

Despatch from Archibald Edward Nye to Philip John Noel-Baker on the Asian Conference in New Delhi (New Delhi, 31 January 1949)

Caption: On 31 January 1949, Archibald Edward Nye, High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in India, sends Philip John Noel-Baker, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, a despatch in which he outlines the conclusions of the Asian Conference on Indonesia, which took place from 20 to 23 January in New Delhi. The conference particularly called for an end to the Dutch police action in Indonesia and requested the intervention of the United Nations Security Council to stop the violence. Archibald Edward Nye emphasises the leading role of India in providing diplomatic support to the anti-colonial cause and advises the British Government to reflect carefully on its future policy in Asia.

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SECRET

Office of the High Commissioner
for the United Kingdom,
6, Albuquerque Road
NEW DELHI.

31st January, 1949.

Sir,

I have the honour to address you on the subject of the Asian Conference on Indonesia which was held in New Delhi from 20th-23rd January, 1949.

2. For some weeks before the Dutch Police Action of December 18th, 1948, the Government of India had on several occasions expressed to the United Kingdom Government their apprehensions that negotiations between the Netherlands Government and the Republican Government of Indonesia were likely to break down and that Police action by the former was imminent. During the same period, and indeed for several months before, the Republican Government had been making repeated requests to the Government of India to give some tangible expression of their sympathy for the Indonesian cause. Their persistence was rewarded at the end of November, 1948, when Pandit Nehru issued an invitation to Dr. Soekarno to visit India in the latter part of December. When the news of the Dutch police action was announced there was a spontaneous and unanimous outburst of indignation throughout India against the Netherlands Government. This was immediately reflected in the termination of Indian facilities for Dutch Air Lines, with Article 89 of the Chicago Convention being quoted in justification of this action; in official suggestions that Marshall Aid should be withheld from Holland as well as the East Indies; in hints that the United States should proceed warily in the matter of the North Atlantic Pact; and in private suggestions that the Government of India would have to break off diplomatic relations with the Netherlands Government. This indignation assumed an even more impatient form when the Security Council failed, in India's view, to take adequate measures to deal with the problem. The United Kingdom and the United States were held primarily responsible for its failure. Whilst those in responsible positions realised our world-wide responsibilities, and the embarrassing position the Dutch action had created for us,

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nevertheless it was felt that our policy had been one of trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

3. In this atmosphere and without any prior warning Pandit Nehru announced in a speech at Allahabad on January 1st, that he had issued invitations to a number of countries in the Middle and Far East to attend an early Conference in Delhi to consider the Indonesian problem. He added that it was hoped that Australia and New Zealand would also attend. India's anti-Colonial policy, her consistent sympathy during the last few years for the Republican cause, her indignation at the Dutch police action and her impatience with the Security Council were undoubtedly the principal causes leading up to this development. But there was probably even more to it than this. For some time past various Indian leaders had been thinking and speaking of the role of leadership which India could and should play amongst the nations of Asia. Here was the chance to assert that claim in a tangible form; and the opportunity was quickly grasped. Lastly, Pandit Nehru's intense personal feelings must also have played an important part in India's decision to convene this Conference. More internationally minded than any other Indian leader he had undergone long years of imprisonment in the cause of India's freedom. Having successfully achieved that end, and now being in a position to help others placed in a position substantially similar to his own predicament of a few years back, it was perhaps inevitable that sooner or later he would initiate an altogether new venture in the support of dependent peoples.

4. Pandit Nehru's speech at Allahabad was in the main a denunciation of colonialism and all its works with very little indication that the basic purpose of the proposed Conference was to work within the framework of the United Nations Charter. Indeed he seemed to be propounding a new Monroe doctrine for Asia. The inevitable apprehensions expressed in certain Western countries at this new development in Eastern affairs fortunately made a quick imprint on Pandit Nehru's mind and undoubtedly led him in several speeches preceding the Conference and in other ways to make it clear that:

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- (i) there was no idea of forming an Asian bloc as against European countries or America;
- (ii) The invitations to Australia and New Zealand were proof that the Government of India's action was in no way hostile to the British Commonwealth; and
- (iii) the Conference was not designed to supersede in any way the activities of the Security Council but only to lend it support; and that it proposed to function entirely in terms of the United Nations Charter under which regional arrangements are both recognised and encouraged.

