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## **THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION AND THE ROOTS OF THE NON-ALIGNED FOREIGN POLICY OF THE SANDINISTA REGIME**

**BETWEEN THE STRUGGLE FOR US HEGEMONY AND THIRD-WORLD SOLIDARITY  
DURING THE CENTRAL AMERICAN CRISIS OF THE 1980S**

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### ABSTRACT

In order to understand the Nicaraguan foreign policy during the 1980s, it is important to turn back to the Nicaraguan Revolution, if not before. Accordingly, the first part of this essay will focus on the historical conditions that made both the Non-Aligned Movement and the Nicaraguan revolution possible, and aim to show how both of these historical events were absolutely bidding to the definition of the Sandinista regime's foreign policy. The second part will spotlight the overall successful Sandinista foreign policy of non-alignment itself, and will concentrate on entangling factors such as the international solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution, the consequent diplomatic relations that the government endured in the 1980s, and on the handling of the Contra War by the Nicaraguan diplomacy and foreign policy during the Central American crisis in the background of the Cold War.

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The United States has always aimed to be “the first among equals” in the Western Continent. From the Monroe Doctrine, all the way to Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy, Americans have benefited from both the rights and duties that their hegemonic stance has brought, and “when subtle methods failed, American presidents often sent in the Marines to secure the North American interest. Such was the case of Nicaragua, where Marines intervened from 1910 to 1925 and from 1926 to 1933.” (Vanden and Morales, 1985, pp.142–143) Sandino, a nationalist leader of a guerilla movement that aimed to expel the American Marines and promote the emancipation of his country, lost the conflict and was assassinated in 1934. Nevertheless, his name was present in another anti-imperialist guerilla movement – this time, of Marxist political orientation – that fought to overthrow the Somoza family, that ruled the country from 1933 to 1979.

In fact, from 1979, the *Government of National Reconstruction of Nicaragua* proceeded with both domestic and foreign policy reform. In this essay, the focus will be on the latter. After the revolution, Nicaragua undertook a non-aligned position in the international system, becoming a member of the Non-Aligned Movement and advocating for sovereignty and political independence. This non-aligned policy must be analyzed under a postcolonial framework and in the context of the conflicts that were ravishing Central America during the 1980s. In this sense, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) will be considered as a policy of resistance to the status quo. This movement, under the lights of absurdly unequal, postcolonial societies, that were charged with a consequent identity crisis, was of exceptional value to oppressed civilizations in that historical context. Plus, the development of postcolonial studies and existentialism during the 1950s and 1960s were also of major importance.

Simultaneously, a complex network of international solidarity with the regime began taking form in the background of the Reagan Doctrine and the Contra War. The focal point of this essay will be, first, to reflect on the historical experience and the domestic and international environment that made the non-aligned Nicaraguan foreign policy possible, and, secondly, to ponder its efficiency in defending its interests and promoting self-defense of the complex environment of the Second Cold War.

## **Historical context**

### *Towards a Non-Aligned Third World*

During the wave of decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s, the international system saw the formation of a new conceptual entity: The Third World. Appropriating this term and shifting its pejorative meaning to emphasize self-empowerment and build a statement of collective identity, the Global South started amalgamating itself and declared its main, intrinsic pillars: poverty and underdevelopment; Cold War non-alignment, and Afro-Asian racial and anti-colonial solidarity. Parker, in its studies on American public diplomacy targeted to the Global South between 1945 and 1963, affirms that this phenomenon was, in large measure, an unattended consequence of the geopolitical and ideological competition that characterized the Global Cold War. (Parker, n.d.) The fact that, since the end of the Second World War, the alliances in Europe were substantially well-designed, increasingly affected the geographical orientation of the superpowers' competition, which ended up having to spot the so-called Third

World. Obviously, this contest was not well seen by the newly independent countries – foreseeing the dangers of new forms of domination – and, therefore, started to reject the idea of being pivots in another Northern conflict, repudiating the Cold War and beginning to recognize their historical paths of oppression as a form of shared identity. Initially, this consciousness was limited to African and Asian countries, but later on the group would have been enlarged with Arab and Latin American countries, which had been progressively touched by the “Third World nationalism emanating from meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement”. (Vanden and Morales, 1985, p.144)

In 1955, a group of 29 Afro-Asian countries organized a protest movement in Bandung. They requested the respect of human rights, the use of pacific instruments in case of conflict and the reduction of the gap between “developed” and “developing” countries. These requests were institutionalized in the Belgrade Conference (1961) when the Non-Aligned Movement was founded. There were basic conditions to be granted a Non-Aligned membership: to support movements of colonial liberation, to have an independent policy based on peaceful coexistence; not to be bounded by any bilateral military agreement with a Great Power nor to be a member of a regional defense pact; not to belong to any world military alliances nor to allow foreign military bases in its own territory.

It is important to stress that Non-Alignment does not necessarily mean neutrality. The main focus of the movement is to promote the possibility of independence in foreign policy, rather than equidistance from both poles of the conflict. It was about liberty of choice, and duties or neutrality rights were not implied. Additionally, the inclusion of the necessity of respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, stresses the denial of white, occidental, supremacy and its way to do politics and organize its economic system – imperialism, colonialism, capitalism and slavery. The movement was more strictly connected to collective goals, such as the democratization of the international system and the reform of the world economic order.

“Non-alignment is a political concept based on morality, with a clear intention to promote efforts toward peace, security, and stability in international relations. [...] Collectivism was another essential characteristic of the nonaligned movement in the Cold War. Whereas neutrality is an institution of specifically European origin, non-alignment sprang up among African, Asian, and Latin American countries. In Europe the movement was originally represented by Yugoslavia and Cyprus, followed later by Malta.” (Fischer et al., 2016, p.9)

Nevertheless, the political functioning of the Movement was not that fluid. Member and guest states shared a common history of oppression and goals, but they were deeply heterogeneous in their political and economic systems. Furthermore, many of the newly independent countries were still indirectly subjected to developed countries (often their former colonizers). Still, they were able to develop a common agenda, mainly based on economic vindications to the Global North and technical south-south assistance.

