

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru¹

Series II, Volume 60

Meetings Between The President Of The French Republic² And the Prime Minister of India

*Sunday, 8 May 1960 at the Elysée
from 12:15 hrs to 13:15 hrs and from 14:45 hrs to 15:35 hrs³*

Classification: Top Secret

General de Gaulle expresses his pleasure on meeting a man he has heard being spoken of since so many years and who represents a country with its future ahead of it and exerts such a great attraction.

After thanking him, Mr Nehru declares that he too is delighted to meet General de Gaulle, whose influence and importance works in favour of

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² Minutes of meeting of 8 May 1960 at the Elysée Palace, Paris.

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Page numbers in the text, for example 'Page 575', indicate the beginning of the page of that number in the original French document. Footnotes of the original document have been renumbered A-L; those of the translation appear as a-1.

³ The Prime Minister of India had been invited by General de Gaulle for a private visit on 8 May, on the occasion of the London trip Pandit Nehru was to undertake in the first fortnight of May to attend a Commonwealth conference

peace in the world. India's future closely depends on this and peaceful cooperation. In fact, no country can survive alone; the world's problems affect all nations.

General de Gaulle agrees with this. This is true for France, though for somewhat different reasons. Since a very long time, France does not desire war, she has no imperialist ambitions. If she had remained relatively very large, she might have nurtured such ambitions as others do. But as she currently is, she desires comprehensive peace and will do her utmost to ensure it. However, the problem of war or peace lies between two camps. Most probably neither wants war. But men are not always masters of their destiny. Their kind of law probably leads to destruction. If there is a war between the side of free men and the other, France will be on the side of free men, even if it destroys her. However, she considers that the two sides must be brought into harmony, or at least we must endeavour to do so. This is the very crux of France's entire policy.

France is in Europe, while also being, to a certain extent, African. But Europe has been torn asunder. The future of peace depends on reconciliation in Europe. This is a given in the West, and it should be so between the East and the West. To this end, a modus vivendi between the Communist East and the Democratic West (including Germany) must be found.

The second task, in order of importance, consists of providing aid to less developed countries. If these countries become more prosperous, peace will simultaneously develop along with them. Otherwise, even if there were to be an agreement of co-existence between the East and the West, war would be inevitable in the long run. Further, between the doctrines that

divide the world, men, when they are less poverty-stricken, will surely prefer freedom. General de Gaulle is aware of all that India, and especially Mr Nehru, has already done for conciliation. This is not an easy matter for them, taking into consideration their vast, very tough and very ambitious neighbour. Peace is, of course, necessary, but not regardless of the cost.

Mr Nehru appreciates what the President of the Republic has said. Of course, hailing from Asia, he regards the world from a different point of view. One thing is essential: the question of war or peace, the solution for which depends very largely on Europe, although other countries are becoming increasingly important in this regard. There is a danger: if this issue is not settled soon in Europe, China, and perhaps other countries, will become increasingly powerful and increasingly less easy to control. It is therefore indispensable that a detente between East and West Europe be achieved.

General de Gaulle raises the issue of Germany. This country has been split in two, Russia having occupied Prussia and Saxony, while Adenauer has organised the Federal Republic. There is Berlin, too. For the moment, the division remains and will continue for a long time to come. This is not a satisfactory situation, but it is tolerable. On the other hand, Berlin remains a current issue. West Berlin is free and should not cease being so. If Berlin were handed over, the West would most probably lose Germany as it no longer reposes any trust in the West and would come to an agreement with the Russians. Nonetheless, if Germany remains divided, it must not be stated that she will be so forever. Above all, there should be no treaty to sanction it. For the moment, the best solution is a status quo and that Berlin remains free. To this could be added a few practical arrangements between the two Germanys on transport, currency, travels, etc. Some

already exist. They are useful for not making Germany's split final. General de Gaulle had said to Mr Khrushchev: "Germany must not turn towards the East. If she does so, France will be threatened and she will need to have very close ties with the United States; in other words, she will have to be subject to her. Thereafter, peace will not be possible. If you, Mr Khrushchev are a man of detente, let things stand as they are."⁴ Khrushchev did not say no, but he wants everything at once: detente and a treaty with East Germany, the isolation of West Berlin and the withdrawal of western troops. Unfortunately, one cannot trust Khrushchev's guarantees. General de Gaulle also told him that to bring about peace, a balanced Europe was necessary, which was the only way to reach an agreement between the West and the East of the Old Continent, which implies that Germany will remain with the West. Once again, Khrushchev did not say no.

