Nehru's Decision on India's UNSC Permanent Seat

What is the issue?

- Union Minister Arun Jaitley recently criticised India’s first PM Jawaharlal Nehru for declining a US proposal in 1950 on India's permanent seat in the UN Security Council.
- It is imperative, in this context, to understand the strategic and political rationale behind Nehru's decision.

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What was the proposal?

- The US made a proposal to India in August 1950 through the Indian Ambassador in the U.S.
- It expressed the American desire to remove China from permanent membership of the UNSC and possibly replace it with India.
- Nehru allegedly refused to take this suggestion seriously and thus abdicated India’s opportunity to become a permanent member of the UNSC.
- However, the complexity of the international situation might justify Nehru's stance then.

What was the international situation?

- The above events took place in August 1950 when the Cold War was in its early stages.
- The two superpowers were in eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation that threatened nuclear catastrophe.
- The People’s Republic of China had just emerged from a bloody civil war and was seen at the time as the Soviets’ closest ally.
- It was prevented from taking its permanent seat in the UNSC because of American opposition based on Cold War logic.
- Furthermore, war was intense in the Korean peninsula.
- The U.S. and allied troops were locked in fierce combat with North Korean forces supported by China and the Soviet Union.

What was Nehru's rationale?

- Nehru, at that time, was trying to carve a policy that ensured India’s

security, strategic autonomy and state-led industrialisation.

- He anticipated that pushing China out, as the U.S. wished to do, would result in a perpetual conflict that could engulf all of Asia.
- To him, the Korean War appeared a forerunner to more such conflicts in Asia that could even turn nuclear.
- The U.S. had dropped nuclear bombs on Japan only 5 years ago and it would possibly not hesitate to do so again in an Asian conflict.
- This is especially since nuclear deterrence had not become a recognised reality then.
- So given these, Nehru did not want India to get embroiled in hazardous Cold War conflicts as it would risk India's own security.
- He understood that peace could not be assured in Asia without accommodating a potential great power like China.
- Nehru also felt that China had to be provided with proper place in the international system.

Why is Nehru's decision justified?

- To be precise, America's proposal was not an offer but merely a vague sensor to explore Indian reactions to such a contingency.
- The U.S. intended the offer to be a bait to attract India into an alliance with the West against the Sino-Soviet bloc.
- The US aimed at pulling India into the “defence” organisations that it was setting up in Asia to contain the presumed “Communist expansionism”.
- Nehru was well aware of this and the fact that Washington was only interested in using India for its own ends.
- Had India accepted the American bait, it would have meant enduring enmity with China without the achievement of a permanent seat in the UNSC.
- Moreover, even if accepted, the Soviet Union, then China’s closest ally, would have vetoed such move.
- As, it would have required amendment of the UN Charter that is subject to the veto of the permanent members.
- It would have also strained the relations between India and the Soviet Union, affecting the possibility of a close political and military relationship with Moscow later.
- The ties, in fact, became necessary once the U.S. entered into an alliance relationship with Pakistan.
- Moreover, the Indo-Soviet relationship paid immense dividends to India during the Bangladesh war of 1971.

Source: The Hindu



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