

**CPD PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

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# Engaging India:

## Public Diplomacy and Indo-American Relations to 1957

By Sarah Ellen Graham

La Diplomatie Publique

الدبلوماسية العامة

Общественная дипломатия

Public Diplomacy

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Indo-American Relations to 1957**

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**ENGAGING INDIA: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND INDO-AMERICAN  
RELATIONS TO 1957**

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## **Abstract**

This paper assesses U.S. public diplomacy in India during the pre- and post- independence periods. Prior to the Second World War, the bilateral PD relationship was shaped by the Indian nationalist movement's attempt to influence U.S. public opinion. During the war, the U.S. government implemented PD strategies to contain nationalist aspirations, which damaged its standing among India's leaders and the public at large. After 1947, the United States was slow to implement PD policies in India, and it struggled to counter Indian criticisms of Washington's Cold War foreign policies and of racial segregation in the American South. The paper concludes with findings on the course of U.S. PD between 1947 and 1957, and looks forward to future research on PD and Indo-American relations.



The diplomatic relationship between the United States and India is known for the longstanding dynamics of misapprehension and distrust between the two governments. The lowest points in the relationship came during the first three decades of the Cold War. Washington's apparent inattention to its relationship with India and its courting of Pakistan in the 1950s, its spiral into the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and its rapprochement with China in 1972 were all episodes that engendered mistrust and resentment among India's leaders. For their part, U.S. officials in this period frequently found fault with the Indian leadership's commitment to Cold War neutrality and their tendency to articulate criticisms of U.S. foreign policy in public settings, often in very strident and biting terms. That these two states shared so many common political values—democracy, secularism, pluralism, freedom of the press, and open institutions—and still harbored such a difficult bilateral relationship poses an analytical question that can be approached in a number of ways. Existing accounts have highlighted the paucity of imagination and initiative in U.S. economic and strategic diplomacy, and some have assessed the degree to which cultural chauvinism structured U.S. foreign policy discourse in economic and strategic policy-making. But, with the exception of two articles examining the course and impacts of U.S. public diplomacy (PD) in India during World War Two,<sup>1</sup> the ways in which PD strategies used by both sides shaped the bilateral relationship—and whether PD initiatives influenced these dynamics of mistrust and ideological disagreement—has not yet been examined in detail.

This essay examines the role of PD in U.S. foreign policy toward India up to 1957, and in considering the 1947–57 period, it constitutes a first step toward analyzing the archival record of U.S. policies during the Cold War. In particular, this paper asks what kinds of PD strategies the United States adopted in engaging India, how consistently these strategies were pursued, and how they impacted the bilateral relationship. For context, this paper will begin by examining the contours of the PD relationship between India and the United States before World War II. This phase, perhaps surprisingly, is characterized by a carefully orchestrated *Indian* effort to influence

U.S. public opinion, but no official government effort by the United States to cultivate Indian support. The case reflects the adeptness of the nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi as a public diplomat, as well as the synergies between the Gandhian concept of political action through *satyagraha*, or “truth telling,” and public diplomacy as a method of international engagement. The paper’s focus will then shift to the U.S. government’s PD strategies in India, which began with stationing of American forces in India during the Second World War. The paper will then turn to U.S. PD strategies toward India during the post-independence decade, 1947–1957, basing this account on primary sources held at the U.S. National Archives and other locations. Given that this period was characterized by a deepening mistrust at the bilateral level, the paper asks: what was the scale and what were the aims of U.S. PD in India during this decade? How did U.S. public diplomats, who were professionally attuned to matters of national mood, characterize the sources and nature of Indo-American tensions in the period? It concludes with a look forward to the key questions that future work should ask in relation to U.S. PD in India during the 1960s.

To tell the fullest story possible, care was taken to also note the role of U.S. philanthropies in India and the ties between U.S. and Indian universities that were established in the pre- and post-independence periods. Both sets of institutions, U.S. philanthropies such as the Ford Foundation in particular, had an important role to play in shaping the climate of Indian opinion about the United States. A substantial review of Indian media, scholarly, and political responses to U.S. PD is beyond the scope of the argument presented here, however. To partially address the issue of how to judge the ultimate impacts of U.S. PD on the Indo-American relationship, the discussion below notes how U.S. government agencies assessed the effects of their own PD policies. Particularly after the establishment of the United States Information Agency (USIA), which undertook extensive assessment of program impacts, the U.S. government gathered comprehensive data on program impacts.

The 1947–57 period presents an interesting case for PD studies because it was a time of growing tensions between the two nations: India's leaders hewed to a policy of neutrality in relation to the Cold War, and were often forthcoming in their critiques of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Set in the context of these difficult high-level relations between the two states, it is thus clear that at best U.S. PD was only capable of partially mitigating these high-level disagreements. Saddled with presenting unpopular U.S. policies, Indian critiques of racial discrimination in the U.S., and a slow start to its Indian operations after independence, U.S. PD struggled to make an impact. Washington also faced strong competition in India from Soviet and British public diplomacy programs. In previous work on the effects of U.S. PD in India during the Second World War, this author argued that U.S. efforts to cultivate Indian public opinion had the *opposite effect* to that which was intended.<sup>2</sup> The mismatch between the pro-independence ideals expressed in U.S. PD and the U.S. government's inconsistent support for Indian nationalism did great damage to the United States' reputation in India during and immediately after the war. While the United States government continued to face the charge of hypocrisy in the Indian media and by India's leaders during the 1950s, it is not clear if in 1947–1957 U.S. PD exacerbated these problems by setting up unrealistic or misguided expectations among India's public.

