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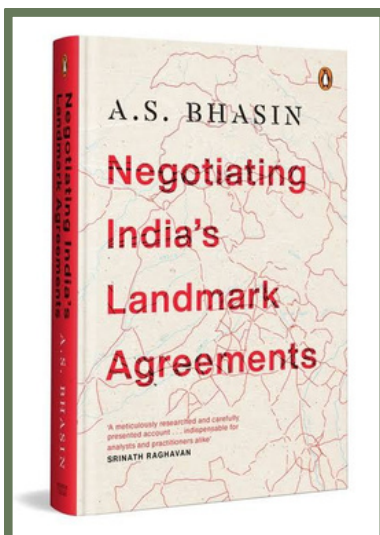
## NEGOTIATING INDIA'S LANDMARK AGREEMENTS DISCUSSION REPORT

by AVTAR SINGH BHASIN

*Hosted by:*

**CHANAKYA POLICY &  
RESEARCH FOUNDATION**

Date: 01 February 2025



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# FOREWARD

It gives me great pleasure in acknowledging the efforts of CPRF In promoting the understanding of international relations by organising seminars on current issues. Organising discussions on latest books on international affairs help to sustain interest of people on the subject.

I notice that your discussions attract mostly the youth. It is important that by organising discussions and seminars their interest is sustained.

I wish CPRF all the success in their endeavours,

**MR. A.S. BHASIN**

# INTRODUCTION

On February 1, 2025, the Chanakya Policy and Research Foundation (CPRF) hosted an engaging discussion on Mr. Avtar Singh Bhasin's book *Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements*. This session provided an in-depth exploration of India's diplomatic history and the intricate process of treaty-making that has shaped its foreign relations over the decades.

The event commenced with a warm welcome from Ms. Koushiki, the General Secretary of CPRF, who set the stage for a critical evaluation of India's diplomatic engagements. The discussion focused on five key agreements that played a pivotal role in defining India's foreign policy trajectory, ranging from the 1954 India-China Agreement to the 2008 India-United States Civil Nuclear Deal. Mr. Bhasin meticulously examined the nuances of these agreements, offering insights into the geopolitical considerations, strategic calculations, and long-term implications for India. Attendees were taken through a historical and analytical journey, highlighting the challenges and successes of India's diplomatic endeavours. This report encapsulates the essence of the discussion, providing valuable insights into the themes explored during the session.

# SPEAKER OVERVIEW

Mr. Avtar Singh Bhasin is a distinguished scholar and historian specialising in India's foreign relations. With a career spanning over three decades in the Ministry of External Affairs, he has been a key witness to and chronicler of India's diplomatic evolution. Throughout his tenure, he was posted in several strategic locations, including Kathmandu, Bonn, Vienna, and Lagos, where he played an instrumental role in various diplomatic negotiations and official delegations.

Following his diplomatic service, Mr Bhasin transitioned into academia, dedicating himself to meticulously documenting India's external engagements. As a Senior Fellow at the Indian Council of Historical Research and an Honorary Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, he has made invaluable contributions to studying India's foreign policy. His seminal works include extensive documentary studies on India's relations with neighbouring countries such as Nepal, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan.

In *Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements*, Mr. Bhasin offers a comprehensive analysis of five pivotal treaties that shaped India's foreign policy over the decades. Through his meticulous research and firsthand insights, he provides a deeper understanding of India's international negotiations' strategic, political, and historical underpinnings. His scholarship not only reflects past diplomatic engagements but also guides readers through future challenges in India's foreign relations.

# SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The session focused on the complexities of diplomacy and India's evolving foreign policy and examined five standalone agreements, each with significant implications over six decades. Mr A.S. Bhasin provided a nuanced analysis of these treaties' negotiation processes, strategic considerations, and long-term impact, offering valuable insights into India's approach to international engagements.

## **The India-China Agreement on Tibet, 1954**

India signed the first significant diplomatic agreement after independence with the People's Republic of China (PRC) concerning Tibet, an essential step towards building friendly relations. Mr Bhasin talked about the 120-day discussion that led to this treaty, emphasising how several laws were skewed favouring China while India simply accepted. A key drawback of the agreement was that it failed to specify the borders between the two nations despite unresolved disputes over Aksai Chin and NEFA. Nehru presumed the borders were settled based on historical customs, but China's rejection of the McMahon Line exposed a critical misalignment in their perspectives.

While Nehru relied on verbal assurances from Zhou Enlai, the agreement also lacked clauses to protect India's long-standing ties with Tibet. Despite Nehru's vision of Asian solidarity, this agreement had a limited positive impact, which cost India dearly in the coming years.