Additionally, the evolution of academic work, during the same period, in the fields of existentialism and post-colonialism was definitely part of the global trend of colonial liberation struggles. The most famous example may be the figure of Frantz Fanon, an Algerian psychiatrist that became worldwide known by his studies on the existential-psychiatric malaise created among colonized peoples as a consequence of oppression and domination. His research was more extensive on these effects on black peoples, but Fanon also developed outstanding research on other non-white peoples, for instance on the psychiatric effects of genocide amid Native Americans. He affirmed that colonized peoples suffered from inferiority complexes, as a result of their dehumanization and socialization in the white world, the world of the colonizer. He states that the linguistic imposition composes one of the first acknowledgements of the colonized child of the inferiority of his culture and, therefore, his personal inferiority towards whites. Fanon claims that this subjection is justified by the dominator's Manichaeic mentality, composed in one hand by the white, civilized, good man, that is entitled to save the uncivilized, evil, beast: the non-white colonized. His work became internationally recognized after his death, in 1961, and "Fanonism has continued and highlighted the revolution in the Third World. Fanonism has also revealed the colonized people are suffering unfair treatment and oppression in respect of humanity by the colonists and it has resorted to military force at the turning point in world history". (Wallerstein, 1980, p.251)

### *The Nicaraguan Revolution*

The Somoza family took charge and remained in power until 1979. They were utterly submissive to North American interests in order to keep their personal and class privileges, while most of the population suffered from the unfulfillment of their basic needs. He tended to support American political decisions in international and regional forums, endorsing the intervention in Guatemala in 1954 and permitting the use of Puerto Cabezas for the invasion of Cuba in 1961. In the Cold War framework, Somoza's image was essential to the Truman

Doctrine, as it was used to illustrate a “stable” Central America, rightfully aligned with the capitalist bloc, and instigate sensibility against communist propaganda in the region. Indeed, Latin America in that period served as a laboratory for the US State Department, where they developed and tested a worldwide strategy of public diplomacy that would serve as an instrument for their hegemony.

In that panorama, Somocism went into crisis during the 1960s and the 1970s: corruption scandals, economic change, governmental repression and the nearly dynastic political system caused general discontent, which ignited the Nicaraguan Revolution – one of the most violent conflicts in Central America during the Cold War. Organized by the unified command of Marxist élites, the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSNL), which fought against American imperialism, socioeconomic inequity, and political exclusion, was particularly successful in transforming this guerilla movement into a popular insurgency. Their struggle was supported by most Latin American regimes, which provided abstract and concrete aid.

In fact, Latin American intervention and support to the Sandinistas’ struggle were key. By the 70s, regional hostility to Somoza was widespread and essentially opportunistic. Many governments sought to use the guerrillas as proxies for their self-interest in the region and the idea of Somoza’s unescapable fall made international solidarity less risky. “More broadly, Somoza’s dynastic pretensions and flagrant authoritarianism were an embarrassment even by Latin American standards, and several governments (Mexico’s especially) used their opposition to the regime to score points with the domestic Left.” (Brands, 2012, p.182)

Support to the revolutionaries from Venezuela (providing arms and financial help) and Mexico (contributing with diplomatic support and the financing of the rebels) was rooted in their aims to play a greater influence in Central America and the Caribbean Basin, filling the vacuum that American imperialism would have left in the region. Furthermore, since Cuba’s revolutionary activities were intensified by the failed attempt to get closer to Carter, the perspective to support the Sandinistas install a democratic government, fighting right-wing dictatorships and obtaining an ally in the region seemed a win-win strategy. Cuban aid came in form of political and military advise and armaments, shipped with the help of Panama. Costa Rica, which had been invaded by Anastasio Somoza in 1955, permitted the FSLN to use its territory as a logistical base and staging points for attacks into Nicaragua.

At the beginning of 1979, the oppressive reactions of Somoza furtherly increased discontentment among the élites (predominant supporters of the regime) and radicalized the



peasant and working classes, bringing them closer to the FSLN – which was wise enough to capitalize on this crisis and present itself as a valid political alternative. Nonetheless, one of the main reasons for the Sandinistas’ success was the “hospitable international environment”, (Brands, 2012, p.184) which ultimately was the reason why they managed to enjoy vast foreign support. By April, with Somoza’s regime under siege, Carter proposed a multilateral OAS intervention in Nicaragua, but the proposition was ignored. Three months later, Somoza gave up and left the country, being replaced by a provisional regime, which soon was succeeded by a Government of National Reconstruction (JGRN), composed by leaders of the anti-Somoza coalition.

It is important to stress that the combination of the factors that led to the Sandinistas’ victory would not have been the same if not in the context of erosion of détente and Carter’s will to change the traditional American foreign policy – which most likely would have been keen to intervening militarily in Nicaragua. In fact, Carter had very low approval domestically, both in Congress and in public opinion, lacking the ability to create concrete strategies between demanding reform and denying intervention in Nicaragua. For the conservatives, he appeared weak and moralist; and the left considered his policies hypocritical (another expression of American imperialism with a human face) and reckless, since the exploitation of the human rights flag clearly endangered détente.

As soon as the Sandinistas got into power, the moderation they showed in the past decade slowly faded away, and they started presenting themselves openly as a Marxist-Leninist group. The new government enjoyed, at least regionally, diplomatic support and public legitimacy, while Washington kept itself vigilant. The US expected a further radicalization of Nicaragua, with a tendency towards a single-party regime and limitations of political rights. The postponing of elections and assassinations of the former members of the National Guard only increased their suspicions.

“...The Nicaraguan revolution would serve as the jumping-off point for the most intense phase of Latin America’s Cold War. The Sandinista triumph presaged even bloodier revolutionary struggles in Guatemala and El Salvador, as well as a decade-long attempt by disaffected Nicaraguans to overthrow the FSLN-leg regime. During the 80s these conflicts – and the foreign meddling they elicited – would produce a torrent of violence in Latin America.” (Brands, 2012, p.188)

### **The Sandinista foreign policy of non-alignment**

During the 1980s and the 1990s, the Non-Aligned Movement was affected by a wave of conservatism that had begun to spread around the globe, starting with Reagan's presidential victory in 1981. Many neoliberal leaders took over – especially in Latin America – and, consequentially, this period was overall characterized by an increasing development of North-South cooperation. It is important to stress that during the 1970s, the crisis of the bipolar system – with the economic rise of European countries and Japan – made the balance of power more unstable, and both superpowers had to make concessions to other nations to seem more competitive.

In this context, Nicaragua applied for the full membership status to the NAM in 1979, almost immediately after the Sandinistas' victory. Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua did not accept the *two imperialism theory* – that considered dangerous both the domination of capitalist and socialist systems over Third World countries – nor the *natural alliance tendency*. The latter stated that the world was divided into a spectrum that ranged from imperialist, colonial, reactionary countries to neocolonial, colonized and progressive ones; and that therefore Non-Aligned nations were naturally drawn into establishing relations with socialist countries. According to this perspective, the real threat to the Third World development was American imperialism and its major allies. Nicaragua realized it was unable to afford ideological exclusivity since it was under military and economic attack and contemporarily needed extensive revolutionary reconstruction. As result, the country generally acted as a bridge, a pivotal state, between more radical American sympathizers within the NAM and engaging in *flexible non-alignment*.