5. The Government of India had a swift and successful response to their invitations, the details of which are as follows:-

- (i) The Governments of Afghanistan, Australia, Burma, Ceylon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, the Lebanon, Pakistan, The Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen decided to send representatives:
- (ii) The Governments of China, Nepal, New Zealand and Siam agreed to send observers. In the first instance it seemed likely that Nepal and Siam would decline the invitation mainly because they did not wish to be drawn into a controversy which might give embarrassment to the United Nations. Personal representations from Pandit Nehru, however, eventually induced both Governments to send observers.
- (iii) Turkey alone declined the invitation, but in doing so expressed her sympathy for the Indonesian cause. Transjordan was not represented apparently because the Government of India's over-all invitation to States of the Arab League was not passed on by the latter to the Transjordan Government.

A list of the delegates and observers attending the Conference is attached as Appendix 'A' to this despatch.

6. The Conference met in Delhi on the 20th January. Goodwill messages were received from many quarters. Two of them, which were incidentally officially circulated by the Government of India among the Conference

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papers, came from the WAFD in Egypt and the Emir Abdul Kerim (on behalf of 25,000,000 Morrocans, Tunisians and Algerians) both expressing sympathy for Indonesia and appealing for co-operation against imperialism. A Vietnam delegation, which had come uninvited to Delhi, also sent its good wishes, and pledged the support of the Vietnam people for the Indonesian cause. The appeal implicit in these messages was manifest and it seemed possible that the Conference would not confine itself to the question of Indonesia.

7. Any fears that may have been entertained on this score were, however, soon allayed. Pandit Nehru was immediately elected Chairman of the Conference, and by the moderation of his inaugural address, at the opening public session, set the tone for all the ensuing proceedings. Though he expressed his belief that so long as any form of colonialism existed in Asia or elsewhere there would be conflict and a threat to peace, he asked the Conference to concentrate on this occasion on the Indonesian issue, and reiterated that their task was to supplement rather than supplant the Security Council, to which body it should make its recommendations. He also suggested that the Conference should consider what steps it should urge the Security Council to take if the Netherlands Government declined to abide by any resolutions the former might pass, but emphasised that it should look to non-violent means for the solution of the problem before them. Finally he hinted at the desirability of some permanent arrangement for mutual consultation and concerted effort between the countries assembled at the Conference.

8. The Speakers who followed Pandit Nehru expressed similar sentiments in similarly moderate terms. The Australian delegate strongly supported his plea that the Conference should confine itself exclusively to the Indonesian issue. The Burmese representative, however, referred to the existence of the problem of Vietnam and the necessity for concerted action in that quarter also. Some of the Arab delegates maintained that the situation in Palestine was no less dangerous than that in Indonesia, and it is understood that there was a danger at one stage that it might be difficult to restrain them from raising this issue along with Indonesia. In the event the Conference restricted its deliberations to Indonesia; although hints

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dropped by certain delegations, that if they had known the Conference was to be so restricted they would not have come, were probably largely responsible for the emergence of an entirely separate resolution (c.f. Resolution III of Appendix 'D' to this despatch) on the subject of a continuing organisation for promoting consultation and co-operation between the participating nations. A copy of the speeches delivered at this Session is enclosed as Appendix 'B' to this despatch.

