

The Buddha Smiled

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Sathyam Commentary, 12 June 1998

<http://www.tamilnation.org/saty/9806buddhasmiled.htm>

Question: "The Buddha is the most awesomely solemn of beings. Why then does he smile?"

Reply: "There are all manner of causes and conditions whereby one may smile. There are those who are delighted and therefore smile. There are those who are afflicted with anger and therefore smile. One may feel contempt for others and therefore smile. One may witness strange events and therefore smile. One may observe embarrassing situations and therefore smile. It may happen that one sees strange customs from other lands and therefore smile. It may also happen that one witnesses rare and difficult undertakings and thus is caused to smile". (*The Buddha's Smile - from the Sutras T25.112b8-113a8 [fasc. 7]*) Translation Copyright © Bhikshu Dharmamitra)

[8 years later on 17 November 2006: US Senate backs India nuclear deal "Energy-hungry India needs nuclear power. The US Senate has overwhelmingly voted to pass a controversial deal to share civilian nuclear technology with India. Under the deal, which was proposed more than a year ago, India must allow international inspections of its nuclear facilities. US President George W Bush hailed the move as bringing India into the "nuclear non-proliferation mainstream". However, the bill still has to clear a number of hurdles before it becomes law and is implemented. One condition would require India to fully and actively participate in efforts to contain Iran's nuclear programme."]

India's first nuclear test, carried out in May 1974, was code named the 'Smiling Buddha'. After its success, Indian nuclear scientist Kalam (a Tamil and a Muslim), reportedly told India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, that the Buddha had smiled.

Twenty four years later, the fall out from the series of nuclear tests carried out by India in May 1998, has served to expose the many faces (smiling, or otherwise) of the emerging multi polar world.

Here, it may be useful to look back a few decades.

Background

Prior to World War I, it was said that the sun never set on the global British Empire and that Britannia ruled the waves. Great Britain was the World's super power. But, two World Wars contributed to the eclipse of Great Britain, and the eventual emergence in 1945 of a bi polar world with the U.S. and the Soviet Union as the two super powers.

The United Nations Charter signed in San Francisco in June 1945, was structured to give the victors of World War II (United States, Soviet Union, Great Britain, China, and France) a permanent place in the Security Council, each with the right to a veto. It is perhaps, no accident that eventually, these five states also became nuclear powers.

Member states of the United Nations often proclaim their faith in democracy. They even call for democracy within armed resistance movements which cannot possibly

put in place institutional structures for elections, whilst being engaged in battle to secure stable boundaries for a state-to-be. But democracy finds little encouragement within the structure of the United Nations itself - a structure which continues to perpetuate the control of its affairs by the five victors of World War II. It is now more than fifty years since the end of World War II and, unsurprisingly, the system that the world was persuaded to accept in 1945, is increasingly at odds with political reality.

It is not simply that with the collapse of the Berlin wall, the old style division between the First World and the Second World, together with the resulting 'alignments' and 'non-alignments', has become less meaningful. It is not simply that the collapse of the bi polar world structure led to a uni polar one with the United States playing the role of the sole super power. History teaches that a uni polar world will eventually give birth to a multi polar one. And, today, within the womb of the uni polar world, a multi polar world has begun to take shape.

Germany and Japan (the 'defeated' in World II) have emerged as major economic powers. France, since Charles de Gaulle, has not been slow to assert its own sovereignty. China perceives itself as a world power. The Islamic world is giving expression to a togetherness rooted in its past. Great Britain would like to retain its identity, extend its influence in the English speaking world, and 'contribute' by drawing on its reservoir of experience and expertise gathered by having 'managed' a global Empire for a century and more. Again, countries which have gained independence from colonial rule are asserting their right to participate and be involved in decisions taken in the international arena - decisions, which in the end, affect the lives of their own citizens.

And India with a population of more than a billion, has called for a proportionate voice in world affairs. Indian Foreign Secretary J.N.Dixit delivering a lecture on September 16 1993, at the influential German Society for Foreign Policy made it clear that India wants a seat as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. He said:

"If Japan and Germany alone are inducted as Permanent members of the Security Council, we will not agree. We have already written to the Secretary General of the United Nations"

In its official submission to the UN Secretary General in 1993, India proposed that the Security Council be expanded from its current five permanent and 10 non permanent members to 10 or 11 permanent members and 12 or 14 non permanent members.