In this sense, Nicaragua's non-aligned policies can only be understood in the context of the country's historical background and revolutionary experience. Vanden and Morales (1985) argue that this shift in Nicaraguan foreign policy is deeply rooted in the evolution of the Sandinista movement of the 1930s. Sandino's idea of nationalism, which stressed the importance of anti-hegemonic, national independence, and the necessity of the union of oppressed peoples against any sort of oppression, gave the basis to the "anti-colonial sentiment [that] grew out of Nicaraguan historical experience and was later to be developed by the FSLN as the basis of Sandinista foreign policy". (Vanden and Morales, 1985, p.145)

Therefore, Nicaragua's non-aligned position in foreign policy was in deep agreement with the domestic policies proposed by the Sandinistas, characterized by the ambition to envisage a

mixed economy and political pluralism within a sovereign government and the application of social policies in order to promote a more equal distribution of wealth in the country. In fact, the FSLN program in 1969 stated that: “The new government would ‘eliminate foreign policy submission to Yankee imperialism’, supporting the creation of a New International Economic Order, and ‘support authentic unity with the fraternal peoples of Central America’ by coordinating ‘the efforts to achieve national liberation’ in the region.” (Valenta, 1985, p.166)

Ultimately, Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister at the time, Miguel d’Escoto, stated the four main guidelines of the country’s non-aligned foreign policy: promotion of peace; maintenance of normal relations with all countries; sovereign, independent Foreign policy-making and “the most pure and authentic non-alignment, which inevitably implies the carrying out of an anti-imperialist; anti-colonialist; anti-racist; anti-apartheid and anti-Zionist policy. These evils are the primary obstacles for the achievement of peace and harmonious coexistence between countries and people.” (Envio, n.d.)

#### *Nicaragua’s diplomatic relations and international solidarity with the revolution*

Another major effort of Nicaraguan foreign policy was to diversify its diplomatic and economic relations. Indeed, when the government announced its new foreign policy program in the Sixth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement of 1979, that took place in Havana, it sought not only to continue to obtain the Latin-American support provided in the years of the revolution, but to engage or strengthen relations with other key governments in the most varied geographical regions. Indeed, in the first years of the end of the revolution, Nicaragua managed to shift from a deep economic and industrial dependence with the United States to a more heterogeneous network of trade and international relations. In 1983, for example, 55% of Nicaragua’s imports came from Central and South America; 27% from the US; 10% from Western Europe and 2% from socialist countries. As for economic aid, in the same year, Nicaragua received nearly 50% of the total loans and technical assistance from Third World countries, 32% from capitalist countries and 18.5% from socialist countries. (Envio, n.d.)

The concession of more equitable conditions for the payment of loans was also another cause embraced by the government of Nicaragua after the revolution. This was a shared vindication of the NAM, that blamed the policies of First World countries for continuously blocking any progress in the development of a New International Economic Order. Nicaragua entered the

1980s with a consistent foreign debt, and despite its good relations with the Socialist International, socialist countries struggled to provide the help that the country needed. Both geographic distance (which delayed and made commerce more expensive) and the economic problems of those countries limited their possibility to provide allies appropriate financial aid.

Politically, the government not only strengthened its relations with the governments of Mexico, Venezuela and Cuba; but also with Panama, Peru and Brazil. Diplomatic relations with Bolivia were resumed, but reversed by the latter when Garcia Meza took control of the country through a military coup in the following year. Cuba provided military and technical assistance; training; shipment of armaments; and political advice and human resources (such as teachers and doctors).

In Western Europe, the government continued its good relations with France; West Germany; Spain; Holland; Greece and Switzerland. Generally, Western European support to Nicaragua's government was summarized in 1981 by Willy Brandt: "good relations with the Socialist International and support by Western European countries essentially depend on how the leadership of the FSLN in Nicaragua defines its continuing political direction." (Brandt, 1981) Moreover, new relations were also installed with socialist countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Vietnam, North Korea and the Soviet Union:

"The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (SFNL) of Nicaragua, following the mutual wish of developing the relations on the basis of friendship and solidarity, note that mutual adherence to the ideals of peace, national liberation, democracy and scientific socialism form pleasant opportunities for cooperation and, being led by the interests of unanimity of anti-imperialistic forces, decided on following events in the sphere of two-side relations for 1980-1981." (CPSU CC Resolution, 1980)

In this meeting, the government of Nicaragua and the Soviet Union agreed in promoting the exchange of party delegations of both countries and committed to the promotion of educational programs for Nicaraguan citizens and politicians. Also, the government of Bulgaria promised to yield educational and military exchange activities, while North Korea sent a cultural delegation in order to encourage cultural exchanges, technical assistance and funding of the structural reconstruction of Nicaragua.

In Africa, Nicaragua undertook new relations with Mozambique; Angola; Zimbabwe; Tanzania and Zambia. As for Asian and Arab countries, Nicaraguan relations were reinforced with Japan;

India; Iran; Algeria; Syria; Iraq; Libya and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In fact, Nicaraguans held a position of active support of other national liberation movements, since as they had previously “received backing in their liberation struggle; now they would support similar struggles elsewhere”. (Vanden and Morales, 1985, p.148) For example, the Sandinistas endorsed SWAPO in Namibia; Polisario in the Spanish Sahara; East Timor’s independence and Porto Rican and Cuban nationalist movements. Furthermore, in 1982 the country cut relations with Israel as a protest to the invasion of Lebanon and its expansionistic aims towards Palestinian territories.

#### *Nicaraguan foreign policy during the civil war*

In the same year, Nicaragua was elected for a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN’s Security Council with 104 votes, despite the mobilization of massive American efforts against it. This election showed an international recognition of the legitimacy of the Nicaraguan government and an appreciation of the mature and consistent handling of its foreign policy. In this light, the Americans reacted to this switch in Nicaraguan foreign policy by stating that the country was a Soviet and Cuban “pawn”, and began a non-declared war against Nicaragua by financially and morally backing up counterrevolutionary guerilla groups – with the help of neighboring Honduras.