*Missionaries, Mayo the Mahatma: Cultural Relations and Nationalist Public Diplomacy Before World War II*

Political and cultural contact between the United States and India took place outside the sphere of government before the Second World War. The only formal American presence in India was its several consulates in the country's major cities: full diplomatic ties were impossible under the protocols of British imperial rule, and these posts existed to assist Americans living in or visiting India. They also hosted representatives that Washington had, from time to time, sent to India to investigate the promotion of commercial relations between the two countries. As a consequence, before the 1920s most of the Indian public's contact with the United States was through their exposure to American Christian missionaries.

The first of these evangelical groups had travelled to India early in the nineteenth century, but in relatively small numbers and, as far as the rates of Indians converting to Christianity were concerned, with limited success.<sup>3</sup> Their educational and social works, such as the Reformed Church's Vellore Christian Medical College and Hospital in the state of Tamil Nadu, established in 1900, had a more lasting and positive impact on Indian society. Despite the relative modesty of these activities, their positive contribution to Indian development was well regarded by Indians for decades afterward.<sup>4</sup> The presence of Western missionaries in India during the late nineteenth century also had the unintended consequence of helping to spark India's Hindu revival movement, and by the turn of the twentieth century one of its most prominent groups, the Ramakrishna Order, had established several Hindu missionary centers in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Academic ties between the two nations were also established in the second decade of the twentieth century. The first American librarian to visit India with the purpose of advising Indian institutions was W. A. Borden, who travelled to Baroda State in 1910 and set up the basis for a statewide public library system at the behest of the state's Maharaja.<sup>6</sup> A second, A.D. Dickinson, visited British India as a consultant to the Punjab University at Lahore in 1915-16, during which time he reorganized the library collection and supervised librarian training.<sup>7</sup> These early contacts with India took place against the background of the U.S. library movement's enthusiastic participation in international congresses and a range of other overseas philanthropic projects in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

The Rockefeller Foundation began international grant-giving work in India around the same time, and while the scale of its program did not approach that in other countries, its work was well known for its contributions to medicine in India. In 1916 the Foundation dispensed its first grants for research through the School of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta. The Foundation subsequently embarked on the training of Indian medical personnel, sponsored malaria research under the American specialist Paul Russell in the 1930s, and provided funding for the establishment of an All India School of

Hygiene and Public Health in 1932. Rockefeller Foundation funding was also granted to various Indian educational institutions outside medicine, including schools and colleges focusing on the education of women and girls.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the absence of full diplomatic ties between the two nations, public diplomacy became an integral part of the Indo-American relationship between the end of the First World War and 1941. The Indian nationalist movement, led by the Indian National Congress (INC) and its leader Mahatma Gandhi, regarded international publicity as central to their cause—moral suasion was, after all, at the core of Gandhi’s doctrine of *satyagraha*, or “truth force;” a term that has often been translated to mean non-violent conflict or passive resistance to violence. *Satyagraha* acknowledged the vital role of individuals and public opinion in the context of prevailing political forces—“every citizen silently but none the less certainly sustains the government of the day.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, for Gandhi the kinds of methods employed in public diplomacy were at the center of the struggle for Indian self-determination, as they should be for any political struggle legitimately engaged in the pursuit of justice. The promotion of dialogue through communication about politics and power was also highlighted through *satyagraha*’s call for rhetorical, symbolic, and activist “disturbances” of the status quo as acts of truth-telling. Here, the Gandhian notion of truth as a position that must be arrived at collectively invested the Mahatma’s efforts to forge dialogues with the American and British publics with a particularly clear political and moral significance.

Gandhi proved especially successful in cultivating personal ties with influential American writers, theologians, and journalists, who then wrote or spoke extensively on the injustices of British rule and the aims of Indian nationalism for U.S. audiences. Public opinion within the United Kingdom was the focal point of the INC’s campaign for international public support. Nevertheless, the Mahatma’s effort to engage U.S. opinion leaders was rooted in his belief that Americans would instinctively support his cause and, given their country’s great power and political stature after Versailles, that

their ability to pressure their own government could in turn lead it to exert significant moral pressure against the *raj*. The Indian nationalist movement had early successes in garnering publicity in the United States by cultivating ties with the American Anti-Imperialist League. Two of the League's most influential members—William Jennings Bryan, who visited India, and Andrew Carnegie—published writings in 1906 advocating an end to British rule. In 1907 a number of League members established an organization solely dedicated to the Indian cause.

This Society for the Advancement of India was relatively short-lived. But its founder, Unitarian minister Jabez T. Sunderland, remained an active and prominent spokesman for the cause throughout the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>11</sup> Sunderland was one of a number of Americans with whom Gandhi maintained a personal correspondence in this period; a group that also included journalist Louis Fisher, philosopher Richard Gregg who later wrote bestselling books on *satyagraha*, and NAACP founder John Haynes Holmes. Sunderland's 1929 book on India's struggle, *India in Bondage*, was a powerful and widely read indictment of the colonial system that was quickly banned in Britain. Working against these early showings of pro-nationalist sentiment in the United States were former and current British colonial officials in India, who managed to ensure that U.S. media coverage of the repressive Government of India Act in 1919 was largely favorable. Their most notable success was ensuring that U.S. editorials on the subsequent massacre of unarmed protesters in the Indian city of Amristar followed the colonial government's line that the shootings were a necessary response to a "riot." Beyond those with specialist knowledge of India, most Americans did not associate Amristar with British colonial repression. But despite these efforts, Gandhi's non-violent movement nonetheless received favorable coverage, and from 1920 U.S. media coverage swung toward favoring the nationalist cause.

India's nationalist leaders had long appreciated the potential value of the small South Asian diaspora within the United States as spokespeople for the cause of Indian independence. Much of

this activism had centered on Indian scholars and students at U.S. universities, particularly after the Indian National Congress leader Lajpat Rai was sent to the United States in 1914 with the express purpose of coordinating Indian nationalists living in the country. During his five years in the United States, Rai founded the Home Rule League of America and the Friends of Freedom for India, both of which benefitted significantly from the involvement of American intellectuals and journalists in the cause. For example, Sidney Webb, a supporter of the Indian cause, introduced Rai to Walter Lippmann. The veteran American journalist subsequently advised Rai on cultivating an advantageous media image, provided Rai with letters of introduction to a number of other influential American writers, and wrote in support of the cause himself.