International response

It is against this backdrop that the international response to India's nuclear tests may be usefully considered. The position taken by each country, although couched in the language of 'principle' is more often than not, a reflection of that which it perceives to be its own 'permanent interest'.

The US, given its self perception as the 'super power' has been quick to respond with 'sanctions' - an urgency which, for instance, it did not feel in the case of sanctions

against the South African apartheid regime which had imprisoned President Nelson Mandela for more than twenty years.

The US points out that 146 countries have signed up to the non proliferation treaty and insists that India should 'put the brakes on its slide away from the international mainstream'. But, the US itself has not yet ratified the treaty. Furthermore, it has carried out over a thousand nuclear tests as against the five carried out by India, and at the latest count had a stockpile of over 8000 nuclear devices - enough to destroy the earth and all its inhabitants, several times over.

France and Russia have deplored the Indian nuclear tests but have stopped short of outright condemnation and have dragged their feet at imposing sanctions. They are not in the business of giving an entirely free hand to the US to set the agenda in world affairs.

Pakistan and China have been vociferous in their condemnation of India. Both Pakistan and China are India's immediate neighbours. At the same time, each of them have close ties with the United States. The closeness of US-Pakistan military links was strengthened during the Soviet - Afghanistan conflict. In the case of China, the intimacy of the relationship is shown by an example of 'co-operation' in 1979, given by President Carter's former National Security Adviser Brzezinski. He writes:

"I informed the President that Deng (the Chinese leader) told Vance and me that China approved of our decision to support the Shah in Iran, that in the **Chinese view the United States should be more active in strengthening Pakistan**, and - somewhat ominously - that Deng wished a private meeting with the President on Vietnam.

I sensed from the tone in which Deng asked for this that we would be hearing something significant, especially given mounting indications that the Chinese would not sit back idly as the Vietnamese continued their military occupation of Cambodia. when we sat down together in the Oval office, I had a general sense of what was coming...

None the less, there is a difference between anticipating a situation and actually experiencing it. There was something grave and very special in the calm, determined and firm way in which Deng Xiaoping presented the Chinese case. China, he said, had concluded that it must disrupt Soviet strategic calculations and that 'we consider it necessary to put a restraint on the wild ambitions of the Vietnamese and to give them an appropriate limited lesson'.

Without detailing at this stage what the lesson specifically would entail, he added that the lesson would be limited in scope and duration. He then calmly diagnosed for us various possible Soviet responses, indicating how China would counter them. He included among the options 'the worst possibility', (a Soviet nuclear response) adding that even in such a case China would hold out. All he asked for was 'moral support' in the international field from the United States". (*Zbigniew Brzezinski - Power and Principle, published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983*)

When China invaded Vietnam in February 1979 - a twenty day invasion to 'teach Vietnam a lesson', the US stance in the international arena helped to stall any adverse resolution by the Security Council on the Chinese invasion.

Sri Lanka's response

Again, unlike China and Pakistan, Sri Lanka, another neighbour of India, was quick to declare that it had no objection to India becoming a nuclear power.

Soon after the Indian General elections (in February 1998) which saw the election of supporters of the Tamil Eelam struggle, such as the PMK and Gopalaswamy's MDMK to the Lok Sabha, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister visited New Delhi. On his return, the Sri Lanka newspapers proclaimed that the Indian Prime Minister had assured Sri Lanka 'not to worry about Tamil Nadu.' That, of course left open the question as to what it was that Sri Lanka should worry about.

Sri Lanka would not have been unaware that the central premise of Indian foreign policy during the past several decades has been directed to excluding extra regional powers from the Indian region. It was a policy that was promoted at the 1975 non aligned conference in Colombo, by Sri Lanka Prime Minister, Srimavo Bandaranaike when she proposed the Indian Ocean Peace Zone.