Next, General de Gaulle elaborates on his ideas on Africa to Mr Nehru. He recalls the work of France, which has been present in Africa for centuries and that she continues to maintain true friendships, which is an important fact of people-to-people connection. Nevertheless, times have changed and everyone desires self-determination. General de Gaulle is not opposed to it. This process, in fact, began after the war. If the States of Black Africa desire independence, they can obtain it and some have already obtained it. This is true of Morocco and Tunisia. There remains Algeria, where the situation is very different and very tough. There are nine million Muslims and more than one million Algerian French people. The French are mostly people of limited means. They have their place, their life, in Algeria. Apart from this, 400,000 Algerians work in France and feed two and half million people in Algeria. Each year, their number goes up by thirty thousand and this figure tends to rise. In fifteen years, there will be one million Muslims

⁴ On the recent de Gaulle-Khrushchev meetings, see below no. 146, 151

in France who will feed between four and five million persons. They are, moreover, starting to bring their families over to metropolitan France.

If France were to withdraw from Algeria, the latter would face unprecedented poverty as she does not possess sufficient wealth or people to lead them. General de Gaulle then goes on to elaborate the three conceivable solutions for Algeria's future. He suggests these with utmost sincerity to the Algerians, because France has no interest in keeping people who do not wish to remain with her. The Algerians will be consulted and they will choose freely. Nonetheless, the insurrection is getting protracted, led by people who pretend to be Algeria, which they are not, just by themselves. They claim to be the Algerian government. But there's never been an Algerian State; Ferhat Abbas knows that very well. In truth, this is about letting ten million Algerians decide freely for themselves and not impose a predetermined solution on them. Nevertheless, France is prepared to negotiate a ceasefire with Ferhat Abbas in Paris, the first condition of the consultation. It would be inconceivable to tell Ferhat Abbas before this, "You are Algeria!", or negotiate Algeria with him, as if he were Algeria. Having said that, once the ceasefire is reached, it is obvious that the insurgents will have to be consulted, too, along with others, on the conditions under which the consultations will be held.

Mr Nehru, too, considers that the immediate problem is to end the conflict. He takes note of the fact that General de Gaulle does not want to discuss Algeria's political future with Ferhat Abbas, but is prepared to come to an understanding with him to end the slaughter. On the other hand, to expand the circle of consultation, other Algerians, and not solely the Ferhat Abbas group, could be invited to participate in the preparation of the referendum.

Obviously, this consultation with different groups could not take place before the ceasefire.

General de Gaulle affirms this and highlights the difficulties of such conversations, recalling the assassination attempt on the parliamentarian Abdesselam.⁵ The insurrection leaders, who are not, in fact, in Algeria, are seeking to establish themselves as the Algerian government through terror and totalitarian actions. They are also hoping to tire out France and force her to deal only with them.

Mr Nehru considers that what General de Gaulle is saying about Algeria's future is so reasonable that it is a real pity that the ceasefire is being reached. It should be possible to find a way to overcome the current obstacles and bring an end to the slaughter. There must be people in Algeria who are capable of understanding the urgency of this positive measure. Moreover, in an insurrection by scattered groups, control from the top is not always effectively exercised. It is clear that one must not treat the insurrection leaders as representatives of a government, but in Algeria there must be a number of persons, including Ferhat Abbas and his opponents, who can base themselves on General de Gaulle's declarations to apply their principles.

General de Gaulle makes it clear that he has taken pains to seek people capable of assuming responsibilities. Such was the aim of the legislative elections, the municipal elections. It is so for the planned departmental

⁵ On 4 May, Mr Robert Abdesselam, Member of Parliament from Algiers, was injured by terrorists a few steps from his residence

elections.⁶ But all the Algerians are terrorised and cannot speak freely. The insurgents are slitting the throats of ten times more Muslims than French. It should not be overlooked either that the presence and action of the French army, which is necessary as long as conflicts continue, make the full exercise of freedoms difficult. That is the very reason for which ceasefire is a precondition for any political solution.

Mr Nehru earnestly wishes that this will happen. He mentions the unfavourable opinions that this situation has given rise to among the peoples of Asia and Africa. This, for them, is an obsession that is difficult to rid them of. France appears to them as an incarnation of revolutionary traditions of liberty and a mecca for culture. Mr Nehru does not want to see this great name stained. In the new world being built, the peoples of Asia expect France to play an important role.

General de Gaulle states that he is endeavouring to do so. To conclude matters on Algeria, he asks Mr Nehru to imagine that for one hundred and thirty years, forty million British are settled in India and thirty million Indians in the United Kingdom, feeding some one hundred fifty million of their family members. The Indian issue would not then have been settled exactly the way it was done.