Rai, along with Columbia University student Haridas T. Muzumdar, also established a journal for American readers devoted to the cause of Indian independence called *Young India* and a society of supporters called the Young India Association. To represent the Muslim viewpoint on India's communal issues, the INC sent former *Bombay Chronicle* subeditor Syud Hossain to visit the United States, where he stayed until 1946.<sup>12</sup> This phase of pro-Indian activism in the United States peaked in 1920–22, paralleling the burst of enthusiasm among the American people in global pacifism and reform. Academic interest in India was also on the rise and U.S. scholars developed three separate proposals for the establishment of a U.S. research center on the subcontinent between 1922 and 1934. A fourth proposal, which was made under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies and involved the establishment of research headquarters in the Indian city of Banaras, gained support within the Council only to be placed on indefinite hold by the outbreak of the Second World War.

Gandhi made a particular effort to reach out to America in 1929 with the objective of attracting media interest in his Salt March campaign, which was intended to showcase the principles of *satyagraha* at work. The March was covered for the international press by a cadre of specially invited British, American, and European

journalists; readers back home took an increasingly voracious interest in the brave, charismatic, and “near-naked” Indian leader and the epic struggle he was leading. In the United States, Negley Farson’s famous dispatches from the front lines of the March described Gandhi’s followers’ fortitude and self-sacrifice in the face of British repression, as well as Farson’s own daring efforts to circumvent British censors in transmitting his dispatches.<sup>13</sup> The same year, the famed Indian poet and nationalist Rabindranath Tagore travelled to the United States for a lecture tour, but pulled out of his speaking engagements over insulting treatment he had received at the hands of a U.S. immigration official. The ensuing publicity “brought American [racial] prejudice to Indian attention,” but also gave further publicity to the Indian nationalist cause within the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas awareness of India’s freedom struggle had been limited to peace activists, theologians, liberal intellectuals, and the burgeoning African American civil rights movement during the early 1920s, by 1930 Gandhi and his cause was a mass media phenomenon in the United States. The “personality cult” of Gandhi was reflected in *Time Magazine’s* choice to make the Mahatma man of the year for 1930. The *New Republic* expressed consistently strong editorial support for self-rule. Between 1930 and 1931 the *New York Times* published more than 500 articles mentioning the Indian campaign, which grew to more than 700 the following year.<sup>15</sup> Gandhi was covered even more extensively in specialized newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor* and the pro-civil rights publications *Chicago Defender*, *Crisis*, and *Negro World*. As a counterpoint, in 1927 a bestselling travelogue by the writer Katherine Mayo called *Mother India* presented a scandalized account of the dirt, disease, sexual depravity, and superstitious backwardness of Indian society. Her book became one of the best-known American accounts of India of the inter-war period. Mayo’s travel had been supported by the British government, and constituted part of a growing pro-imperial publicity effort to counter Gandhi’s campaign in the United States. Its lurid subject-matter of child marriage, animal sacrifice, teeming masses, cobras, illness, and death reinforced a number of the most

pervasive negative stereotypes of Indian religion and society that had prevailed in the United States since the works of Kipling first appeared.

But while *Mother India* was sensationalist and widely-known, it was part of a much larger publishing phenomenon that encompassed a range of ideological positions on India during the 1930s: more than twenty popular books and many more articles with positive messages about on Indian civilization and/or the freedom struggle were published during 1930 alone.<sup>16</sup> While Mayo's account reinforced longstanding American perceptions that India was a backward, poverty-stricken, and superstitious society, these views coexisted with, and in some respects even strengthened, Americans' instinctive sympathy and admiration for the leadership of the nationalist struggle. As Sean Scalmer notes, "Mayo's work was merely one voice in a rising, cacophonous exchange" in which "'Gandhi' became an icon: studied, pictured, debated, derided, genuflected to, worried over, celebrated, mourned. Even when the nationalist struggle suffered from temporary subsidence, the Mahatma remained ubiquitous."<sup>17</sup> Gandhi was an especially adept manipulator of the relatively new medium of photojournalism, no doubt partly because editors understood the noteworthiness of Gandhi's brief style of dress: "During a period when leading broadsheets only rarely included photographs, Gandhi was frozen in a remarkable array of acts: cradling an infant, frowning, spinning, walking, reading, dictating, mourning, visiting, recovering from sickness, posing with celebrities, meeting with mill workers, speaking to crowds, raising funds, distributing alms, and disembarking on European soil. It is little wonder that the analogy of the 'movie star' beckoned for so many observers."<sup>18</sup>

By the late 1930s, the success of the Indian nationalist movement's public diplomacy in America had left British civil servants and pro-imperialists deeply concerned about the future stability of the *raj*. Amid the media frenzy over the self-rule campaigns of 1931, the British Foreign Office Permanent Undersecretary Sir Robert Vansittart complained of the "idealism" and the "facile but impractical recipes for expediting the arrival of the millennium" upon

which the pro-India sympathies of the American people appeared to rest.<sup>19</sup> Although India's struggle left the American headlines for a time during the mid 1930s, as domestic concerns about the effects of the Depression took over the headlines, by the end of the decade the Indian nationalists, and their newly appointed political leader Jawaharlal Nehru, had once again reached out to cultivate favorable U.S. opinion.