The “Contra War” included different dissident groups, most of all peasants and indigenous, that requested a real land reform, resisting the policies of collectivizing farms that the government put into practice. “The FSLN called itself the champion of *campesinos*, but its rural initiatives were based more on the ideological need of the party than the long-ignored needs of the peasants.” (Brands, 2012, p.211) Other actors, especially élite members, were political dissidents that contested the Marxist-Leninist imprint of the government and Cuban and Soviet influences in the country, and most thought that Nicaragua would serve as a Soviet proxy and that Cuba was invading the country to impose its political system (Brands, 2012). However, that perspective did not quite illustrate the Cuban perception of the aims of the Sandinista Government:

“We believe that the Sandinistas are inclined to preserve in Nicaragua a pluralistic system. It is known that several of the Sandinistas want to carry out a revolution that is deeper than that which exists at the moment. This is a fact. [...] I believe that they understand perfectly well that it will be difficult and undesirable to hasten the process of intensifying the revolution.” (Transcript, 1981, p.9)

As a result, several ministerial meetings of the NAM aimed to discuss and follow the post-revolutionary processes that were destabilizing Central America, such as the American interventionism in El Salvador and the increasing political and economic pressures orchestrated against the Nicaraguan revolutionary process. In this sense, the *Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Countries on Latin American and the Caribbean* that took place in Managua was particularly important (Vanden, Morales, 1985), as it granted diplomatic legitimation to the currently under attack Sandinista government, and 89 countries, liberation groups and international institutions discussed possible sanctions on the American government for supporting anti-Sandinista groups. In the end, moderate states (such as Jamaica, Egypt, and Singapore) claimed for softer tones and it was decided that Central American instabilities would have been solved through negotiations and peaceful resolutions. Nevertheless, the meeting stated that “Latin American problems would no longer be the exclusive province of the OAS, so often dominated by the US, nor would Nicaragua be isolated.” (Vanden and Morales, 1985, p.149)

In 1983, Nicaragua used its status in the Security Council to draw attention to the escalating counter-revolutionary attacks and American aggression. Nicaragua openly claimed that there was a secret war taking place, orchestrated by the Reagan administration’s CIA. The US struggled to depict it as an internal Nicaraguan affair, and ended up exceptionally isolated in the Security Council: even its usual allies were critical of its actions against the Nicaraguan government. “This development certainly validated Nicaragua’s policy of non-alignment and which had intended to use the Third World Movement not just as a forum for dissemination of objective, sympathetic, information on the Nicaraguan Revolution, but as a medium for diplomatic defense and initiative.” (Vanden and Morales, 1985, p.150)

Moreover, another strategy used by Nicaragua to denounce the continued attacks in its territory was the intensification of its activities in the UN, the OAS, and the International Court of Justice – especially after 1984, when US Senate approved the release of funds that would finance covert CIA operations in the region, US military aid to Honduras and an increase of naval maneuvers.

In the same year, Nicaragua took before the ICJ its case against the American intervention and obtained another foreign policy victory.

Finally, the close solidarity that Nicaragua had cherished with the Third World from the beginning of the Revolution, allied with the legitimation of the international community overall, helped to consolidate its post-revolutionary process. Nicaragua used internationalism as a crucial weapon in favor of its national self-defense. “Through a ‘diversified dependence’ on different nations, but with special ties to the non-aligned countries, Nicaragua hoped to fend off aggressive actions by the US.” (Vanden and Morales, 1985, p.151) And as the NAM grew, it became more difficult for the US to try to isolate Nicaragua as it had done with other Latin American nations in similar historical situations, such as Cuba.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is possible to state that Nicaragua’s foreign policy success was a direct result of its active and flexible participation in the NAM. The consciousness of a shared identity and the country’s union based on intrinsic values helped not only Nicaragua, but also other nations in the same historical context to resist imperialism and neocolonialism. Nicaragua’s strategies based on the diversification of economic and diplomatic relations and its efforts to remain congruent in its historical positions and domestic and foreign policy were complex and far from perfect, nonetheless were greatly appreciated by the international community.

In this sense, the NAM was also successful, as it provided a true third alternative during the Cold War and allowed former colonized, dependent countries, to fundamentally pursue an actual independent posture, both nationally and internationally. The movement had finally granted those countries international prestige and the ability to speak for themselves and ignited opportunities for south-south solidarity and support. However, the ensemble of the Central American crisis, even if in a Cold War framework, must not be seen black-and-white scale. It was a complex, ambiguous proxy conflict that must be also analyzed as such. All countries involved surely had their self-interest in mind, but also struggled to stand in a unified position since their public opinion domestically was not at all cohesive.

Finally, the NAM was part of the global trend of revolutionary liberations struggles and, although in an international framework, did embody the hopes of those populations to obtain minimally dignified lives, the respect of their fundamental rights, and re-form their national

identities, that had been injured by their colonial past. Nonetheless, the crisis of Central America in the 1980s, specifically, brought destruction, massive human and economic losses and social chaos. As John Lewis Gaddis (2005) stated: the end of the Cold War represented a “triumph of hope”, but “if anyone won the Cold War in Latin America, it was certainly not them.” (Brands, 2012, p.222)

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## UNCOVERING THE UNKNOWN: TRACKING FINNISH MEMORY CULTURE SHIFTS IN THE 2017 VERSION OF *THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER*

Marin Ekstrom

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The original version of the article “Uncovering the Unknowns: Tracking Finnish Memory Culture Shifts in the 2017 Version of *The Unknown Soldier*” was originally a term paper for Dr. Thomas Fetzter’s “Dark Legacies: Coming to Terms with Europe’s Twentieth Century” course, which I took during the Winter 2020 semester at Central European University.

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The struggle against fascism defines the predominant WWII narrative for most European countries. Finland, however, has a different focal point. Namely, the country’s fight against the USSR in the Winter War and the Continuation War epitomizes its predominant WWII experience. The conflicts originated with the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in which Nazi Germany and the USSR carved up Eastern Europe into territorial spheres of influence. The USSR laid claim to Finland and invaded it to create a buffer zone against the growing threat of Germany (Chapple, 2019). Finland resisted the USSR’s occupation, which in turn culminated in the 1939–1940 Winter War. Despite the overwhelming odds against Finland in terms of manpower and artillery, the Finnish army valiantly fended off the Red Army due to their well-organized guerilla war tactics (The Moscow Times, 2020). In the end, however, the USSR prevailed, and Finland was forced to concede eleven percent of its territory in 1940 (Islam, 2020).