Mr Nehru understands this very well. The French of Algeria deserve protection and their interests should not be sacrificed. He is, nonetheless, perturbed by the continued conflict, but he is sure that the President will find reasonable means of settling the problem. Whatever be the responsibilities under question, bitterness is growing among the peoples of

⁶ Cantonal elections were scheduled from 27 to 29 May: *Annee politique* 1960, pp. 294-295

Asia and Africa. Increasingly, they are deeply concerned and wish to see the clashes end and forge a future of entente and cooperation.

Notwithstanding this, it would be a great pity if France and Algeria did not remain linked, but it is not up to him to say what kind of relations could be established.

General de Gaulle asks Mr Nehru what impression he has gathered from his discussions with Mr Zhou Enlai.⁷ According to the press, he was not very satisfied with the meetings.

Mr Nehru replies that he had very lengthy discussions in a cordial and friendly tone with Mr Zhou Enlai. However, their viewpoints diverged so widely that they did not even manage to agree on the facts. In actual fact, they found no common ground between them. Mr Nehru had thus suggested to examine the facts and the documents in New Delhi, but Zhou Enlai was not so inclined. It was decided that officials of the two countries would meet in a month or two to prepare, without power of recommendation, a report on the facts - no more. This is hardly a satisfactory situation. However, it helps prevent matters from deteriorating.

The discussions resume after lunch with Messrs Debre, Couve de Murville and Pillai present.

After having summarised the subject of the morning's discussion for the new participants, General de Gaulle asks Mr Nehru what he thinks of the prospects of the conference at the Summit. Mr Nehru having asked him to speak on it first, the General recalled that he had already made a public

⁷ The Chinese Prime Minister had called on his Indian counterpart from 19 to 25 April. The joint press release issued on 25 April acknowledged the failure of the talks.

statement on what could be expected of it. He expects modest outcomes from the conference, which could, nonetheless, bring about a beginning of detente in the area of disarmament, cooperation for aid to less developed countries, and, obviously, with regard to the German problem.

Mr Nehru feels that progress is not impossible with regard to disarmament and atomic experiments. As far as Germany and Berlin are concerned, it would already be a success if the situation did not deteriorate further. The Prime Minister had drawn the attention of the Commonwealth Conference to General de Gaulle's statement issued a month before on the subject of less developed countries.⁸ He even quoted a part of it and stated that the programme seemed excellent to him.

General de Gaulle specifies that his proposal for cooperation is independent of the endeavours of the United Nations; the special funds of the latter do not imply a specific cooperation between the East and the West.

Mr Couve de Murville draws attention to the fact that the nations can avail only of small sums, which do not help them make the massive investments that are necessary.

General de Gaulle states that it is France's desire to see the beginning of collaboration of between the Soviet Union and the Western nations in a

⁸ Reference to the speech delivered by the General before the British Parliament on 7 April (reproduced in *Annee politique* 1960, pp. 642-643, with the erroneous date of 5 April). It notably said:

"Whatever may be the arrangements adopted one day either to reduce means of war, for ensuring peace in Europe, for practising detente from one end of the universe to the other, France remains convinced that peace will remain precarious as long as two billion men remain plunged in poverty before their well-provided-for brothers."

precise and limited field. Such an initiative would help towards detente. Similarly, for disarmament, we should not expect a spectacular result right at the beginning-the divergence of views is too deep.

Mr Nehru asks how one can consider disarmament without China.

Mr Debre suggests that we begin, for instance, by restricting arms trade in the world.

General de Gaulle considers that one must start with something defined, such as the control of missiles and strategic aircraft, although the United States does not much like this idea and the Soviets have not commented on this as yet. He doesn't see what else he could suggest for the moment. As for China, she does not have missiles, strategic aircraft, or nuclear bombs as yet. So there wouldn't be any contradiction if one started without her.

Mr Nehru asks what the next step will be.

General de Gaulle replies that if an agreement is reached on missile control, China will not start making them on her own. He asks Mr Nehru in turn if he thinks China is manufacturing nuclear weapons.

Mr Nehru explains that China receives some help from the Soviets, but she desires to conduct an autonomous policy. Even though China and the Soviet Union are allies, their relations are not very cordial. The USSR is undergoing a period of organisation and normalisation, whereas China, which is in the middle of a revolution, is still in a period that could be termed Stalinist. Their domestic policies are quite different.

General de Gaulle asks Mr Nehru if he intends to manufacture nuclear weapons in the event that China does so.

