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**Arms and 'asymmetric foreign policy'**

Sir,

Apropos Mani Shankar Aiyar's "A lesson for policy makers" (October 30), one wonders what exactly he means by the term 'asymmetry' in relation to India's foreign policy. If the policy that India pursued during the Nehru era represented asymmetry, then it would include Nehru's apparent lack of security threat perception resulting from wishful thinking and idealism manifested in the form of Panchsheel and the '*Hindi-Chini bhai bhai*' slogan. The same policy culminated in the country's most humiliating political and military debacle.

Aiyar's reference to Gandhiji's effective use of the weapon of non-violence against the British would appear to be quite out of context here. While the use of this weapon during the freedom struggle was, no doubt, realpolitik, it would be preposterous to suggest that non-violence could be employed, even in some remote way, to ensure national security or for safeguarding national interests against armed external threats. Gandhiji is known to have given his approval for the use of armed force against the raiders in Kashmir.

If the use of force can be justified why not its build-up? The sagacity of a nation lies in the timely anticipation of the threat to its security and preparing for it accordingly and not in waiting for wars to teach us costly lessons. The fact that Nehru was forced to raise the strength of the armed forces immediately after the 1962 war is indicative of his policy of asymmetry.

The usefulness of a country's foreign policy, whether symmetric or asymmetric, is to be judged by the extent to which it serves its national interests. Nehru's non-alignment also does not seem to have passed the litmus test. India was forced into the Soviet camp to be able to pull through the Kashmir issue with the help of the Soviet veto on the Security Council. Non-alignment took another knock when we had to rush to the United States for help against the Chinese attack.

As Aiyar believes that the strategy of asymmetry was continued by the Gandhis who followed, it would be fair to assume that India's contribution towards the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971, the conduct of the nuclear explosion in 1974 and military intervention in Sri Lanka were part of the policy of asymmetry that Aiyer extols. But if all this is covered by asymmetry, why not India's quest to acquire advanced missile technology and a nuclear power status?

There is nothing wrong in acquiring political power, required not only for a country's quest for dominance but also for the maintenance of the *status quo* and consequent peace. If India lost at the United Nations it was more for lack of political power, (that is earned through military and economic power), than its efforts to acquire it.

**K BRAHMA SINGH**  
**Jammu**