-led Western bloc or the Soviet-led Eastern bloc during the Cold War. Nehru's leadership was shaped by India's recent independence from British colonial rule, and he believed that newly liberated countries should preserve their sovereignty by staying out of great power rivalries. He championed a foreign policy based on the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and non-intervention — ideas later codified as the *Panchsheel* (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence).

Nehru's vision for non-alignment was not passive neutrality, but active engagement in promoting peace, justice, and economic development. He sought to unite countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to form a "third force" in global politics that could advocate for disarmament, decolonization, and equitable economic relations. His role in convening the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, alongside leaders like Yugoslavia's Tito and Egypt's Nasser, laid the ideological and organizational groundwork for the formal establishment of NAM in 1961.

India, under Nehru, became a leading voice for the Global South. His speeches at the United Nations and his bilateral diplomacy emphasized the dangers of military alliances and the need for an independent foreign policy. Nehru's stance was especially significant because it gave moral and political legitimacy to non-alignment at a time when the world was deeply polarized.

Though NAM evolved over time, Nehru's leadership remains foundational. His emphasis on sovereignty, peace, and South-South solidarity continues to influence India's foreign policy and the broader discourse of developing nations within global institutions.

**Criticism and Limitations** Despite its ideals, Nehru's foreign policy was criticized for being overly idealistic and occasionally inconsistent. India's war with China in 1962 exposed the limitations of moral diplomacy and tested the resilience of the non-aligned stance. Critics argue that Nehru's commitment to non-alignment sometimes led to ambiguity and diplomatic inefficacy. Nehru's socialism was often



diluted by political reality. To maintain national unity and secure parliamentary consensus, he compromised with powerful domestic interests, including:

2. Failure of Land Reforms: Radical land redistribution, a core socialist tenet, was largely stalled by resistance from powerful rural landowning elites within the Congress party itself, deepening rural inequality.

3. Centralization of Power: The Planning Commission became a highly centralized, bureaucratic body that overrode local needs and democratic input, demonstrating a 'top-down' approach that undermined the spirit of grassroots empowerment.

The external crisis of 1991 (the Balance of Payments crisis) served as the necessary catalyst for India to abandon the institutional core of Nehruvian planning, initiating a shift toward a market-oriented economy.

**Legacy and Contemporary Relevance** Nehru's democratic socialist approach to foreign policy laid the groundwork for India's enduring strategic autonomy. While the geopolitical landscape has changed, elements of Nehruvian non-alignment continue to influence India's foreign policy doctrine, especially in its emphasis on multipolarity and independence in global affairs. Despite the neoliberal turn, the legacy of Nehru's democratic socialism remains embedded in India's constitutional vision and political discourse. Policies such as the Right to Education, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and food security programs reflect a continued commitment to social welfare.

Moreover, Nehru's emphasis on secularism, scientific temper, and inclusive development continues to provide a moral compass amid rising communal tensions and identity-based politics. His vision offers a framework for addressing contemporary challenges such as economic inequality, environmental sustainability, and democratic backsliding.

**Conclusion** Jawaharlal Nehru's democratic socialism was not confined to domestic policy; it deeply informed his vision of a just and equitable world order. Through the Non-Alignment Movement, Nehru translated his socialist values into a coherent foreign policy strategy that aimed to protect India's sovereignty while promoting international peace and cooperation. His insistence on neutrality and independence enabled India to pursue development goals free from external domination and ideological coercion. The Non-Alignment Movement provided a collective voice to newly decolonized nations and became a vital forum for resisting imperialism in new forms.



Moreover, Nehru's legacy continues to resonate in India's strategic autonomy, its pursuit of balanced international partnerships, and its emphasis on peaceful coexistence. His foreign policy framework, though challenged and revised over time, remains a cornerstone of India's international engagement, especially in a multipolar world where emerging powers seek a greater role. Ultimately, Nehru's integration of democratic socialism with global diplomacy provided India with a moral compass and strategic clarity that has endured beyond the Cold War.

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