Mr Nehru recalls that he has reiterated on several occasions his intention of not using atomic energy for military purposes. From both the scientific and the technological points of view, India could have weapons within two or three years, but such is not her intention. China's attitude is completely different. She would certainly wish to have atomic weapons. Even in such an event, Mr Nehru hopes not to have to take this path. Zhou Enlai has particularly said to him that China faces greater threats than India as she is surrounded by American bases, from Korea to Thailand, via Japan and the Philippines. It is quite terrifying to hear Chinese leaders speaking of war. "Even if two or three hundred million Chinese perish," they said, "there will still be two or three hundred left."

Does this mean, asks General de Gaulle, that they want war?

Mr Nehru thinks that this only means that they fear war less than others. Continuing with the subject raised by Mr Debre, General de Gaulle says that arms supply to certain countries should cease. This issue is closely linked to that of disarmament. Why arm Nasser, Kassem, Sekou Toure, Tunisia, Libya, Ethiopia, Israel?

Mr Nehru says he supposes that, if a general policy is not established in this matter, there will be a dangerous arms race between the West and the USSR.

Mr Debre highlights the entire import of supplying arms to the Middle East and Africa. Engaged in an arms race with the help of the West or the

Soviets, all these new States will, in five to ten years, constitute a serious threat of anarchy and war, and create a new instability factor in the world. General de Gaulle asks what the members of the Commonwealth Conference think of the upcoming meet between Soviet and Western leaders.

Mr Nehru indicates that Mr Macmillan believes that it would be possible to make progress on disarmament by coming to an understanding on ceasing nuclear trials and on inspection of production. As far as Germany and Berlin are concerned, he, too, thinks that the status quo is a possible solution for now. He has not said anything on the supply of arms. He thinks that it is necessary to plan a series of conferences during the Summit.

General de Gaulle sees no objection in principle to another conference at the Summit, provided that the atmosphere is known. He is not sure that it would be favourable since Mr Khrushchev's speech⁹ at Baku and the incident of the American plane.¹⁰ As for France, she has a clear conscience, harbours no imperialistic intentions, and does not as yet possess nuclear weapons. As far as trials are concerned, he would agree to nuclear-armed countries suspending such trials. He then broaches the issue of relations between India and France.

Mr Nehru desires these relations to be not only friendly but also that they develop in several directions: culture, economy. Both countries have the means for achieving this result. Would General de Gaulle have any specific idea about this?

⁹ On this speech, see no. 188 (note).

¹⁰ On this incident, see no. 204 (note).

General de Gaulle states that this is certainly possible in the cultural area. The study of languages and student exchanges should be especially encouraged. In the economic area, it is natural that India, which is in a process of development, should buy more than she sells and pay in the long term. France favours this as far as it is possible; her interest is to sell equipment to a friendly country that she trusts. There will only be the practical issues of credit and orders to be resolved.

Mr Nehru agrees. For India, these are not current expenses but long-term investments. In accordance with the Five Year Plans, this policy aims at industrial and agricultural growth following the principles of autonomous development. Substantial results are forecast within a period of nine or ten years. The difficulties are due to the pace of economic growth and social conditions. The people must support 80% of the costs and not think that others will bring about the economic prosperity of the country. Agricultural ups and downs remain quite considerable. Replying to a question asked by General de Gaulle on the rising standard of living, Mr Nehru indicated that apart from statistics, one could notice it visibly. Nonetheless, the most skilled elements of the populace are benefiting the most from this improvement, which must be extended to all the layers of society.

General de Gaulle goes back to the subject of China by informing Mr Nehru of certain discussions he had had with Mr Khrushchev regarding China's strong growth. Mr Khrushchev had replied that, despite everything, China was not dangerous; but visibly, he does not like to talk much about it. Mr Nehru acknowledges-as did Mr Khrushchev-that there are vast unexploited spaces in China, but she is currently populating Tibet as she had earlier done in Mongolia, and that in twenty-five years, her population

will have touched one billion. Already in the past, it had stretched to South Asia and up to Africa.

General de Gaulle asks if Mr Nehru thinks that China's recent incursions into Indian territory¹¹ are aimed at annoying India, or whether this marks the beginning of a systematic expansion.