It was the election of the West leaning Sri Lanka Prime Minister J.R.Jayawardene in 1977, and the building of the Voice of America installations in the island, which led India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to give covert assistance to the Tamil resistance movement during the period upto 1984. These same considerations also influenced the actions of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during period after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The Exchange of Letters annexed to the 1987 Indo Sri Lanka Accord made this explicit.. Clause 2 of the letter dated 29 July 1987 from the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Sri Lanka President J.R.Jayawardene said:

2., you had, during the course of our discussion, agreed to meet some of India's concerns as follows:-

I) Your Excellency and myself will reach an early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensuring that such presences will not preJudice Indo Sri Lanka relations.

II) Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India's interests.

III) The work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank will be undertaken as a joint operation between India and Sri Lanka.

IV) Sri Lanka's agreement with foreign broadcasting organisations will be reviewed to ensure that any facilities set up by them in Sri Lanka are used solely as public broadcasting facilities and not for any military or intelligence purposes.

In 1998, under President Chandrika Kumaratunga's dispensation, Sri Lanka was, no doubt, concerned to secure that there was no repetition of the events prior to 1987.

Jayanath Rajapakse, International Affairs Adviser to President Chandrika Kumaratunga declared in a recent article:

"... South Asia has an advantage over others, in that regional leadership is indisputable... One test will come with the filing of nominations for permanent seats in an expanded UN Security Council - whenever that happens. India's would be the only viable regional candidature for such a seat.... Certainly no other Asian candidate could be expected to reflect South Asia's particular concerns... " (*South Asian Prospect - Perceiving Reality - Lanka Guardian, May 1998*)

The decision by India, on 11 June 1998 to extend the ban on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, for a further period, on the ground that LTTE was a threat to the unity and integrity of India, must have been received with some satisfaction by Sri Lanka.

The US whilst, ofcourse, understanding the special reasons which may have influenced Sri Lanka's decision to support India, may nevertheless have been concerned at the effect that such an open declaration by a signatory to the non proliferation treaty, may have on other signatories. This may explain the somewhat circumspect, but pointedly public, US response:

"A US embassy official in Colombo says the American Ambassador has requested a meeting with Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister to learn Sri Lanka's position on India's nuclear tests. The embassy spokesperson says the ambassador is seeking an explanation of a foreign ministry statement that supports India's nuclear test series - because Sri Lanka is a signatory to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty. US embassy officials say the United States is interested in finding out why Sri Lanka chose to support India so openly." (*Voice of America, 19 May 1998*)

Sri Lanka's private response to the American Ambassador, would no doubt have taken into account Sri Lanka's structural dependence on foreign aid. The Paris Aid Consortium (including Japan), at its meeting held on 27 May 1998, did pledge 780 million dollars of aid to Sri Lanka, though the Western donors trimmed their contribution by 10%.

Here, it may be useful to remember the words of Sardar K.M.Pannikar who served as, Indian Ambassador to China from 1948 to 1952:

"The public habit of judging the relations between states from what appears in the papers adds to the confusion. It must be remembered that in international affairs things are not often what they seem to be. .. A communique which speaks of complete agreement may only mean an agreement to differ. Behind a smokescreen of hostile propaganda diplomatic moves may be taking place indicating a better understanding of each other's position. ..." (*Sardar K.M.Pannikar - Principles and Practice of Diplomacy, 1956*)

Complex power balances

The world wide web of power balances is an increasingly complex one. President Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote perceptively in 1983::

".... The population of the world by the end of this century will have grown to some 6 billion people.... moreover most of the increase will be concentrated in the poorer parts of the world, with 85% of the world's population by the end of this century living in Africa, Latin America and the poorer parts of Asia....

Most of the third world countries... are likely to continue to suffer from weak economies and inefficient government, while their increasingly literate, politically awakened, but restless masses will be more and more susceptible to demagogic mobilisation on behalf of political movements... it is almost a certainty that an increasing number of third world states will come to possess nuclear weapons.... . the problems confronting Washington in assuring US national security will become increasingly complex..." (*Zbigniew Brzezinski - Power and Principle, published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983*)

It is not clear whether Brzezinski saw the irony in his statement that as the peoples of the third world become 'increasingly literate' and 'politically awakened' they will be 'more and more susceptible to demagogic mobilisation'. Surely, literacy and political awakening will render people not more but less susceptible to demagogy.

