**Politicians revenge**

BY A . G. N O O R A N I 2021-02-13

NOT long after the US appointed a national security adviser in 1947 that a rash spread over a large part of the democratic world. Countries began appointing NSAs minus the paraphernalia in the US model.

Diplomacy is an art. It is the temperament that matters. Harold Nicolson writes in his classic Diplomacy, `Diplomacy is not a system of moral philosophy; it is, as Sir Ernest Satow defined it, `the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states`. The worst kind of diplomatists are missionaries, fanatics and lawyers; the best kind are the reasonable and humane sceptics.

One of the finest diplomats Asia has produced was a businessman, Jamsheed Marker. He was inducted into diplomacy by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto but unlike some in our region, he did not sell himself and his judgement to Bhutto. His loyalty was entirely, exclusively to his country, Pakistan.

T.N. Kaul, on the other hand, was personally attached to an appalling degree to Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

While still in the foreign service, he wrote to Indira Gandhi urging her to split the Congress. This was much before she did so in the secondhalfofl959.

The diplomats` profession acquired malodour as practitioners of Machiavelli`s lessons. He wrote: `How laudable it is for a prince to keep good faith and live with integrity, and not with astuteness, everyone knows. Still the experience of our times shows those princes to have done great things who have had little regard for good faith, and have been able by astuteness to confuse men`s brains and have ultimately overcome those who have made loyalty their foundation. ... Therefore a prudent ruler ought not to keep faith when by so doing it would be against his interest and when the reasons which made him bind himself no longer exist. If men were all good, this precept would not be a good one; but as they are bad, and would not observe f aith with you, so you are not bound to keep f aith with them.

This and the charmed, glittering life they led did not please their political masters. President Harry Truman regarded the State Department as `a hostile foreign power`. Golda Meir of Israel wanted the nuances and complexities of international life to be reduced to simplistic terms shorn of nuances.

The NSA is the politicians` revenge against the diplomatic services. Margaret Thatcher won the Falklands War but her grievance was that the foreign office had ignored warnings and was far too concilia-tory towards Argentina. The foreign secretary resigned and, for the first time, the prime minister acquired her `own man` as adviser in the prime minister`s office to vet advice emanating from the foreign of fice.

Partly, it was this attitude which gave birth to the NSA. But he was not alone. He was part of a new scheme, the National Security Council, and the major motivation was disciplined, organised process in the making of foreign policy in which all f actors are considered together and at one place.

In the US, Congress enacted in July 1947 the National Security Act. It defined the council`s responsibilities: `(1) to assess and appraise the objectives, commitments and risks of the United States in relation to our actual and potential military power, in the interest of national security, for the purpose of making recommendations to the president in connection therewith; and (2) to consider policies on matters of common interest to the departments and agencies of the government concerned with thenational security, and to make recommendations to the president in connection therewith.

But president Truman distrusted the new creature. It would `constrain` him. In the 74 years since, presidents have used the NSA just as they wished.Kissinger as NSA was more powerful than the secretary of state. The State Department languishes.

Moral? It is the leaders in power who must decide and take responsibility based on advice which they accept from advisers they select; acts of judgement, both. To quote the wise and maligned Machiavelli: `A prince ... ought always to take counsel, but only when he wishes, not when others wish; on the contrary he ought to discourage absolutely attempts to advise him unless he asksit,buthe oughtto be a great asker, and a patient hearer of the truth about those things of which he has inquired; indeed, if he finds that any one has scruples in telling him the truth he should be angry.

And since some think that a prince who gains the reputation of being prudent is so considered, not by his nature but by the good counsellors he has about him, they are undoubtedly deceived. It is an infallible rule that a prince who is not wise himself cannot be well advised....` The writer is an author and a lawyer based in Mumbai.