## **The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, 1971**

On the India-Soviet Union Treaty of 1971, Mr. Bhasin provided a lucid account of the geopolitical complexities that underpinned its signing. This treaty originated in 1969 when the Soviet Union offered military support to India in case of a potential war with Pakistan, which was quite a surprising move by a superpower. However, Mr Bhasin highlighted that then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was reluctant to sign this treaty, mainly for two reasons- India's non-aligned status and opposition from the right-wing political parties. By 1971, as tensions escalated over Bangladesh's independence, the Soviet Union used the treaty as leverage to secure Indian alignment before providing military assistance. Mr Bhasin explains that this is a classic case of how a superpower can exploit other smaller countries for its benefit. Although it wasn't a military alliance, it symbolised a deviation from India's Non-Alignment policy.



## **The Simla Agreement, 1972**

Mr Bhasin then moved on to explain the Simla Agreement, which was signed for several reasons- to make Pakistan recognise Bangladesh, to release more than 90,000 Pakistani political prisoners, and to settle the Kashmir issue. He emphasised that Mrs Gandhi's assurance not to treat Pakistan as a vanquished power was a necessary palliative for a demoralised Pakistan. This latitude allowed the final settlement of the Kashmir issue on the Line of Control (LoC) to be deferred on a mutually acceptable basis. Thus, the Simla Agreement is said to have provided Zulfikar Ali Bhutto with an honourable exit. Although the outcome had broadly met India's expectations, its weakness was reflected in being seen as the more anxious party for a peace settlement than Pakistan.

## **India-Sri Lanka Accord, 1987**

The discussion then moved to the India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987, signed amidst growing tensions between the two ethnic communities- Sinhalese and Tamil. Mr Bhasin pointed out that democracy, based on majoritarian rule, played a significant role in marginalising Tamils in Sri Lanka. India's involvement was driven by its concern for the Tamil population, which resonated with Indian Tamils.

However, he argues that reconciling these differences between two citizens of the same country was a futile attempt. Indian leadership failed to gauge the popular sentiment against it in the island nation. Eventually, it turned out to be an India Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam war. In the end, India paid a huge price in the ignominious retreat of the Indian peacekeeping force, the IPKF, and the loss of lives, including that of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

## **India-United States Civil Nuclear Energy Agreement, 2008**

Finally, Mr Bhasin discussed the India-United States Civil Nuclear Agreement and shared several thrilling events. He asserts that the timing for concluding the India-US Nuclear Deal at the beginning of the millennium couldn't have been more perfect. He credits Condoleezza Rice, who became US National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, for understanding the convergence of interests between the two nations and guiding US policy accordingly. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made it very clear that American high technology was essential for the rapid economic growth and transformation of India. The final waiver from Nuclear Suppliers' Group in September 2008 led to the Congress's adoption of the 123 Agreement to seek an amendment to the US Atomic Energy Act 1954.

This covered all of India's nuclear facilities from supply disruptions, upheld its right to use spent fuel, and also carried out nuclear tests. Despite being a non-signatory to the Treaty on the NonProliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the deal put an end to the nuclear technology apartheid against India. It paved the way for our nation to pursue its energy security. Mr Bhasin commended Indian negotiators for having proved more than a match for their US interlocutors and not blinking under pressure. If not for this agreement, present cordial relations would not have been possible.

# Q&A SESSION

**Q: Could the Shimla Agreement have ensured long-term peace between India and Pakistan?**

A: The Shimla Agreement was intended to establish lasting peace by resolving outstanding disputes through bilateral negotiations. However, its effectiveness was limited as it did not prevent future conflicts. While it reaffirmed the Line of Control (LoC) and aimed to improve relations, the absence of strong enforcement mechanisms and mutual trust led to continued tensions between the two nations.

**Q: Does the Indus Water Treaty require ratification, given Pakistan's demands for modifications?**

A: The Indus Water Treaty, signed in 1960, remains a legally binding agreement mediated by the World Bank. While Pakistan has pushed for revisions, India has maintained that the treaty provides a fair and stable framework for water sharing. Any modification would require mutual agreement, but India sees no compelling reason to alter the treaty, given its strategic and legal significance.

**Q: How did the 2008 Indo-US Nuclear Deal impact India's position in global nuclear diplomacy?**

A: The deal marked a turning point in India's nuclear policy, effectively ending its nuclear isolation despite not being a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It allowed India to access advanced nuclear technology, strengthened its energy security, and positioned it as a key player in global nuclear governance. The waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) was a significant diplomatic achievement, reinforcing India's credibility in international negotiations.