Be that as it may, Brzezinski's perception that the political awakening of the so called 'third world' (in reality, the 'majority world') was a threat to US 'national security' though understandable, also reflects a failure by the US to develop a principle centred approach to international relations - a principle centred approach which seeks genuine win-win answers to conflicts between the US and other states, instead of the US being seen as attempting to impose its own diktat on the world.

In the context of an 'increasingly literate' and 'politically awakened' multi polar world, the old techniques of 'balance of power', 'divide and rule' and 'my enemy's neighbour is my friend' may be seen for what they are - techniques designed simply to outwit your opponent. And, they may not work. No one has a monopoly of wit. Again, as Sardar K.M.Pannikar, has pointed out:

"Foreign Ministers and diplomats presumably understand the permanent interests of their country.. But no one can foresee clearly the effects of even very simple facts as they pertain to the future. The Rajah of Cochin who in his resentment against the Zamorin permitted the Portuguese to establish a trading station in his territories could not foresee that thereby he had introduced into India something which was to alter the course of history. Nor could the German authorities, who, in their anxiety to create confusion and chaos in Russia, permitted a sealed train to take Lenin and his associates across German territory, have foreseen what forces they were unleashing. To them the necessity of the moment was an utter breakdown of Russian resistance and to send Lenin there seemed a superior act of wisdom..." (*Sardar K.M.Pannikar - Principles and Practice of Diplomacy, 1956*)

The danger is that in a nuclear world, a miscalculation may result in mutually assured destruction. It was Arthur Koestler who remarked in the 1950s that if he was asked: what was the most important date in history, he would say without hesitation that it was the day when the Hiroshima bomb was dropped, because on that day mankind had for the first time acquired the know-how to annihilate the entirety of the human species.

Need for Principle Centred Approaches

The old style 'command - control' method of leadership will yield diminishing returns in an increasingly 'politically awakened' world. Hierarchical authority may secure a measure of compliance in the short term but it will fail to foster genuine commitment and stability. Perhaps, the time has come for the US government, as a government of a country that is regarded as the home of private enterprise, to itself start practising some of the leadership methods which the likes of Stephen Covey and Peter Senge have advocated to successful Fortune 500 companies:

"From a very early age, we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the world. This apparently makes complex tasks and subjects more manageable, but we pay a hidden, enormous price. We can no longer see the consequences of our actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole. When we then try to 'see the bigger picture', we try to reassemble the fragments in our minds, to list and organise all the pieces. But as physicist David Bohm says, the task is futile - similar to trying to reassemble the fragments of a broken mirror to see a true reflection. Thus, after a while we give up trying to see the whole altogether.

....When we give up this illusion (that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces) - we can then build 'learning organisations,' organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." (*The Fifth Discipline : The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization - Peter M. Senge, Massachusetts Institute Technology*)

There may be a need to see the bigger picture. If the US aspires to world leadership, it will need to recognise that leadership will not come simply by the display of military might and economic power. It is the marriage of power with principle that will secure leadership. A leader needs to secure the trust and respect of those whom he seeks to lead - trust in his integrity and respect for the skills that he is able to bring to the task of achieving shared goals. This is true of individuals. It is true of business organisations. It is also true of countries.

The glaring weakness in the US stand on nuclear non proliferation is that it is not willing to engage in discussions about the reduction of nuclear weapon stockpiles as a part of an agreement on nuclear non-proliferation. It is an approach that says: "We will continue to have, what we have. But no one else shall have, what we have."

The US argument that 'the Indian government at this point appears to care more for narrow political interests, than for its role in the international community.' (*Rediffusion News Report, 16 May 1998*) would have carried more weight, if it was not self evident that the US stand was itself directed to secure that which the US perceives to be its own 'national security' interests.

Nothing is gained by the visceral language that some US commentators have used:

"In some of the sharpest commentary heard so far, former Under Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger did not want "pipsqueak countries" like India to be recognised

as nuclear powers. His colleague Robert McFarlane was even more visceral in the New York Times. 'We must make clear to the Indian Government that it is today what it was two weeks ago, an arrogant, over reaching cabal that, by its devotion to the caste system, the political and economic disenfranchisement of its people and its religious intolerance, is unworthy of membership in any club' (*Indian Express* 31 May 1998)

The comments by ex President Carter which appeal to reason and principle deserve the attention of a wider audience.