In 1939 Nehru spoke out to the international media over the humiliating manner in which the British Viceroy had declared India at war with the Axis without consulting, or even forewarning, the Indian people. This provocation brought an abrupt end to two years of cooperation between the British imperial government and the Indian National Congress, which had come about after Britain granted administrative reforms allowing greater Indian self-rule in 1935. In response to the declaration of war, the INC issued numerous public statements questioning British war aims and the justice of its fight to preserve its imperial rule in Asia. In an appeal that resonated both with isolationists and liberal critics of empire in the United States, Nehru asked: "What of America, that great land of democracy, to which imperialist England looks for support and sustenance during this war? Does Britain think that the people of the United States will pour their gold and commodities to make the world safe for British imperialism?"<sup>20</sup>

In response to this attempt to appeal to American opinion, one of only two covertly run publicity projects at the British Library of Information in New York, which had been conducting publicity work on behalf of British interests in America since the First World War, was a counter-propaganda effort against Indian nationalism.<sup>21</sup> After the outbreak of war the British government also brought Indian spokespeople, including the editor of the United Press of India T. A. Raman, to the United States to present the case for the continuation of the imperial rule. Both British authorities and the Indian National Congress thus clearly understood that that American opinion was central to the survival of the imperial enterprise in India. A matter of months before the Pearl Harbor attack, the nationalists appeared to

have the upper hand. The British Minister of Information Duff Cooper remarked in the fall of 1941 that the nationalist movement had been remarkably effective in its cultivation of American sympathies.<sup>22</sup>

*The Constraints on Freedom: Washington's Message to India in Wartime*

The Second World War brought the United States government directly into the fray with Britain over Indian independence and the Allied struggle for hearts and minds in Asia. As the United States Office of War Information set about publicizing U.S. war aims after 1941, Washington's official position on Indian self-determination would prove to be both less supportive than Nehru had called for and more anti-colonialist than the British had wished. A hundred thousand United States troops were ultimately stationed in or passed through India over the course of the war, and Allied air bases in the north and east were the source of vital supply lines for Allied fighting forces in China. At the height of Japan's military advance in Asia its troops were occupying Burma, at India's Eastern frontier. In this context, India's survival as an Allied nation seemed pivotal to the success of the military campaign in the Pacific theater. Military pressures thus compounded for Washington the already difficult task of defining its political stance on Indian independence, and in designing PD strategies that could effectively communicate this stance to Indian audiences.

Diplomatic ties between the United States and India were opened in early 1941 as a consequence of Franklin Roosevelt's lend-lease policy, which supplied economic assistance to the Allies before the United States entered the war. Noting the public's sympathy for Gandhi and the administration's ideological position on colonialism in general, the upgrading of U.S. diplomatic representation prompted Roosevelt's foreign policy advisor Adolf Berle to remark that the United States should now "express concern" over British policy in India, since India's "status is of interest to all the surrounding nations" and thus to the war itself.<sup>23</sup> The administration's view that the United States had a stake in India's political situation deepened after Pearl

Harbor, and the President and his representatives subsequently made several approaches to the British government through U.S. officials in London and via Roosevelt's personal correspondence with Churchill in support of the cause of independence. None of these intercessions were expressed in particularly strong terms, however. After Winston Churchill presented the Indian National Congress and Muslim League with a flawed independence deal in April, 1942—a deal which came close to agreement but ultimately collapsed—the U.S. administration's tentative efforts behind the scenes to advance the cause of Indian self-determination ceased. Between then and the ultimately successful independence negotiations after the war, American officials were spectators rather than interlocutors or facilitators in the attainment of India's freedom.

The Roosevelt administration's ambivalent policy toward Indian self-determination posed a significant problem for U.S. PD in India during wartime. Throughout the conflict, the Office of War Information served as the lead agency in setting and delivering America's message to the Indian people. Its challenge was to craft a message that could reconcile Allied war aims—which, according to Churchill, mandated that no independence offer could be made while the fighting still raged—with America's own traditions of anti-colonialism. The OWI's publicity work in India centered on print media, films dealing with themes relating to American life and the U.S. economy as well as the war, and newsreels. Policy guidelines for these forms of informational diplomacy to areas within the British Empire had instructed that materials must identify America as the "champion of democracy" and thus associate America's war aims with the cause of democracy worldwide.<sup>24</sup> Behind the scenes, this strategy had been crafted to express America's tacit consent for anti-colonial movements by linking their goals to a U.S.-led Allied victory, while at the same time retaining a veneer of non-interference in British imperial affairs.

American PD activities in India during the war also extended to the establishment of United States Information Service (USIS) libraries in Mumbai and Kolkata as well as U.S. Embassy sponsored

public events. Voice of America also prepared weekly radio segments that were transmitted via the BBC's All India Radio service. But in all its areas of PD operation the OWI's message suffered from the political constraints of U.S. foreign policy in general. The OWI advocated independence for colonized peoples in general terms and celebrated U.S. policies like the granting of independence to the Philippines. But at the same time, the OWI was not in a position to publicize any concrete, pro-independence policies on the part of the U.S. government after the failed talks of 1942 because none existed. Thus, the OWI's efforts to showcase the democratic traditions, economic prosperity, and cultural vibrancy of the United States rang hollow as Indians contrasted America's up-beat portrayal of its own democratic heritage with the unhappy circumstances in India. Whereas American newsreels and documentaries had reportedly reached "millions" of Indians and the United States Information Service libraries were very popular with the public, the U.S. diplomatic mission in New Delhi (Delhi) reported that U.S. war information had been undermined by the "lack of clear policies and objectives, against the complex political background."<sup>25</sup>

U.S. cultural and informational diplomacy also faced a challenge in addressing the Indian public's curiosity about racial segregation within the United States. In 1943 the OWI had prepared materials for Indian audiences that presented images of racial harmony in domestic U.S. contexts and showcased the participation of African American soldiers in the U.S. military. But these were never shown or distributed. OWI materials of this kind had already provoked a backlash from Southern Congressmen, who objected to the promotion of a desegregationist message through U.S. wartime information. Racial harmony was also the message of an OWI-sponsored event in Mumbai in 1943, which brought the U.S. Forces Negro Swing Band to perform at a consulate-sponsored event. The initiative backfired, however, when the *Bombay Chronicle* reported that almost no Indians had been invited. The ensuing publicity drew further attention to racial tensions within the United States. Like its efforts to articulate a compromise position on democracy and freedom for colonized peoples, the OWI's handling of racial issues

actually worsened the image of the United States in India rather than improving it.