A year later, the Finnish army regrouped and attempted to reclaim the lost territories, which led to the 1941-1944 Continuation War. Finland aligned itself with the Nazi German campaign against the USSR to bolster its chances of reclaiming the territories (Hannikainen 2020, p.77). The joint efforts of the Finnish and German troops proved successful at first. Finnish troops took back most of its former territories, and occupied large swathes of Soviet territory (Yle Uutiset, 2012). However, the tide of the war reversed, and the Soviet army soon gained ground on the Finnish and German armies. In 1944, the Soviet Union launched a counter strike against Finnish troops and drove them out of the occupied territories (Yle Uutiset, 2012). Finland, fearing that an encroaching Soviet army could occupy the entire country, signed a peace treaty

in late 1944. As a result of the treaty, Finland gave up the territories that it had set out to reclaim (Yle Uutiset, 2012). The USSR and Finland also signed the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (Korhonen, 1973, p.183). This treaty helped develop the “Finlandization” policy that would guide Finland’s foreign affairs during the Cold War. According to the Finlandization approach, Finland sought to appease the USSR by demonstrating its commitment to peaceful and civil co-existence (GlobalSecurity.org, n.d.). While this policy constrained Finland’s foreign policy choices and censored its critiques of the USSR in official circles, it allowed Finland to remain an independent democratic state that maintained close contacts with the USA and Western Europe (Ponniiah, 2017).

Finland grappled with the aftermath of its postwar experience. The general public, particularly war veterans, found it difficult to balance their lingering nationalist sentiments with the disappointment of defeat and the newfound pressure to accommodate to the USSR’s preferences (Kivimaki, 2012, p.487). However, Finns received a means to reconcile their postwar memories via the 1955 film version of *The Unknown Soldier*, which was based on the 1954 novel of the same name. *The Unknown Soldier* garnered immediate acclaim for its depiction of a rag-tag battalion’s experiences in the Continuation War. The film deconstructed the ideal of the noble, romanticized Finnish soldier, and instead replaced it with very humanized, relatable characters (Ridanpaa, 2017, pp.200–201). While the film highlighted the futility of war and the unnecessary suffering that accompanies it, it also emphasized the courage of the soldiers’ efforts and their role in maintaining Finland’s independence after the war ended (Kivimaki, 2012, p.488). The 1955 version of *The Unknown Soldier* became a canonical representation of Finnish historical memory culture and remains iconic to this day. The film is screened annually on Finland’s Independence Day, and one million Finns – approximately one-fifth of the country’s population – consistently tune in to watch it (Pajunen and Korsberg, 2018, p.226). *The Unknown Soldier* has thus become Finland’s most well-known representation of its WWII memory culture.

The immense popularity of *The Unknown Soldier* inspired a 2017 remake of the film. During the period between the 1955 and 2017 releases of *The Unknown Soldier*, Finland had undergone shifts in its collective WWII memory narrative. While the new version of the film shares many common features with its predecessor, it also reflects several changes that align with Finland’s reframing of its WWII experience. Namely, Finnish WWII memory culture has undergone three major changes. First, it strives to be more nuanced and empathetic in its relations with Russia. Second, it attempts to balance out the positive and negative aspects of the Finnish soldiers’

behavior during WWII. Lastly, it puts more scrutiny into analyzing the nature of Finland's collaboration with Nazi Germany. The article intends to detail the processes that accounted for these three major memory shifts and describe how these changes are reflected in the 2017 version of *The Unknown Soldier*; in doing so, the paper intends to showcase the evolution of Finland's WWII historical memory.

### **The nature of Russo-Finnish relations**

The first major shift in Finnish memory culture regards Finland's views towards Russia. The 1955 version of *The Unknown Soldier* came out just over a decade after the end of the Continuation War. Feelings of resentment and animosity remained fresh, and many Finns took the Finnish military leader Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim's assessment of Russia as "the hereditary enemy" to heart (Sander, 2018). Nevertheless, the Finlandization policy, with its intent of maintaining relatively positive relations with the USSR, limited the extent to which Finland could openly criticize Russia and the greater Soviet Union. Given these circumstances, the film chose to minimize the character development of the Russian soldiers while maximizing its focus on the Finnish soldiers. The Russian characters essentially become relegated to nameless entities that existed solely to provide conflict for the Finnish protagonists. Meanwhile, the film highlighted the human aspects of the Finnish characters. The Finnish soldiers were given regional quirks and colorful personalities so that the audience could easily distinguish between the members of the main cast (Sjavik, 2006, p.173). Nevertheless, they were all united in their sense of brotherhood and desire to defend Finland, which compelled the audience to admire all the soldiers and root for their success (Sjavik, 2006, p.173). *The Unknown Soldier* generated national pride in its homeland by amplifying the human qualities of its Finnish main characters. However, the lack of attention that it gave to the Russian side of the conflict showcased Finland's hesitancy to fully engage with its neighbor.

By the time the 2017 version of the film came out, the geopolitical dynamics of Russo-Finnish relations had dramatically altered. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 eliminated the Soviet "threat" to the rest of the world, and the Russian successor state pursued more normalized – albeit still tenuous – relations with Finland and its other Western neighbors (Sutela, 2001, p. 23) Finland, meanwhile, transformed into one of the world's wealthiest and most developed countries in the latter half of the twentieth century (Jantti and Vartiainen, 2009). These factors helped to balance out the uneven "David and Goliath" dynamic that had

characterized Russia/ the Soviet Union and Finland during WWII. Meanwhile, the legacy of the Finlandization policy, as well as bitter war memories being soothed over time, led to the development of relatively amicable relations between Russia and Finland. Today, they are major trading partners and serve as popular tourist destinations for their respective citizenries (Haavisto, 2017). However, Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea ignited fears of the reemergence of the "Russian aggressor" throughout Europe. The event placed Finland in a precarious situation: on one hand, it complied with its traditional Western allies' outcry against Russia and placed sanctions on the country. On the other hand, Russia constituted a key partner for Finland, and the country sought ways to continue to interact with its neighbor (Haavisto, 2017). Instead of simply writing Russia off as the "hereditary enemy," the Finnish government and citizenry had to find ways to understand and empathize more deeply with Russia to balance out its commitments to both Western Europe and its vast eastern neighbor.

The 2017 version of *The Unknown Soldier* portrays a more nuanced portrait of Russia by incorporating highly sympathetic Russian characters into its storyline. Initially, the 2017 film mirrors its 1955 counterpart by only featuring the dehumanized Soviet soldiers as its representation of Russia. The soldiers initially speak of Russians in derogatory terms: in one scene, the character Corporal Lehto shoots a Russian prisoner of war in the back. Sergeant Hietanen chastises him for his actions, stating that the prisoner was not posing an immediate threat to his safety. However, some of Lehto's cohorts retort by stating "There is not use crying over a Russkiy" (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). Furthermore, when the platoon crosses the border into Soviet Karelia, the soldiers joke that they are stepping onto "foreign soil" (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). They claim that they "no longer have rights" and must behave like "bandits" from now on (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). Once the soldiers arrive in Finnish-occupied Petrozavodsk, several of the soldiers – as well as the viewers – begin to sympathize with the civilian Russian residents of the city. The most notable example of a humanized Russian character is the young schoolteacher, Vera. In one scene, the Finnish characters Corporal Rokka, Corporal Vanhala, and Sergeant Hietanen visit her house. An agitated Vera asks them, "Why did you come to Russia? Why did you attack us?", to which Rokka replied, "Your people started it... We would not be here if you had not attacked" (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). This dialogue illustrates how each side blamed the other for the conflict, as well as the fact that the line between hero and villain was not so clearly defined. Hietanen interjects by acknowledging that "Those who suffer the most [during war] are the people...who never harmed anyone, like kids" (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). Vera is touched by Hietanen's

heartfelt response, and they strike up a romance. In the course of their relationship, Hietanen's fellow soldiers joke, "Two tribes have united...he's fallen for the enemy" (The Unknown Soldier, 2017). Although Hietanen and Vera eventually part ways when he is stationed to the front, their brief plot line allows viewers to glimpse the plight of Russian people under occupation and view them – and Russia as a whole – in a more sympathetic light.

