

# Foreign Policy Tiffin Talk: Dr Swapna Kona Nayudu

December 2018

- As part of the first edition of Foreign Policy Tiffin Talks, Brookings India hosted **Dr. Swapna Kona Nayudu**, Associate at Harvard University Asia Centre on December 19, 2018.
- Nayudu presented her work on India's response to international crises between 1945 and 1965 with a specific focus on peacekeeping commitments in the Korean War, the Suez Canal Crisis, the Hungarian Revolution, the crises in Lebanon and in the Congo.
- **Ambassador Shivshankar Menon**, Distinguished Fellow at Brookings India and former National Security Advisor served as the lead discussant.
- The discussion was moderated by **Dr. Constantino Xavier**, Fellow, Foreign Policy at Brookings India. The seminar was attended by academics from universities, scholars from India's leading think tanks, and members of the media.

The Brookings India Foreign Policy Tiffin Talks are a new series of closed-door seminars where scholars present their evidence-based research and interact with peers and practitioners on India's security and strategic affairs. It seeks to expose a new generation of policy analysts to cutting-edge and policy-relevant research from Indian and international scholars.

## Importance of historical research

Scholarship surrounding international relations has seldom employed a historical perspective in its study of foreign policy. Breaking away from the longstanding tradition of strategic studies, Swapna Kona Nayudu's research emphasises the importance of providing a historical framework to international relations as she studies diplomatic, military and institutional history through archives and long-forgotten files, across different languages, cities and countries. She argues that approaching foreign affairs through strategic studies alone has limited our understanding since international actors are not merely strategic individuals influencing foreign policies. On the contrary, it is necessary to analyse individual actors in the context of their domestic setting, as well as their relationships with one another, as crucial to unpacking significant events that influence India's foreign policy.

## India's history of peacekeeping efforts

Nayudu's research focuses on India's peacekeeping efforts during the period of 1945-1965, with a special focus on the case studies of the Suez Canal Crisis, the crisis in Lebanon in 1958 and in the Congo in 1960, revealing how India's foreign policy priorities shaped and directed India's peacekeeping efforts. She highlighted how India's position as a non-aligned power allowed for greater peacekeeping presence, paving the way not only for India to become one of the

By "letting the archives speak", Nayudu traced the important relationship between India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dag Hammarskjöld, the third Secretary General of the United Nations, and how it came to inform India's approach to the UN. Nayudu's research gives insights into India's peacekeeping commitments from 1945 to 1965 through a fresh approach, giving a "bird's eye view while writing it through a worm's eye view." Constantino Xavier, who was moderating the discussion, emphasised the importance of archival research as an important methodology to study international relations as it perceives foreign policy in realistic terms, as what practitioners actually do, contrary to speech, ideas and emotions.

largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations, but also for smaller nations to take on peacekeeping roles of their own. It also outlines Nehru's commitment to supporting the United Nations and wider Asian nationalism.

Nayudu's study of archival material brought to the fore often neglected and overlooked elements of India's peacekeeping efforts and operations during the 1950s

and 1960s. One such benefit of studying the archives was the discovery of an anti-India sentiment that was evident during the Korean War in 1953 and in the Congo in the 1960s. Her study of the diplomatic cables revealed India's efforts at maintaining a delicate

balance between two contradictory targets -- on one hand, the need to support the UN and on the other, handling local resistance to deployment of Indian troops on the ground.

## Peacekeeping in India's foreign policy

Participants stressed the importance of the humanitarian nature of India's peace-building operations, and its ability to move beyond providing combat troops. This paved the way for easier Indian integration into modern peacekeeping. For example, although the 1958 crisis in Lebanon was limited, it pushed across the idea of India as a mediator. It served as a precursor to India's larger involvement in the Congo crisis of 1960. Participants also agreed that India's multi-lateral cooperation and direct diplomacy through the UN and the global south was key to the success of these peacekeeping efforts.

Participants pointed out that within India, civilian leadership largely dictated India's peacekeeping involvement, reflecting the civil-military gap of the early stages. The discussion highlighted that although India is viewed as a net security provider within its region today, it has a long history of mediation and peace-building efforts in its own region, as it played a crucial role in deescalating conflicts in the early Cold War context.

## India's current role as a mediator

As a founding member of the United Nations, India's commitment and contribution to maintaining international peace has been evident from the early days after Independence. India's peacekeepers have been deployed in more than fifty missions, and serve as one of the largest contributors to peace operations today. Its contribution has been appreciated and acknowledged by the international community. Indian experience in peacekeeping has provided a template for other countries to study and learn from.

The study of peacekeeping operations reflects the importance of more historical research, on lessons learnt and best practices from past Indian involvement. The discussion was even more timely and relevant since India marks the 30th year of the Indian Peace Keeping Forces' (IPKF) presence in Sri Lanka, offering us an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of Indian mediation efforts, peace-building, and peacekeeping operations.



(From L to R) Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, Distinguished Fellow at Brookings India; Dr. Swapna Kona Nayudu, Associate at Harvard University Asia Centre; Dr. Constantino Xavier, Fellow, Foreign Policy at Brookings India.

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