*Post-War Drift: Public Diplomacy Between War and Independence.*

Post-war cuts to the U.S. international informational and cultural diplomacy budgets, motivated by Congressional hostility to the OWI's perceived political bias, led to a drastic downscaling of operations in India. Only the most basic components of the U.S. PD program, such as the American libraries and news file projects, which were cheap to run, were maintained. In 1945, a weekly broadcast of the VOA program "America Today" via All India Radio was set up to replace the various wartime radio segments produced by VOA. "America Today" exclusively addressed the concerns of Indian audiences, with script advice prepared by the embassy in New Delhi. Each installment aimed to present "a dialogue built around a particular theme in explaining some aspects of American life."<sup>26</sup> But the program was discontinued at end of 1946 at the request of All India Radio, which cited scheduling difficulties. State Department correspondence on the matter does not verify whether deeper motives were at play, but given the climate of Indian opinion about the United States that year it is likely that All India Radio's decision was political. The OWI's circulation of American newsreels to India's numerous cinemas was also discontinued after the war, and was not replaced by peacetime government programs or via private distribution channels until the 1950s. The USIS American libraries, located at the U.S. Consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata, remained open, but were the targets of violent anti-American protests in 1946. In Mumbai the American flag was torn from the building and burned, and in both cities U.S. army personnel were attacked and injured.<sup>27</sup>

The United States also faced a significant credibility problem among India's leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru stridently criticized Washington's hypocrisy in fighting a world war for democracy at the same time as lending what they regarded as "passive and sometimes even active support of British policy and British propaganda."<sup>28</sup> At the end of the war he had condemned the use of the atom bomb

against Japanese civilians and criticized Washington's failure to support Indonesian nationalists; U.S. Consul Howard Donovan warned the Department of State that Nehru's statements resonated with the "great majority of Indians."<sup>29</sup> The U.S. cultural diplomacy program, which had remained outside the Office of War Information structure during the war, began talks with Indian scholars in 1944 to initiate educational exchanges between the two nations. The first educational visit sponsored by the State Department's Division of Cultural Relations occurred in January 1945. In a continuation of the U.S. government's ambivalent attitude to the independence issue, the Division instructed that the selection of candidates must be done with the political sensitivities of India's situation in mind, and should not be seen as a *de facto* endorsement of the pro-independence side. That such "politically sensitive," pro-independence factions would shortly become the governments of India and Pakistan—and were in actual fact the very best individuals to sponsor for educational or short-term visits to the United States—is an obvious point that was apparently overlooked by the Division.

*Nehru, Nationhood and Pakistan: U.S. Public Diplomacy and Independent India.*

The United States extended diplomatic recognition to India on the day of its independence on August 15, 1947 with a message of congratulations from President Harry Truman to India's (British) Governor General. In it the President articulated his intention to establish "close and fruitful cooperation" between the United States and the people and government of India.<sup>30</sup> But the statement expressed diplomatic niceties rather than the direction of U.S. national interests. While the end of India's long struggle for freedom was greeted with enthusiasm by an American press, which had retained fond feelings for Gandhi, the government of "the United States, in contrast with its earlier deep involvement [in the 1942 independence talks]" stayed in the "background" as a final settlement for Indian and Pakistani independence drew closer.<sup>31</sup> It thus came as a dual irony when the former Viceroy and current Governor General, Lord Mountbatten, observed in a statement to the American people that "[i]n the Atlantic

Charter, we—the British and Americans—dedicated ourselves to champion the self-determination of peoples.”<sup>32</sup> Britain had steadfastly refused to take Indian calls for independence seriously until a change of government brought the Labor Party into power, and thereafter it had rushed through a partition deal that dashed the hopes of many nationalists who had aspired to the twin goals of self-determination and religious unity on the Indian Subcontinent. This rushed settlement had, most tragically, caused the loss of millions of lives and the displacement of at least ten million refugees. For America’s part, despite its joint-authorship of the Atlantic Charter, Washington had been completely disengaged from the negotiations over Indian and Pakistani independence.

This governmental indifference, as well as the hypocritical impression created by the OWI’s wartime publicity on colonial and racial questions, created an inauspicious climate for U.S. PD relations with independent India. Prime Minister Nehru continued to feed this skepticism about America’s degree of support for colonized nations. The new U.S. ambassador to Delhi, Henry Grady, acknowledged the issue in his first press conference, when he assured his audience that his country had “no designs, economic or political, on yours or any other country,” and cautioned against reading “sinister motives” into his government’s “generous form[s] of assistance” to war-torn areas.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Washington’s broader strategy in South Asia during 1947-8 was a posture of impartial disengagement. The Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency ranked India and Pakistan as having only marginal importance to U.S. grand strategy in the short term. Washington thus decided it would defer to London in the setting of diplomatic imperatives to the region, and would in particular steer clear of any involvement in the bitter legacy of partition in Kashmir and the Punjab.

