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## Magnificent Response

IN the last fortnight the atmosphere has cleared up a great deal and a much more objective and rational appraisal of the situation facing the country has been possible. What has come out most prominently out of it is the magnificent response of the Indian people to the challenge facing the country and the enormous emotional upheaval of the people in the face of the Chinese invasion. Not only have the people responded magnificently, they had the further assurance that India is not without friends, and the enormous goodwill towards India has been expressed in the most effective manner by the immediate supply of the essential arms both by Britain and the United States with an alacrity and readiness which has vindicated once again the correctness of India's foreign policy of neutrality and non-alignment.

Earlier, Pandit Nehru had confessed that we were living in a world of unreality. But China has not only knocked some sense into us, she has done more. One is inclined to agree with Pandit Nehru when he says that the Chinese Government should be thanked for having taken some action against us which has suddenly lifted the veil from the face of India. "We have had a glimpse of the serene face of India, strong and yet calm and determined". One can share this vision of India with Nehru, share in that emotion and in that experience, if one shuts one's eyes firmly to the disgraceful witch-hunt among the politicians and the grotesque exhibitionism on the part of some of his Ministers. It is, indeed, a high privilege to share in that emotion and in that experience. What stands out from it is that the Indian people will never submit to Chinese aggression, they can never be suppressed.

Along with the Indian people, in the last few days, even Pandit Nehru has gone up in stature, if that were possible. In his magnificent reply to the six-day debate in Lok Sabha on the Emergency and the Chinese aggression, he stoutly turned his face against a campaign of hatred against the Chinese people, as no leader of a country had ever done which was faced with aggression. While the Indian people could not be suppressed, neither could the people of China; he did not foresee an end of the present hostilities by the surrender of either party. "We are two great countries and neither will surrender. Therefore, some way has to be found to finish the war on terms honourable to us. We will finish the war when we liberate our territories in their possession". There was no question of carrying the war into the enemy's camp, Panditji particularly rejected the idea of our liberating Tibet—it was manifestly absurd to talk about it. And while applauding the resolve, and spirit of dedication of the nation to repel the aggressor, however long it may take and whatever be the consequences, Nehru held the door open to negotiation and peaceful settlement. He reiterated Indians offer of a cease-fire—withdrawal by the Chinese behind the September 8 line.

For this just and righteous struggle, the united strength of the nation has to strengthen Pandit Nehru's hands and give him unqualified and unconditional support. Under his leadership, the nation is wedded to freedom, peace, social justice and development for India, and to world

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peace. These are our objectives and the nation can ill-afford to lose sight of them whether there is peace or war. So if we have to fight, we have to fight for these ideals. And since we are wedded to peace and peaceful methods, we have to do so with a stout heart and mind, unclouded by the fever generated by fear and undistracted by passions other than the basic passion for freedom and peace. So if there is an opportunity for peaceful negotiated settlement with China, consistent with our freedom and honour, we should seize such an opportunity. This is, in fact, our basic policy of Panchsheel and Peace and Non-Alignment. Hence we should fight for peace and freedom, but without allowing any sort of fever to affect us and cloud our mind.

How much was the Defence Minister responsible for the defence policy? To what extent is the defence policy independent of the foreign policy of a country? Or, for that matter, of its economic policy? There are two questions involved here — one is of political judgment for which the responsibility obviously belongs to the entire Cabinet. And the other is the question of the efficiency of the Defence Minister in conducting the affairs of his Ministry. The campaign of hate and propaganda of lies had so fouled the atmosphere that the Defence Minister was even accused of deliberately neglecting defence production. At least, this lie could have been nailed in time by the Prime Minister himself, as he did two days after Menon's resignation was accepted when he took the country into confidence about the progress made in the manufacture of automatic weapons. One of the pointed charges against the Ministry had been that our troops in the NEFA front were out-equipped because they had not been supplied — deliberately and by design, that was the insinuation — with automatic weapons. Pandit Nehru assumed Parliament that they had machine-guns and sub-machine-guns and that automatic rifles would be flowing in a few weeks from the production lines. Surely, this miracle could not have been achieved overnight even by three-shift working in the ordnance factories. If one compares the record of defence production in the regime of the previous Defence Ministers, one can very well

see that it was only after Menon took over, that defence production was stepped up. The progress made in the last years has been something amazing. This is borne out even by the statistics of the supplies from the ordnance factories year by year which were quoted by Pandit Nehru on the floor of the House.

Behind the attack against Krishna Menon, the most powerful motivation was not the reversal of India's defence policy but of her foreign policy of non-alignment. The ready response that India has received to tier appeal for arms has exposed the deliberately propagated fiction that India cannot get arms to defend herself without aligning herself to one of the cold-war camps, the obvious preference, not unstated, being for the Anglo-American camp. Much learned expertise has been wasted on establishing the obvious that there is not much difference between economic aid and arms aid to the extent that these are substitutable. It has now been clearly established that non-alignment does not stand in the way of India getting arms assistance for the legitimate defensive purposes and that the criterion for non-alignment is not the economic terms on which arms are obtained but the political commitments, if any that go with it. To the extent that India remains out of any military commitments, acceptance of arms on however favourable terms, does not affect her position in this respect. India is lucky in having Professor Galbraith as the American Ambassador to point this out at the right time.

The atmosphere has cleared up a great deal after Nehru's last speech in Parliament. But why was it necessary to wait anxiously for more than a fortnight even for an intelligible account of the equipment of our forces, of their arms, of the magnitude of our losses and the actual number of cases of frost-bite? What was the Information Ministry doing all this time? Widely exaggerated reports were circulating all around, reports coloured by the melo-dramatic reportage of Korean fighting, of suicide squads and of human waves breaking through mountain-passes, through which men can move even

today only in single files. If the country is not to be fed on lies and nurtured on a hymn of hate, and the great emotional upsurge is not to be dissipated, is not the dissemination of correct information just as important as mobilisation for keeping up the morale of the people?

Of the harnessing of the emotional urge of the people and, their magnificent response to the challenge facing the country to some effective purpose, there is still very little evidence. Even at the top, things have not been put shipshape. The new Defence Minister has to realise that the defence policy of a country stems from its foreign policy. From his first speech after the announcement of his appointment, one gets the uncomfortable feeling that his past ideological affiliations and his narrow experience in State politics have not specially equipped him for facing wider problems of a country's foreign relations with which its defence policy is inextricably mixed up.

On the purely operational plane, unstated 'political difficulties' still stand in the way of streamlining the organisation of production and rearrangement of planning priorities. From the present allocation of its functions, it seems that the newly-created Ministry of Economic and Defence Co-ordination will function in a partial vacuum, being divested of the portfolios of Planning and of Industry, the two key elements in any rational organisation of supply and defence production. A Ministry of Supply with which is combined the Development Wing of the Industries Ministry, with vague overriding powers over the other Ministries dealing with vital elements of defence and supply, can at best be ineffective and can conceivably give rise to frictions. It will in no way help the smooth flow of defence equipment and supply. The emotions of the people have been worked up or rather people have responded spontaneously; it is for the Government now to give it a purposive direction and surely a beginning could be made with an appropriate re-organisation of the Cabinet for the purpose.