Foreign Office memorandum on Indian foreign policy, 10 September 1949

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THE BACKGROUND AND THE SALIENT FEATURES OF INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

[…]

D. Conclusion

27. From the foregoing it will be noted that India’s present foreign policy conflicts with the following United Kingdom objectives:

(i) the prevention of aggression by the organisation of regional collective security pacts; and

(ii) the fostering of self-government in dependent territories at a pace with the capacity of their peoples.

With regard to (i) it is possible that India will come to recognise that the Soviet Union’s refusal to co-operate with non-Communist countries and her increasingly clear intention to work for a Soviet dominated Communist world render the United Nations ineffective as a guarantee against Soviet aggression and make regional security pacts the only alternative safeguard. India’s decision to continue as a member of the Commonwealth, with all that implies in the way of mutual consultation and co-operation (although hitherto this has been rather one-sided), is a big step towards such recognition. As regards (ii) the Indian view is that the grant of independence to dependent peoples is the only effective way of defeating the growth of Soviet influence, and that any attempt to resist the claims of nationalist movements to self-government will throw them into the arms of Soviet Russia. She adheres to this view even where, as in Indo-China, the probably alternative to a Western Colonial administration is a Soviet controlled administration and her first reactions towards the recent French proposals for a settlement in Indo-China were accordingly hostile. However, Indian opinion appears to realise that the Communist campaign reduced the tension in India’s hostility to the policy of the Netherlands Government. India’s attitude towards our policy in Hong Kong has also been more sympathetic then seemed likely and that provides another example of the way in which the Soviet expansion in the Far East may bring India’s foreign policy some distance away from her attitude of “Asia for the Asiatics” towards one of co-operation with the Western Democracies to resist the spread of Soviet control.

28. To summarize, therefore, it may be said that India’s foreign policy is still unwilling to face the full realities of Russian policy and is tinged with prejudices against the Western Democracies, deriving from her struggle for Independence, but that it is slowly developing towards agreement with the aims of the Western Democracies and possibly at a later stage may move towards some form of closer cooperation with them. In particular there have been some signs that the early exuberance, inseparable from the conditions of newly-won independence is wearing off and that increasing concentration on domestic and particularly economic problems, may tend to make the Indian Government less aggressive in its pursuit of foreign policy.

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