### **The behavior of Finnish soldiers**

The second key shift in Finnish memory culture attempts to more openly acknowledge the conduct of Finnish soldiers during WWII. Prior to the 1955 release of *The Unknown Soldier*, many Finns felt a sense of disillusionment towards the wartime experience and wondered if their patriotic zeal had been in vain. After all, Finland lost significant portions of its territory to the USSR, and the country was essentially forced to be on friendly terms with its former enemy due to the terms of the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. Finnish soldiers in particular harbored traumatic memories of the war, as they had directly experienced, or even committed, wartime atrocities (Kivimaki, 2012, p.487). The 1955 version of *The Unknown Soldier*, however, helped restore a sense of Finnish patriotism by portraying the Finnish soldiers as noble and courageous heroes. On one hand, the film broke ground by depicting a motley crew of personality types that clashed with the image of the ideal Finnish soldier. On the other hand, the film reinforced the idea of what a soldier should be: these seemingly ordinary boys and men displayed bravery, sacrifice, and companionship throughout the course of the war, and it was only through their efforts that Finland maintained its sovereignty after the end of the war (Kivimaki, 2012, p.488). The film heavily influenced public attitudes towards the soldiers, as most people took pride in the soldiers' efforts – almost to the point of worship – while censoring stories of their less palatable wartime behavior. Thus, this sanctification of Finnish soldiers would remain the main narrative for years to come.

By 2017, most Finns still revered the efforts of the Finnish soldiers during WWII. At the same time, younger generations of Finns were looking for more balanced – in other words, less glorified – accounts of the soldiers' wartime experiences. Their interest coincided with a weakening sense of self-censorship that had persisted amongst older generations of Finns (Wolnik et al, 2017, p.166). Previous generations – particularly the veterans of the war – were still traumatized by their direct experiences in the war, and thus wanted to limit discussions on their bleaker memories of it. The impact of the original version of *The Unknown Soldier* also

encouraged the public to emphasize the positive aspects of the war over the negative ones. With time abating the emotional ramifications of WWII, new generations of Finns grew increasingly curious to comprehensively understand the wartime experiences of the soldiers. They pressed about previously taboo subjects and began to uncover stories that contradicted the rosy portrayal of Finnish soldiers that had previously dominated wartime accounts. While many Finns continue to hold the war veterans in high esteem, they also understand that the soldiers committed regrettable, if not downright horrific, acts as well, and therefore have a more well-rounded understanding of their wartime experiences.

The 2017 version of *The Unknown Soldier* references this memory shift by more evenly portraying both the heroic and reprehensible actions of the Finnish soldiers. On one hand, the 2017 film strengthens the audience's connection to the soldiers' struggles by including scenes of their personal lives. While the 1955 film highlighted the humanity of the soldiers by focusing on their personalities, the 2017 film goes a step further by showing how they lived when they were not on the battlefield. Scenes of Captain Kariluoto's wedding and Corporal Rokka's family life, for example, help viewers sympathize with the soldiers' missions (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). The audience, in turn, root for the soldiers to succeed so they can return to their loved ones. At the same time, the film does not shy away from showing the more controversial aspects of their wartime behavior. In the scene where the platoon first arrives in occupied Petrozavodsk, for example, they encounter sheer chaos. They are greeted by fires burning on the streets, the sound of gunfire filling the air, and Russian-speaking women shrieking and running away from Finnish soldiers (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). The platoon quickly runs into a group of drunk, stumbling Finnish soldiers that were contributing to the madness in the streets. The unsettled looks on their faces highlight the uneasiness that they feel towards their fellow soldiers' uncouth occupation of the city. A scene that appears shortly afterwards depicts a group of Finnish soldiers coercing Russian women to have sex with them (*The Unknown Soldier*, 2017). In short, the film portrays the conduct of the Finnish soldiers in a more balanced manner. While the overall respect for the veterans' efforts remains, the film also emphasizes that they were not infallible – and in doing so, it showcases the fuzzy moral boundaries of war.

### **Finland's collaboration with Nazi Germany**

The last major memory shift regards the Finnish army's collaboration with Nazi Germany during the Continuation War. In 1955, the Continuation War was predominantly framed as a

conflict between Finland and the USSR, and the role of Nazi Germany was minimized. If collaboration between Finland and Germany did come up, it was portrayed as a pragmatic decision to defend Finland's national interests as opposed to signaling support for Nazi ideology (Wolnik et al, 2017, p.171). Furthermore, since Finland chose to align with Germany, it was not occupied and was not pressured to comply with the Nazi regime's practices. As a result, no Finnish Jews died in the Holocaust, and Finnish Jewish soldiers even fought on the side of Nazi Germany (Holocaust Remembrance Project, 2020). Given Finland's supposedly clean slate during the Holocaust, the 1955 version of *The Unknown Soldier* solely focused on the conflict with the USSR and did not make overt references to the Nazi alliance.

In the decades following the release of the 1955 version of *The Unknown Soldier*, historical evidence emerged that revealed how Finland was not completely faultless in its role in the Holocaust. Research focused on Finnish volunteers serving with the SS Wiking in Belarus and Ukraine discovered that they were complicit in Nazi war crimes. Some investigators suspect that the Finnish volunteers may have committed war crimes themselves (Holocaust Remembrance Project, 2020). In addition, Jewish refugees who sought asylum in Finland were not always granted it. Finland extradited many of the refugees, and in some cases, it handed them over to Nazi forces (Holocaust Remembrance Project, 2020). Although Finland largely avoided the trauma that characterized most European countries' wartime experiences, it still needed to find some way to acknowledge and repent the crimes that were committed on its behalf during the war.