9. From the evening of the 20th January until the final public session on the 23rd January, the meetings of the Conference were held 'in camera'. Despite an assurance given by the High Commissioner for India in London that I would be kept informed of the proceedings of the Conference, no information of any kind was sent to this High Commission other than the usual copies of communiqués, etc., released to the Press. Close contact was, however, maintained with the Australian and New Zealand delegations who, between them, provided very full information about what went on. As to the former, Dr. Burton had strong prejudices against the Dutch and on his arrival in Delhi was suspicious of the United Kingdom on account of the moral support which he was convinced they were giving to the former. I did my best to put him on the right lines before the Conference began, not without success; but he remained elusive and rather close to the end. On the other hand Mr. Colin Moodie (the Australian Number Two) was much more reasonable and helpful throughout and did his best to keep us in touch with the progress of the Conference. Mr. Inglis (the New Zealand Trade Commissioner in Bombay) who represented that Dominion as an Observer, was extremely co-operative from the beginning and was good enough to provide copies of the official records of the private proceedings of the Conference. I also saw Mr. Bandaranaike, the Ceylon delegate before the Conference and explained to him the United Kingdom policy on the Indonesian question. He was very ill informed and not very realistic in his approach but showed himself amenable to arguments.

10. From these and other sources I understand that the tone of moderation which marked the public sessions of the Conference persisted throughout its private proceedings. In particular there was apparently no overt criticism of the part played by the United Kingdom Government in the whole affair. The Conference had before it a confidential working paper prepared by the
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Government of India setting out the issues to be decided and containing a very brief summary of the various proposals which had been made for their solution by the Dutch, the Security Council and the Indonesians. The Indonesian demands had been enumerated in a long memorandum, prepared by the strong Indonesian team which had come to Delhi for the purpose, and circulated to all delegates by the Indonesian Office in Delhi. A summary of the proposals in this memorandum is attached as Appendix 'C' to this despatch. The Indian working paper was clearly sympathetic to most of the Indonesian demands at least in so far as those related to the immediate recommendations which they thought should be made by the Security Council for the solution of the Indonesian problem. It omitted, however, all reference to certain sections of the Indonesian memorandum (c.f. paragraph 14 below) and suggested some minor modifications especially in regard to the timing of the Indonesian programme. The Indonesians, for example, had suggested June 1st, 1949 as the time limit for the holding of general elections to the Constituent Assembly and September 1st, 1949 for the complete transfer of Netherlands sovereignty to the United States of Indonesia, together with the complete withdrawal of Netherlands Forces. While drawing attention to the fact that April, 1950, had been mooted in the Security Council in the latter connexion, the corresponding dates put forward in the Indian working paper as a basis for discussion were October 1st, 1949 in the case of the elections and January 1st, 1950 in the case of the transfer of sovereignty. These dates were later accepted by the Conference.

11. At the first private session of the Conference a drafting committee was appointed consisting of the Chief delegates of India, Pakistan, Australia and Ceylon to draw up resolutions giving effect to the general sentiments expressed at the Conference. By the evening of 21st January they had virtually completed their task and with some minor modifications their draft resolutions had by the evening of 22nd January been approved by the Conference as a whole.

12. The composition of the drafting committee reflected the parts played by the various delegations at the Conference. The central figure was of course Pandit Nehru himself, whose personality and detailed grasp of the problem seems to have made a deep impression on all the delegates. Among
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the remainder Dr. Burton of Australia was the most vigorous of the delegates in discussion, with Sir M. Zafrullah Khan of Pakistan following closely behind. Mr. Bandaranaike of Ceylon seemed to be the most prominent moderating influence. It was for instance Dr. Burton, strongly supported by Sir M. Zafrullah Khan and Dr. Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, who insisted on the insertion of a provision to prohibit the Dutch from setting up new puppet states in Indonesia before the proposed establishment of an interim Government of the United States of Indonesia. Mr. Bandaranaike thought this was unnecessary. Again he also expressed the view that the proposal for holding elections by 1st October, 1949 and transferring power by 1st January, 1950, was unduly optimistic. Incidentally he made clear that as Ceylon was not a member of the United Nations she could not commit herself to impose sanctions if the Security Council recommended such action.