Thus, in 1947–8 Washington’s public diplomacy program remained much as it had in the interim between the dissolution of the Office of War Information and Indian independence. The USIS maintained its two outpost libraries and continued to send features, transcripts, and its news file of media items to Indian media outlets,

with the addition of some India-specific content prepared by U.S. consular staff. In February 1947, and again in 1950, the U.S. Embassy in Delhi had reported that the news file material was being republished at a favorable rate.<sup>34</sup> The public affairs section of the Delhi embassy continued to monitor the Indian media and public opinion. A small but steady stream of scholars and visitors continued to travel between two countries under the auspices of the State Department's exchange of persons program. But aside from this, U.S. cultural diplomacy struggled due to lack of funds. For example, in February 1947 the public affairs section at the Delhi embassy was forced to turn down a request for funds from the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society to present a roving exhibition of contemporary Indian paintings in the United States. U.S. officials agreed that the exhibit would be an excellent PD initiative, but were forced to direct the project to U.S. philanthropies instead of sponsoring the initiative directly.<sup>35</sup>

The U.S. Congress passed the Smith Mundt Act in January 1948, and along with the general boost to PD funding provided by the legislation, it also prompted the Department of State to identify areas where U.S. PD had been particularly inadequate since the war. One of these areas was India. A month later the United States concluded agreements with India, and soon after with Pakistan, for bilateral educational exchanges funded by the sale of surplus war goods. An additional full service outpost library was set up in Chennai (Madras) in 1947—another would be established in New Delhi in 1950—and reading rooms were established in a further six cities by 1954.<sup>36</sup> U.S. philanthropic and university activities in India also resumed: the Ford Foundation dispensed one grant to the Allahabad Agricultural Institute in 1948, and the Carnegie endowment gave funds to the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell in support of their anthropological and linguistic research work in India.<sup>37</sup>

Radio remained the key weakness of Washington's PD efforts. After being informed its programs were no longer wanted in 1946, Voice of America had continued to send transcripts to be used on All India Radio, but it lacked short-wave facilities of its own. In

December 1948 an announcement was finally made that a dedicated Hindi, Urdu, and English service for India would be set up,<sup>38</sup> although this depended on establishing relay facilities in Sri Lanka and it took more than two years for these arrangements to be completed. In contrast, Radio Moscow had been maintaining a relatively well-developed India service since the war. In an expression of the fact that the USSR had always been “deeply interested in India,” as early as 1946 its broadcast languages included English, Hindustani, and Bengali. In this period it had also derived significant value from its well-founded criticisms of Britain’s handling of the independence issue.<sup>39</sup>

Given the extensiveness of Soviet public diplomacy activities and the shock of the Chinese Communist revolution, anti-Communism became the overarching theme of a revived U.S. information policy for the Subcontinent in 1949. In this context, India assumed a special importance as the last hope for democracy in Asia: the American president’s special advisor Philip C. Jessup hoped that India would become Washington’s “most solid associate in the Asian area,” provided that Nehru could be made amenable to supporting U.S. interests.<sup>40</sup> At this time the State Department’s Office of South Asian Affairs advised that enhanced cultural and economic ties between the United States were necessary given the prospect of Communist agitation in India.<sup>41</sup> In other memoranda, the Office discussed the potential contribution of U.S. labor groups in reaching out via PD activities targeting Indian trade unions, which were regarded as hotbeds of pro-Soviet sentiment in India.

Jawaharlal Nehru also made his first official visit to the United States that October, and he was feted in the American press for his statesmanship during the difficult transition to independence. On a PD level, the Department of State had hoped the visit would showcase American friendliness toward India and would provide an opportunity to cultivate Nehru so that he might correct the “vague but widespread suspicion” of the United States among Indian elites and the public at large.<sup>42</sup> Behind the scenes, however, Nehru’s interactions with U.S. officials were soured by Washington’s

earlier refusal to offer substantial economic aid to India after Nehru transmitted his interest in such assistance earlier that year. His face-to-face meetings with the administration failed to produce a change in U.S. aid policy, despite the fact that India's food production was demonstrably below the population's needs.

A binational foundation to administer Fulbright exchanges was established in 1950, with an expected annual budget of \$400,000.<sup>43</sup> The Fulbright program was fast becoming the United States' most successful PD initiative in India, although the program's direct impacts on high-level intellectual findings in this first decade was probably quite limited. The short duration and single-visit format of the program reflected a "lack of planned commitment to fundamental area research, especially in such a complex civilization as India's." Nonetheless, the program was widely appreciated and over the next twelve years it would send 534 scholars, ranging "from graduate student to veteran professor" from the United States to India, providing a stimulus to the disciplinary development of Indian studies within U.S. universities.<sup>44</sup> But reports on the impact of U.S. cultural diplomacy and information showed that the U.S. programs were consistently out-spent by the USSR, a worrying development in Washington in light of the recent loss of China to Communism.<sup>45</sup> The USIS news file also faced stiff opposition at home from the United Press, which regarded USIS as unfairly competing with it in the major Indian markets.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the broadly positive image of the Fulbright program, it was also clear by 1950 that Indians and Americans were displaying a widening "difference of attitude" about the U.S. government's failure to offer economic aid to India and towards Communism as a threat to the global peace. U.S. analysts noted that the Indian public by and large supported Nehru's policy of neutrality, condemned racial segregation within the United States, and regarded Washington's anti-Communist foreign policy as a vehicle for neo-colonialism.<sup>47</sup> Worse, Washington's failure to provide economic assistance to India showed the callous treatment non-Western peoples could expect to receive if they exercised their sovereignty through a posture of foreign policy

independence. According to the State Department's Office of South Asian Affairs, differences of attitude also influenced U.S. policies. According to a memorandum in March, the president's refusal to support economic aid was the "harvest" of "misinformation" about the Indian government's global objectives.<sup>48</sup> By the end of the year the Department of State was recommending significant spending increases, a larger exchange of persons program, and an effort to develop an Indian service within Voice of America. The latter was especially vital since one "grievous omission" in the station's planning was its lack of any independent broadcasting capacity to India.<sup>49</sup>