The 2017 version of *The Unknown Soldier*, like its 1955 counterpart, chiefly focuses on Finland's conflict with the USSR. However, it does make some minor adjustments to point out Finland's compliance with Nazi Germany. One scene in the film depicts the soldiers becoming rambunctiously drunk during the celebration of Field Marshal Mannerheim's birthday. In the leadup to the scene, the film includes a newsreel that shows how Hitler traveled to Finland to partake in the festivities (Sander, 2018). Mannerheim holds a revered place in Finland's national imagination. He was not only a legendary military leader, but he also served as the country's president and helped set the course for Finland's post-war development (ThisisFINLAND, 2017). The sight of one of Finland's greatest heroes shaking hands with Hitler, one of the most reviled figures in human history, is intended to unsettle Finnish viewers. Nevertheless, the scene does not whitewash Finland's historical legacy; in doing so, it balances Finland's commendable wartime experiences with the darker aspects of its WWII involvement.



## Conclusion

Given the distinctive nature of Finland's WWII experience, Finns have faced challenges in defining and understanding this chapter in their country's history. The 1955 version of *The Unknown Soldier* provided a medium for the Finnish public to make sense of the war's impact on their nation. The 1955 film promoted three major trends in Finnish WWII memory culture: it downplayed Russia's perspective on the war, presented the Finnish soldiers in an overwhelmingly heroic light, and overlooked the implications of Finland's collaboration with Nazi Germany. However, the 2017 version of *The Unknown Soldier* featured alterations that emulated broader shifts in Finnish WWII memory culture. In contrast to the first film, the updated version drew more attention to the Russian side of the conflict, showcased the positive and negative aspects of the Finnish soldiers' actions, and reflected more critically on Finland's involvement with the Nazis. Comparing the two versions of *The Unknown Soldier* provides valuable insight into how Finland has continually reframed its understanding of WWII and its role in the conflict. Furthermore, it allows researchers to track how these shifts are reproduced throughout the wider realm of Finnish media culture.

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**GLOBAL HEALTH APOCALYPSE:  
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE WORLD WITH PARTICULAR  
EMPHASIS ON INDIA AND THE ISSUE OF ACCESS TO MEDICINE**

Candice Stephens-Mc Nichols

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 global health pandemic threatened to annihilate the entire world's population and many persons viewed it as one of the many plagues signalling the impending dooms day. Indeed, for many countries around the world, the Corona virus ushered in what appeared to be an apocalypse of some sort. It was noted with great trepidation by the Express UK, that COVID has "infected more than 158.4 million people globally, since it emerged in China in 2019 and was branded a global pandemic by the WHO. (Kettley, 2021) From the statistics taken from the WHO coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard globally from the 15 May 2021, there have been 161,513,458 confirmed cases of COVID-19 including 3,352,109 deaths reported by the WHO. However, as of the 12 May, 2021, only 1,264,164,553 vaccine doses have been administered. (WHO, 2021). While statistics have been staggering globally, some countries have been devastated by a second wave or strain of the virus which is reportedly more virulent in its impact than the previous strain. Notably, countries such as Brazil, Nepal and India had second waves of the virulent COVID-19 virus. The situation in India is said to have far surpassed Brazil and Nepal as cases escalated out of control. From the statistics of the WHO, it was recorded that from the 3rd January 2020 to the 15 May 2021, there have been 24, 965, 463 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 274,370 deaths being recorded in India. The question however was why did India's situation become so adverse? Additionally, what were the factors that contributed to the vast surge in its mortality rate and the rise in in number of COVID cases? This paper proposes to examine what went wrong in the context of India, and with the right to access to medicine for COVID patients which could have prevented the alarming growth in the mortality rate of India. The paper further examines the lessons that the situation in India has taught on the need for intercultural understanding and diplomacy as well as education and awareness in preventing the mass spread of the virus in the way it did in India.

Key words: global health, COVID-19 pandemic, India, mortality rate, vaccination, patents

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### **The crisis in India and the causes**

It was noted that the number of COVID-19 cases in India escalated significantly in 2021 after a sharp decline in 2020. (Bhuyan, 2021) While many factors have contributed to the steady rise in these cases, it was noted that several factors precipitated this situation. Such factors included the refusal of the government of India to place the country under another lockdown due to its focus on economic recovery. Other factors which were cited were cultural and religious practices of the Indian population, a sense of laxity on the part of the Indian government and people due to a false sense of security, and a feeling that the worst was over. (Bhuyan, 2021)

It was noted by Srinath Reddy, President of the Public Health Foundation of India that the augmentation of cases arose from “a confluence of careless behaviours, slackening of government vigil and mutations of the virus.” (Bhuyan, 2021) Moreover, he noted that the decline in cases led to the popular belief that the danger had fully abated. (Bhuyan, 2021) Notably, because of this perception, India celebrated religious and cultural festivals such as Holi and Kumbh Mela which are Hindu religious festivals in which celebrations include a royal bath in Haridwar and in which there were large gatherings of people. The recent elections in India also drew large crowds of supporters due to the elections campaign. According to the WHO, this led to the “perfect storm” of the crisis, as hospitals in India became severely overcrowded and lacked basic necessities such as oxygen or COVID vaccines to inoculate patients which could have been used to control the spread of the virus.

Further, from subsequent reports, there were insufficient places for persons to bury their loved ones, as crematoriums were inundated with dead bodies. (OpIndia, 2021; Mishra, 2021) In other accounts, there were reports of bodies floating on rivers. Ghastly images were also proliferated throughout the media of thousands of bodies being burnt in carparks and on sidewalks in India. (Forbes, 2021)

### **The right to health and the issue of access to health and international obligations for patent protection under the WTO law**

Article 12 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognizes and guarantees the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest possible standard of physical and mental health. Further, states are obliged pursuant to Article 12 (2)

(c) to take measures towards the prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases.

Thus, according to the ICESCR Convention, every human being has a right to health. And the state holds an international obligation within the context of International Human Rights Law to protect its citizens from conditions which create a climate inimical to their health. States therefore have a binding international legal obligation to control situations such as epidemics and other diseases on the basis of the ICESCR Convention. Applying this consideration to the context of India, the government had an obligation to do all within its power to control the spread of CORONA virus. They had a responsibility to ensure that in cases such as epidemics that are highly contagious, that the citizens were using proper safety measures such as wearing masks, maintaining appropriate social distancing and not gathering in large numbers, making use of measures for quarantine and containment of the disease as well as applying temporary national lockdown measures in cases where there had been a state of emergency.

Although the government initially responded to COVID-19 by putting in place the temporary lockdown and were able to control the spread of the virus in the initial stages, it later relaxed its policies as there was a false sense of security that the issue of COVID was no longer problematic. This led to the mass gatherings at festivals, sports events at the stadium and for elections which resulted in the widespread rise in COVID-19 cases and in the high mortality rate in India. In this way, the government therefore failed to meet its international legal obligations to prevent, treat and control the pandemic in accordance with Article 12 (2) (c) of the ICESCR Convention.