13. Of the remaining delegates General Carlos Romulo of the Philippines figured prominently in the discussions but amongst the Arabs the Egyptian, Mr. Ismail Kamel Bey, alone made any substantial contribution. It was his influence which eliminated a proposed reference in the resolution⁸ both to Articles 41 and 42 of the Charter by suggesting that it should be left to the Security Council to find ways of enforcing its decisions under the wide powers accorded to it under the United Nations Charter. He also spoke, strongly supported in this instance by Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, in favour of a continuing organisation for fostering consultation and co-operation among the nations assembled at the Conference. Australia tried in vain to stop the discussions developing along these lines. The Burmese delegate also made a contribution on this subject and suggested that any continuing organisation should be located in Burma; but opinion among the other delegates was almost unanimously in favour of Delhi.

14. It will, I think, be appropriate at this stage to mention three points which the Indonesians wished to be considered but which did not in fact come up for discussion. The first was the immediate imposition of restrictions on air and sea traffic to Indonesia (c.f. paragraph 15 of Appendix 'C'). The whole tenor of the discussions at the Conference was that it was for the Security Council to take whatever action which was necessary and for the Conference to support the Security Council in any

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16. It is too early yet to assess in the wider context of world affairs, whether the Conference can be deemed to have been a success or not. Despite statements issued by the United States Ambassador in India - no doubt for political reasons and without much conviction - that meeting as it did within the framework of the United Nations the Asian Conference might do useful work, it was always a little difficult to visualise how any resolution it might pass could basically affect the decisions of the non-Soviet members of the Security Council. There was however from the moment the Conference was summoned an obvious danger that its resolutions would so far exceed anything which ~~were~~ members of the Security Council might be prepared to accept that a golden opportunity would have been afforded to the Soviet Union to pose as the champions of Asia in veto-ing all resolutions falling short of the Conference's recommendations. In the event it seems from your Savingsram No. Y.10 and related telegrams that the non-Soviet members of the Security Council have, quite independently of the Asian Conference, arrived at a draft resolution very similar on most fundamental points to the recommendations proposed by the latter. It is pointless for me to comment or speculate further on the details of the Resolution or its reactions on the Security Council because events at Lake Success may well have moved so far as to make my remarks out of date before you receive this despatch.

17. Beyond the problem of Indonesia, however, it is interesting to speculate on the wider significance and possibilities of the Asian Conference hailed as it was by several of the delegates as the dawn of a new era in Asiatic history. I have outlined in paragraph 3 above the immediate causes leading to the summoning of this Conference by Pandit Nehru; but I think it is important to bear in mind that it constitutes the culmination of a gradual development of Pandit Nehru's thought in regard to co-operation between Asian countries. Sir Terence Shone first had occasion to draw your attention to this in terms of co-operation in South East Asia in his despatch No. 8 of the 12th January, 1948; At that time co-operation was visualised in an area comprising India, Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon and Burma with an outer defence zone stretching right across the Indian Ocean from Aden and Mauritius in the west to Singapore in the East. Under cover of

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measures which might be necessary and not to supplant it. The second Indonesian point was the question of the imposition of sanctions by the Conference countries if the Security Council declined to take appropriate action (c.f. paragraph 13 of Appendix 'C'). It was generally agreed that the Conference should avoid any action which would suggest that they were trying to threaten the Security Council or the structure of the United Nations. The Australian delegation however gave us clearly to understand that if in fact the Security Council did not come up to the mark it was in the back of the minds of certain delegations at the Conference, particularly India, Pakistan and Australia, that they would have to take the necessary action themselves. Pandit Nehru himself is reported to have emphasised this point at a Press interview on January 25th. The third point omitted from the discussions was the question of providing supplies and money to the Republic. (C.f. paragraph 16 of Appendix 'C'). Here again it seems to have been felt that it was for the Security Council to take action in the first instance to re-establish the authority of the Republic.