" 'It's hard for us to tell India you cannot have a nuclear device when we keep ours -- 8,000 or so -- and are not ready to reduce them yet," he (ex President Carter) said during a commencement address at Trinity College in Hartford yesterday. The U.S policy on nuclear weapons and landmines "smacks of hypocrisy," Carter noted. The former President also pointed out that U.S advises India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty but it has not ratified it yet. Condemning the superpower's claim to reduce nuclear arsenals, he said, "the Start-II treaty was passed about eight years ago and has still not been ratified by the U.S or Russia." (*PTI*, 18 May 1998)

Again, there are those who take the view that India's nuclear tests moves India away from Gandhi. The logic of such a viewpoint may also lead them to call upon India (with the fourth largest army in the world) to abandon its conventional armed forces as well.

Here, the story of the wandering sadhu (holy man) who visited an Indian village where many had died as a result of being bitten by a snake, comes to mind. As the story goes, the sadhu advised the snake against killing and persuaded the snake to give up its evil habits. An year later, the sadhu returned to the village to find the snake shrivelled up and in agony and pain as a result of the injuries caused by stones thrown by villagers who were no longer afraid of it. The snake told the sadhu: " I followed your advice - and see what has happened to me." The sadhu replied: "I told you not to bite - but I did not tell you, not to hiss."

David Landes has analysed the First World's phenomenal wealth and power, in a new book titled *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations : Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* ' Landes suggests that one of the three main reasons that Europe earned its wealth was that Europeans mastered the power to kill. They learnt about gun powder from Asia - China originally - but they learnt to make it better and their guns fired straighter and farther. Perhaps the time has now come to level the playing field, to right the balance - and at the same time, move towards a world wide reduction in nuclear and conventional weapons of destruction.

India's strength will lie not in the nuclear bomb, but in its peoples

Having said that, New Delhi will need to recognise that, in the end, the strength of India will lie not in the nuclear bomb, but in its peoples. The economy of India will not grow unless the different peoples of India are energised to work together to achieve their shared aspirations. Here, the failure of successive Indian governments to openly recognise that India is a multi-national state, has served to weaken the Indian Union rather than strengthen it. The European Union (established albeit, after two

World Wars), may serve as a pointer to that which may have to be achieved in the Indian region in the years to come. There may be a need for India to recognise the force of reason in that which Pramatha Chauduri declared more than 70 years ago:

"It is not a bad thing to try and weld many into one but to jumble them all up is dangerous, because the only way we can do that is by force. If you say that this does not apply to India, the reply is that if self determination is not suited to us, then it is not suited at all to Europe. No people in Europe are as different, one from another, as our people. There is not that much difference between England and Holland as there is between Madras and Bengal. Even France and Germany are not that far apart. If some of our politicians shudder at the mention of provincial patriotism, it is because their beliefs smack of narrow national selfishness...."

To be united due to outside pressure and to unite through mutual regard are not the same. Just as there is a difference between the getting together of five convicts in a jail and between five free men, so the Congress union of the various nations of India and tomorrow's link between the peoples of a free country will be very different. Indian patriotism will then be built on the foundation of provincial patriotism, not just in words but in reality."

Nuclear capability will not guarantee unity. The nuclear bomb did not prevent the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the non-nuclear states of Latvia, Estonia and Georgia. Peoples speaking different languages, tracing their roots to different origins, and living in relatively well defined and separate geographical areas, do not easily 'melt'. And in any event, a 'third world' economy will not provide a large enough 'pot' for the 'melting' to take place.

A people's struggle for freedom is also a nuclear energy and the Fourth World is a part of today's enduring political reality. India may need to adopt a more 'principle centred' approach towards struggles for self determination in the Indian region. A myopic approach, apart from anything else, may well encourage the very outside 'pressures' which New Delhi seeks to exclude. And, if India can grasp this, then, the Buddha may have cause to truly smile.