**Q: Did the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Cooperation contradict India's Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) stance?**

A: While the treaty provided India with crucial military and diplomatic support during the Bangladesh Liberation War, it was perceived by some as a deviation from India's non-aligned principles. The agreement secured Soviet backing in the event of external aggression, but it also led to concerns that India was aligning more closely with the USSR, impacting its relations with other non-aligned nations.

**Q: How did other non-aligned countries perceive the IndoSoviet Treaty, and what was its impact on India's security?**

A: Some non-aligned countries viewed the treaty as a pragmatic move, given the geopolitical realities of the time. However, others criticised it as a shift towards Soviet influence. From a security perspective, the treaty enhanced India's strategic position, ensuring Soviet support in a potential conflict with Pakistan or China, which proved crucial during the 1971 war.

**Q: Has India's diplomatic approach been too idealistic, and should it adopt a more strategic stance?**

A: India's diplomacy has historically emphasised moral and ethical principles, but this has sometimes put it at a disadvantage in negotiations. There is growing recognition that India must balance idealism with pragmatism, adopting a more strategic and calculated approach to protect its national interests. A more Machiavellian approach in treaty-making could strengthen India's bargaining position in future negotiations.

**Q: What are the challenges surrounding prisoner exchanges between India and Pakistan?**

A: Prisoner exchanges remain a complex and sensitive issue, often influenced by broader political tensions. While humanitarian considerations play a role, diplomatic negotiations are frequently hindered by mutual distrust and legal hurdles. The process requires sustained dialogue and confidence-building measures to ensure fair and timely repatriation of prisoners.

**Q: Has India's diplomatic approach been too idealistic, and should it adopt a more strategic stance?**

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**Q: How do recent developments in China-Kazakhstan relations reflect shifting regional dynamics?**

A: China-Kazakhstan relations have seen increased cooperation, particularly in trade and infrastructure development. The recent diplomatic breakthrough in the Kazan region highlights China's expanding influence in Central Asia, aligning with its broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strategy.



# CONCLUSION

The session on Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements by Mr Avtar Singh Bhasin at the Chanakya Policy and Research Foundation thoroughly analysed India's diplomatic history and the complexities inherent in treaty-making. The pivotal agreements include the 1954 India-China Agreement on Tibet, the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty, the 1972 Simla Agreement, and the 2008 Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal.

Mr. Bhasin elucidated the strategic considerations, geopolitical pressures, and long-term implications that shaped these negotiations. His insights underscored the intricate challenges India has encountered in diplomacy, highlighting both setbacks, as seen in the India-China Agreement, and significant achievements, such as the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal. He traced India's diplomatic evolution and illustrated the shift from post-independence idealism to a more pragmatic and strategically driven foreign policy approach.

The session profoundly relected on the enduring relevance of historical awareness in shaping future diplomatic strategies. By engaging with past negotiations, policymakers, scholars, and students of international relations can derive valuable lessons, ensuring that historical precedents inform contemporary decision-making.

As India navigates an evolving global landscape, these landmark agreements continue to serve as critical reference points, shaping its strategic outlook and diplomatic engagements.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Chanakya Policy & Research Foundation (CPRF) extends its sincere gratitude to Mr. Avtar Singh Bhasin for his insightful presentation and in-depth analysis of India's diplomatic history. His extensive knowledge of India's foreign policy negotiations offered a valuable perspective on the intricacies of treaty-making and international relations.

We are grateful to Ms. Madhulika Manohar, Director and CEO of CPRF, for her continued guidance and intellectual contributions, which have been instrumental in shaping CPRF's research initiatives. Our appreciation also goes to Ms. Tamanna Sharma, President of CPRF, for her thoughtful concluding remarks, which provided a relective and insightful closure to the discussion. A special acknowledgement is due to Mr. Jatin Sehrawat, Director and Co-founder, and Ms. Koushiki, General Secretary of CPRF, whose meticulous coordination and organisational eorts ensured the seamless execution of this event.

We also extend our gratitude to the advisor of CPRF, Dr. Rajiv Ranjan for facilitating our engagement with Mr. Bhasin and for his valuable support. We also express our heartfelt appreciation to our mentor, Mr. Rajeev Kr. Yadav, for his unwavering guidance and encouragement in CPRF's initiatives. CPRF acknowledges the dedication and efforts of Team CPRF, whose hard work behind the scenes played a crucial role in the smooth execution of this event. Their commitment and enthusiasm continue to drive CPRF's vision of fostering meaningful academic and policy discussions.

Finally, we thank all attendees for their active participation and meaningful engagement, which enriched the discussion. This session reaffirms CPRF's commitment to fostering informed and scholarly dialogue on India's evolving role in global diplomacy.

# VISUALS/PHOTOGRAPHS









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