

India: Successful professionals or rank mercenaries?

Saturday 8 November 2014, by [BIDWAI Praful](#) (Date first published: 30 October 2014).

I'm glad to be an Indian, but I'm not a chest-thumping nationalist. I can understand and appreciate why many Indians (or for that matter, other nationals) emigrate and become naturalised citizens of other, typically developed, states. What I find it hard to understand is why some of them choose to represent their adopted homelands' governments as officials, even ambassadors, to the countries of their origin. An example is Zalmay Khalilzad, a Pushtun born in Afghanistan, who migrated and became a US citizen. He was appointed in 2001 as the US president's special envoy to Afghanistan, and then served as the US ambassador to Afghanistan (November 2003-June 2005), during which period he oversaw the drafting of a new constitution, and closely advised President Hamid Karzai.

We had the first instance of a similar arrangement when Indian-American Nisha Desai Biswal became the head of the US's South Asia Bureau last year. And we will soon have a second-generation Indian-American, Richard Rahul Verma, taking over as the full-fledged US ambassador to India. How such individuals reconcile their hyphenated loyalties (if such exist), or the conflict between their origins and public roles, isn't an easy question to answer. It's best answered by them.

But even stranger is the case of Arvind Subramanian, just appointed chief economic adviser to the Indian government. Unlike Verma or Biswal, he's an Indian national and was until recently a fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington. He testified this past March to a US government committee on intellectual property rights (IPR) recommending that the US should press India to amend provisions of its patents law which allow for compulsory licensing for unworked (unimplemented) patents, and which [Section 3(d)] prevent frivolous extensions of patents on existing molecules by claiming minor changes, without improved efficacy, as "innovations".

These provisions are fully compatible with the World Trade Organisation's IPR regime, and promote public health by permitting Indian companies to manufacture drugs at low cost and sell them at home and to the developing countries—which is why India is called the Pharmacy of the Third World. Subramanian wrote: "If India does not address the problems created by Section 3(d) of the patent legislation or by compulsory licensing for nonworking, the United States should consider initiating WTO disputes against India." This is precisely what US pharmaceuticals firms have long demanded of India, and which the Indian courts have rightly rejected. Last year too, Subramanian testified to the US Congress on how best US business interests could be advanced by diluting India's policies of "localisation—in banking, telecommunications, retail, and solar panels..."

In some ways, the kind of sacrifice the Indian people are being asked to make to further global capital's interests and "free trade" is reminiscent of the deployment of lakhs of Indian soldiers to secure the expansion of the British empire into West and Central Asia (including Afghanistan), East Africa, Burma and Southeast Asia. The empire could not have been extended or consolidated without the sacrifice of Indian soldiers, who became cannon fodder out of dire poverty. Similarly, 62,000 Indian troops, of the more than one million serving overseas, lost their lives during World War-I in Europe. A 100 years after 1914, the British government is organising a ceremony to acknowledge India's contribution to the war effort.

Frankly, it need not bother. The Indian Army officially asserts its own continuity with the colonial past and claims ample credit for its participation in the all the major campaigns launched “Under the Crown” and the two World Wars

(<http://indianarmy.nic.in/Site/FormTemplete/frmTempSimple.aspx?MnId=OLsbCMC4ZbxcyOeUalGxEw==&ParentID=YDHMONOXzu45fGbBhCvIWA==>).

Praful Bidwai

P.S.

*<http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/column-successful-professionals-or-rank-mercenaries-2030327>