Mr Nehru hesitates to give a categorical reply, but he thinks rather that the Chinese are interested only in limited zones of Indian territory, such as the one through which runs the caravan route between Sinkiang and Tibet. This road, which they have started building, is of strategic importance to them. Further, they consider everything they occupied centuries ago to be their territory. During the insurrection in Tibet,¹² they were furious with India because they thought she had helped the Tibetans. They posted troops at the Indian border in the western ranges and they remained there, declaring that these territories belonged to them. As far as the situation in Tibet is concerned, India has some information through her commercial staff and her consuls. On the whole, the rebellion has been crushed, despite minor sporadic incidents. The Chinese are trying, above all, to destroy the power of the lamas and to undermine their credibility. The people have greatly suffered and continue to suffer. The flow of refugees is continuing. The Chinese colonisers are coming in droves to settle there and, in ten years, there will be more Chinese people in Tibet than Tibetans. Governance is taken care of by a Chinese military governor with a few local committees. As for the Dalai Lama, who is just twenty-six years old, he is a man of

¹¹ On recent developments in the Indo- Chinese dispute, see Documents diplomatiques francais, 1959-II, nos. 129 (and note), 177 (note), 218 (and notes), 273 (note).

¹² On this insurrection and the Dalai Lama's flight, see Documents diplomatiques francais, 1959-1, no. 207 (and note).

great charm and intelligence who has matured considerably. It is difficult to predict how influential he will be in future.

General de Gaulle asks if these incidents in Tibet have brought Pakistan and India closer.

Mr Nehru replies that there is no collaboration in defence between these two countries. The zones concerned are too far from each other. For India, the essential problem is that of communications. It is easier for the Chinese to come down from the mountains than for Indians to climb up. Also, roads and landing strips are being built to bring supplies to troops that India would have to station in these regions.

In reply to another question from General de Gaulle on the general atmosphere in Southeast Asia, Mr Nehru says that there are constant frictions, but China would not do anything to trigger serious turmoil. With Burma, for instance, where she could easily penetrate, China has concluded an arrangement. She feels that she has gone too far since the past few months and that she has become extremely unpopular. She now wishes to convey an impression of goodwill without inciting political changes.

As far as relations between France and India are concerned, General de Gaulle recalls the treaty on French trading posts that was signed before his return to power.¹³ The French government will not go back on it, but he would prefer that its ratification not be pressed for.

¹³ In October 1954, an agreement was signed providing for consultations not with the people of the Trading Posts but the assembly of elected representatives; a large majority elected for joining the Indian Union, which was implemented de facto on 1 st November (Documents diplomatiques francais 1954, nos. 283 and note, 341 and note). The official treaty was signed on 29 May 1956.

Mr Nehru would be delighted to have the ratification take place as fast as possible, but it is up to the French government to judge the opportune moment for her.

General de Gaulle explains that things will become much easier if, as he hopes, the relations between India and France develop and if the Institut français in Pondicherry runs well.

Mr Nehru says that India would like to have a French cultural centre, which will be well situated in Pondicherry.

General de Gaulle thinks that the small number of Indian students in Pondicherry can be explained by the fact that the Institut français mostly teaches the humanities and not science, which is of greater interest to Indians. Something could be done about this.

Mr Nehru adds that due to the issue of the equivalence of degrees, the students are uncertain about the future that Pondicherry holds for them, unless they specifically study French.

General de Gaulle recapitulates the main points of his talks on detente, the Summit, the relations between east and west Europe, free determination in Africa. As for the Arab countries, France has nothing against them. They display a lot of excitement, but that is part of their nature. With India, France intends to develop its relations not only in the cultural and economic areas but also the political one as there is no clash between these two countries. It would therefore be advisable not to place any obstacles to this by avoiding as far as possible the adoption of any position likely to cause any concern to the other party. For the essentials, that is peace and aid to less developed countries, India and France are in agreement. France

desires to contribute to India's development. Having attained political, financial and economic stability, France can now contribute more to the global economy.

Mr Nehru thanks General de Gaulle for his kind words and deplors the fact that the world is not always governed by reason and logic but by passion and distrust.

General de Gaulle states that France, while not being imperialistic, believes it necessary to rebuild her forces; she is doing it for herself, but perhaps also for others.

Mr Debre adds that all the effort of the Community consists of guaranteeing stability and freedom in the world. Certain African States have already been able to organise themselves in union with France. Others are getting carried away by passion. France's endeavour since General de Gaulle's return to power has been to make of the largest possible number of African States a factor of balance and peace within the next twenty to thirty years.

In this regard, General de Gaulle recalls Mali's recent decision.¹⁴ It is only when we act dispassionately, abstaining from all excitement, that these States will be able to be independent in freedom.

(Minister's Office)

¹⁴ Agreements for transfer of competence were signed on 4 April by Messrs Debre, Modibo Keita and Mamadou Dia for Mali (see no. 154 and note above). For further details on the contents of this agreement, see *Annee politique* 1960, pp. 340-341