*Public Diplomacy and the Indian Wheat Loan Bill, 1951.*

After the outbreak of war in Korea, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs George McGhee remarked that the "viability of a non-Communist Asia" now rested on India's shoulders. This new state of affairs placed the possibility of economic aid to India firmly on the administration's agenda. In August 1950 the president agreed, although at Secretary of State Dean Acheson's insistence the proposal held that aid would be provided in the form of a loan, with the U.S. repaid in cash and via concessional trade for strategic materials, rather than a grant. Truman agreed to the loan format, but deferred taking the request to Congress until mid 1951. In the meantime, McGhee engaged the Bureau of Public Affairs to set about correcting the "misinformation" about India among the American people, in the hope that enhanced understanding would improve the likelihood of Congress approving the plan. This domestic publicity effort failed. While the U.S. media expressed the American people's sympathy for India's predicament and endorsed the loan as a humanitarian gesture, Congress proved determined to extract the toughest terms possible. With the food situation in India rapidly deteriorating, consideration of the bill was moved forward to February 1951. But its passage was then slowed by Congressional criticisms of Nehru, with the Prime Minister exacerbating tension by publicly condemning the slow pace of the negotiations and the onerous loan terms that were under debate.

When the Emergency Indian Wheat Bill (PL 48) was finally approved in June, the final version included a substantial public diplomacy element. It instructed that the first U.S. \$5 million of India's interest payments be diverted to library development in Indian universities, to the acquisition of Indian materials by the Library of Congress, and to educational exchanges. The programs contributed substantially to U.S. educational diplomacy in India: in 1955 it was reported that the educational exchange component of the program was making "satisfactory progress" toward implementing its targets. By 1960 \$1.4 million had been spent on books for 36 Indian university libraries.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the coordinating office for the Wheat Loan at the New Delhi embassy was also able to channel U.S. philanthropic funds into Indian libraries and educational institutions. The inclusion of library support provisions within the terms of the loan was a last-minute sweetener, and India's requests for economic aid had presented the U.S. administration with a much larger opportunity to reorient the tone of Indo-American relations, which it squandered.

Prompt action by the U.S. administration when Nehru first warned of famine in 1949, or at the very least the preparation of a proposal in the form of a food grant (which the United States could easily afford given its large surplus in food product) rather than a loan, would have greatly enhanced Indian public perceptions of the United States. Prompt and generous assistance would also have boosted Washington's image elsewhere in the developing world, but six months of wrangling over the terms of the loan while mass starvation loomed generated a great deal of negative comment in the Indian media as well as strident criticism by India's senior politicians. Acheson's decision to use India's aid request as a basis to pressure Nehru to alter his policy of Cold War neutrality was a strategy that discounted Indian, and global, public opinion and its value to U.S. national interests. The fault lay not just with Acheson, Truman, and Congress. The State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs also overlooked the public diplomacy implications of the loan. During Congress' delays in considering the bill the Office focused on mollifying Nehru's concerns about the process, rather than on

convincing Congress of the public diplomacy benefit to be gained by providing prompt and generous humanitarian assistance.

After a hiatus in philanthropic activity during the war and immediate post-independence periods, the Ford Foundation began to survey conditions in India in 1950-1 with an eye to resuming its agricultural development work. Senior figures at the Foundation, particularly its president Paul Hoffman, intended that their investment in India would prevent the spread of Communism. Hoffman had determined that “India, one of the two Asian giants, and the non-Communist one, was to be a focus of serious investment... Assistance to India would demonstrate what free men with wealth and wisdom could do to help other men to follow them down the same...path of development.” Poverty alleviation, according to Hoffman, would “put Indians firmly in the Western camp.”<sup>51</sup> Ford’s first Indian national program director, Doug Ensminger, saw the role of philanthropy somewhat differently—as transcending government antagonisms through people-to-people understanding. He stressed the reciprocal function of the foundation’s work, noting that when India was mentioned in the United States “Congress is critical and the man on the street is either indifferent or cynical.” Thus, as he saw it a key part of the Foundation’s work was to “recognize the reasons for this situation and change...[America’s] approach” to thinking about India.<sup>52</sup>

By 1952 Ford had provided \$2.8 million dollars to the Indian government for an intensive cultivation initiative that aimed to reform planting practices in 15,000 villages within five years.<sup>53</sup> In 1952 it added an information program on agricultural techniques, began to dispense grants for educational institutions, and funded health initiatives including malaria research. The Foundation’s return to India in 1951 coincided with the arrival of Chester Bowles as the third U.S. ambassador to India, and Bowles worked assiduously to rehabilitate the United States’ public image in India. He wrote and spoke extensively on racial issues in particular during his 18 months in the post, warning the Department of State that while Indians generally knew little of real conditions in the United

States they knew “enough to be convinced that, solely because of their color, many Americans are denied a full share in the life of the richest nation on earth.”<sup>54</sup> Bowles advised the Ford Foundation that where possible it should employ African American personnel to lead its health and rural development programs to correct this negative picture of American racial attitudes.<sup>55</sup>

*Surveying the Damage: USIA and the Public Diplomacy Challenge in India*

President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s restructure of the administration of U.S. PD, leading to the establishment of the United States Information Agency, has been surveyed extensively in existing literature within the field.<sup>56</sup> The founding of USIA brought the U.S. government’s informational diplomacy functions, and several of its cultural projects, under the umbrella of an independent Executive Agency, which was to receive direction from the President and the National Security Council as well as from the Department of State. Crucially for the India programs, the USIA’s Office of Research and Analysis immediately initiated a number of projects designed to survey the impacts of U.S. PD in various contexts. Its findings on India were troubling.