15. The closing session of the Conference took place in public on 23rd January. The three Resolutions on which the Conference had unanimously agreed were read out. Their text is enclosed as Appendix 'D' to this despatch, together with the covering letter under which they were forwarded to the President of the Security Council. Pandit Nehru then made his final speech, the text of which is attached as Appendix 'E' to this despatch. The Iranian delegate followed with a brief speech reiterating his country's faith in the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. General Carlos Romulo then spoke of Asia breaking her bonds and marching forward to her lost heritage of freedom and power; and finally the Egyptian delegate paid a warm tribute to the Governor-General of India who by his simplicity of dress and conduct seemed to him to symbolise the very spirit of Asia and its power for meditation and action. Each of the speeches, and indeed everyone present at the Conference, paid warm tribute to the Government of India's highly efficient arrangements for its organisation. Pandit Nehru closed the Conference at 11 a.m., exactly 72 hours after he had opened it and the delegates departed well pleased with the ground they had covered with so large a measure of unanimity in such an extremely short space of time.

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Mr. Symon's despatch No. 54 of the 2nd April, 1948, a copy was enclosed of a record of part of a speech by Pandit Nehru in which he expanded on this theme and expressed the opinion that Malaya, Indo-China, Siam, and Indonesia would be gradually drawn into the sphere of co-operation while Australia and New Zealand would also find a place in it. He said at that time that he did not know how the Middle Eastern countries would be affected. On his return from the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference last year Pandit Nehru mentioned that for certain purposes he regarded Egypt as part of Asia. For the purpose of the Delhi Conference, Turkey, Ethiopia and the Philippines *were added to the list.*

18. It is, I think, probably true to say that only two factors were common to all the nations invited to this recent Conference. Firstly the fact that all of them to a greater or lesser extent have come within the sphere of India's growing influence as a result of the consciousness of India's potential power coupled perhaps with their present apprehensions about the future role which China will play in Asian affairs. Secondly all of them were united in a common detestation of imperialism in Asia although in the case of the present Australian Government, the dislike is, I imagine, more political than emotional. These two common factors are probably an indication of the kind of issue over which it may be possible to summon any similar Conference in the future. It is difficult to conceive of any such Conference coming into being without India playing an important part in its inception. Nor is it likely that ready agreement could be achieved amongst this strange conglomeration of nations, acting by themselves, except on issues of an anti-colonial and anti-imperial character unless possibly as a result of a turn in events the issues should become anti-Communist in character. Some of the difficulties connected with any idea of extending the scope of these Asian Conferences were ably outlined in a speech by Mr. Bandaranaike to the Indian Council of World Affairs, a record of which was made by a member of my staff and a copy of which is enclosed as Appendix 'F' to this despatch. Within the scope afforded by these limiting factors, however, there are I fear no bounds to the subjects which may, in the future, come up for discussion. Indeed no respect for the sovereignty of any state is likely to preclude consideration of any
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Delhi Conference (c.f. your telegram No. 319 of the 28th January) as an attempt to form a counterpart of the Western European bloc. There is also the further hope that any kind of regional grouping might lead to greater economic co-operation between the countries concerned with a view to raising the standard of living of the masses and thus indirectly offering the best possible buttress to the spirit of Communism.

Thirdly, in the future it is more necessary than ever before for His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom when formulating their policy on any matter affecting Asia directly or indirectly, to take most carefully into account exactly what view the Asian countries hold about it and how they are likely to react to any decision taken by us. I consider this aspect of the new situation to be of paramount importance.

20. I am sending a copy of this despatch to His Majesty's Embassies in Kabul, Rangoon, Cairo, Teheran, Baghdad, Jeddah, Nanking, Kathmandu, Bangkok, The Hague and Paris, and to His Majesty's Ministers in Addis Ababa, Manila, Beirut, Damascus, to the High Commissioners for the United Kingdom in Canberra, Colombo, Karachi, Wellington, to the Commissioner-General for South East Asia in Singapore, and to the United Kingdom representative to the United Nations, Washington.

I have the honour to be, with the highest respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble Servant

(Sgd) ARCHIBALD NYE.