It was also noted that the country also suffered due to a lack of basic amenities and supplies such as oxygen which is critical for the preservation of life in any healthcare system. Additionally, there were not enough COVID-19 vaccines to inoculate patients which were critical to controlling the spread of the virus on the massive scale in which it was spread throughout India. The lack of these basic amenities raised a question of the right to access to healthcare. Notably, the WHO's Constitution of 1946 envisages the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition (Preamble). Further, it notes that as a corollary right, there is a legal obligation imposed on states to ensure access to timely, acceptable and affordable health care of appropriate quality as well as providing for the underlying

determinants of health such as safe and potable water, sanitation, food, housing, health related information and education and gender equality. (WHO, 2017)

Given that the right to access to health is a corollary to the right to health, arguably when applied to the context of India, the government and the international community, should have acted more expeditiously to ensure that India had access to oxygen and COVID vaccines which were critical for preventing the mass spread of COVID-19. However, the International Community did not act fast enough to assist India in curbing the spread of the COVID-19 virus by providing them with the much-needed oxygen. Additionally, many states of the developed world including the United States and Germany were initially reluctant to provide India with the formulas for their patented vaccines which are protected under the rules of the WTO and specifically the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). As noted by Padmanabhan, (2021), the pharmaceutical industry puts in place strict IP protections to safeguard their patents and its competitive secrets. However, the issue with such strict protection is that poorer nations and particularly developing countries often are unable to afford the cost of these pharmaceutical drugs, such as what happened during the COVID-19 crisis in India. (Padmanabhan, 2021)

Consequently, because these states and their citizens are unable to afford or to subsidize the cost of these drugs, they often resort to getting around the rights of states to protect their intellectual property to the patented pharmaceuticals through compulsory licensing or state authorization of its use without prior consent provided for under Article 31 of the WTO. (Padmanabhan, 2021) This obviously poses a problem for patent owners and states who own the rights to these patented pharmaceuticals. The COVID-19 crisis however, forced many states in the more developed countries to reconsider their strict protection of patented drugs and waiving these protections in light of the overwhelming nature of the COVID crisis.

Notably, states had to balance between two competing International obligations, that is to say, the international obligation of the right to access to healthcare and with that of the right to protection of intellectual property rights under the WTO Agreement. Most of the developed states however chose to uphold their rights to protection of their intellectual property through the protection of their rights to patents over those of human beings. This therefore resulted in the mass mortality rates in India. It was not until the situation spiralled out of control that the developed states decided to intervene with many embarking on provision of much needed oxygen which was in critical shortage in India.

The United States, France and Russia, have to be commended as they were among those developed nation states in favour of taking the decision to waive the rights to protection of patents under the rules of the WTO in light of the severity of the crisis. (Morrison, 2021) The United Kingdom must also be commended as it also made substantial contributions in the provision of much needed oxygen for the Indian population. (Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, 2021) The EU, and particularly Germany however, did not feel that waiving the rights to protect patents was the best approach to dealing with the impending crisis but they decided instead to hold diplomatic discussions with India in order to reach an agreement on the way forward. (Morisson, 2021; The Arugus, 2021)

The crisis in India however delineates the limitations of International law and Diplomacy. It underscores that within International Law, there are often competing interests for states especially where there are situations of global / public health concerns such as COVID-19 and International trade and intellectual property law. However, states have a duty to weigh competing interests carefully in light of public health outbreaks and its impact not just upon those countries who are impacted by the public health outbreak but also upon the entire global community. This is because the world is becoming a globalized community and with the rise in international travel to and from destinations which may be affected with public health crises, this may also turn into a global health nightmare for international communities just like in the case of the Ebola crisis. In fact, Ebola should have taught the global community a lesson about the impact of globalization and the heightened threat to global safety due to international travel and crossing borders into territories affected by the virus, however, the world was not prepared for the global health crises of the COVID-19 virus.

While states may therefore wish to protect intellectual property rights which are important for the protection and promotion of innovation, they must weigh how such decisions in a time of emergency will affect entire populations and their rights to access to healthcare.

Although it is the responsibility of the sovereign state to provide access to certain healthcare benefits for its citizens, there may be cases where the International community may have to intervene or to cooperate with such states who are affected by global health crises. This would ensure that there is true or proper access to healthcare for all, particularly for those states whose citizens are destitute or lack these basic amenities such as developing countries. This would thereby meet the Sustainable Development Goals of sharing equitably in the resources of states and contribute to maintaining peace and security among nations.



### **Lesson from India on intercultural understanding and diplomacy**

While COVID-19 has taught the entire world a lot in relation to the treatment of highly contagious, infectious and virulent diseases and viruses, the case of India, like the case of Ebola in Africa, should have taught much more about the spread of infectious diseases. One such lesson is the need for having deeper intercultural understanding on how diseases or viruses can be spread exponentially and at an alarming pace due to cultural and religious practices. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, India still continued to have large gatherings to celebrate religious and cultural festivals such as Holi and Kumbh Mela. This was one of the factors that precipitated and fuelled the spread of COVID-19 and led to it spiralling out of control, as well as to the high mortality rates in India.

Intercultural understanding is therefore critical to understanding how highly infectious diseases can be spread at a much faster pace. If there is insufficient education and awareness about the issue and intercultural understanding about how factors such as culture and religious beliefs and practices of a society can play a role in the spread of infectious diseases, this provides a ripe situation for infectious diseases to be augmented exponentially. It is therefore important for the International Community to keep intercultural understanding in mind when seeking to formulate policies to deal with epidemics and pandemic outbreaks particularly in developing countries. This is because many developing nations such as Africa, India and states in the Caribbean including Haiti, still hold on to traditional beliefs and cultural practices which can augment the spread of viruses and diseases during a crisis or pandemic. Therefore, Education and Awareness programmes through intercultural dialogue and diplomacy with local communities are therefore critical for preventing the further transmission of diseases or viruses.

Most of the literature and research has focused primarily on ensuring there are proper hygienic practices during pandemics involving infectious diseases. These may include measures such as washing and sanitizing of hands, wearing masks, practicing social distancing and quarantining persons who are suspected of having the disease, however, less has been highlighted of the role that education and awareness of the role that cultural practices of states during pandemics can play in augmenting situations of crises particularly for developing states. Therefore, it is critical that states when formulating policies for protection of their citizens must bear this factor in mind. This is especially so as the world becomes a more and more globalized space and there is more international travel across borders.

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