The Office reported in 1953 that the USIS news file was unpopular with Indian media outlets,<sup>57</sup> while another survey the following year found that USIS pamphlets such as *Free World* and *The Negro in American Life* were regarded by their readers as “interesting” but not “fair or trustworthy.” The Indian audience for the Voice of America, which had finally established an English language service to India with good signal strength and coverage, overwhelmingly rated its broadcasts as “not objective.”<sup>58</sup> More positive responses were garnered from Indian elites for the Fulbright program and the USIS magazine *American Reporter*. The race problem was a key factor in the lagging credibility of U.S. initiatives. In contrast to Chester Bowles’ frank approach to the issue, USIS materials prepared for India presented a rosy picture of racial harmony in America that were immediately distrusted. Another

USIA review identified a systematic failure in the Department of State's handling of PD in the developing world, which applied especially to India: it had failed to take seriously the "neutralist" position of many governments.<sup>59</sup> But addressing the politics of the Cold War effectively through PD in India was no easy task. Engaging and persuading Indians to abandon neutralism brought with it the dilemma of how to engage the erudite Nehru, since Indian opinion leaders and elites in particular were sensitive to criticism and "to anything that sounded like 'onesidedness' or 'propaganda.'"<sup>60</sup>

No sooner had USIA turned its tools of policy evaluation to the problem of the U.S. image in India than the Eisenhower administration's strategic decision-making foreclosed the possibility of any improvement, placing the Indo-American relationship on its worst footing since the Second World War. The administration's move to extend military aid and formalize an alliance relationship with India's rival, Pakistan, in 1954, presented the USIA and its officers in India with an exceptionally difficult task. The Truman administration had attempted to maintain an even-handed approach to India and Pakistan; even before assuming office, Eisenhower's Secretary of State John Foster Dulles singled out Pakistan as a candidate for a strategic alliance in the context of the Eisenhower campaign's "policy of boldness" in the Cold War. Whereas Nehru had always been unafraid—and some would have said he was all too willing—to criticize U.S. influence in Asia, Pakistan had courted U.S. military aid since its independence, working assiduously to impress its anti-Communist credentials upon the Truman administration. The Republican Cold Warrior Dulles was more receptive to Pakistan's assurances, and even before the administration took office he had sent a U.S. military representative to Karachi to discuss bilateral strategic relations. Once in office, Dulles immediately ordered cuts to the additional economic aid funds the Truman administration had committed to India as additions to the Wheat Loan and appointed a pro-Pakistan former U.S. Army brigadier to the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

Dulles formally opened talks when he visited Pakistan in the spring of 1953, although when he went on to India afterward he assured Nehru that the United States would do nothing “unneutral” with respect to the Indo-Pakistani border rivalry. Nevertheless, talks with Pakistani representatives continued throughout the summer and in November the U.S. media announced that the parties were close to a deal involving a bilateral treaty, Pakistani inclusion in a Middle Eastern strategic pact, and substantial amounts of U.S. military aid. In response, Nehru complained bitterly that the “Cold War has come to the very frontiers of India” as the result of a decision that “represents great immaturity in political thinking.”<sup>61</sup> The following January, Eisenhower signed a deal for a bilateral aid and security treaty with Pakistan, and the formalization of a multilateral pact—the South East Asian Treaty Organization—would soon follow. The President wrote to Nehru to assure him that U.S. weapons would “in no way [be] directed against India.”<sup>62</sup> Nehru seemed to accept this, but soon hit out publicly at the administration’s sense of “superiority” in interfering with region through its “shamefully” bellicose foreign policies.<sup>63</sup>

The State Department’s Office of South Asian Affairs faithfully charted the fallout in the Indian media. SEATO was branded a threat to peace and stability in Asia and an embodiment of America’s racist neo-colonial approach to Asia, while rumors swirled that USIA was responsible for any number of covert, subversive activities within India. In retaliation for the U.S.-Pakistan alliance Nehru threatened to curtail India’s participation in the Fulbright program and other bilateral cultural activities, including library work under the Wheat Loan provisions. He issued a request in 1955 that USIS close all but four of its cultural centers and reading rooms. At the same time, the Communist bloc enhanced its activities in India with Nehru’s apparent “sanction and support,” with 24 Indian cultural delegations travelling to the USSR or China in 1954-5 and none allowed to travel to or from the United States.<sup>64</sup> The USSR also gained the upper hand through its Peoples’ Publishing House in New Delhi, which produced low cost books, its English and vernacular language newspapers, and its numerous libraries and cultural centers. Correcting the record

somewhat for the United States in PD terms were the ongoing activities of the U.S. foundations: Ford's agricultural projects were well-regarded; Rockefeller had re-entered the educational field by 1954 and had extended funding to a linguistics program for American scholars in the city of Poona; and Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie all offered funds to U.S. universities to develop their South Asian Studies programs.<sup>65</sup>

George V. Allen, former Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, became Assistant Secretary in charge of the Near Eastern Affairs bureau in 1955, and made a surprisingly upbeat assessment of U.S. PD in India despite Nehru's threats. Although U.S. diplomats would need to put additional effort in to "correct" Indian suspicions about the purpose of USIS,<sup>66</sup> he also received advice that the Wheat Loan library provisions and educational exchange policies were continuing to make "satisfactory progress" despite the political upheaval.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, while "negro inequality" remained Indians' most commonly voiced criticism of the United States in 1955,<sup>68</sup> the focus of U.S. PD was overwhelmingly on international Cold War issues. Washington's Cold War-focused PD initiatives were generally of a high quality—the worldwide touring exhibit *Atoms for Peace* was a hit in all four Indian cities it visited—but Nehru's visit to Moscow in June prompted some debate over whether the U.S. materials ought to tone down their anti-Communism in an appeal to Indian neutrality.<sup>69</sup> It would seem that U.S. PD had failed to make any dent in the Indian public's support for Cold War non-alignment.

According to one critic of the anti-Communist line, Chennai Consul General Henry C. Ramsey, contrary to the view in Washington that the claims of Communism should be continually refuted, the most popular materials distributed by USIS in India were actually reprints of articles that took a "scholarly and factual" approach to surveying the conditions within the Soviet Union and China.<sup>70</sup> Ramsey lamented that it was still necessary for U.S. diplomats in India to correct the assumptions of their superiors in Washington that Indian elites' support for Nehru's neutrality did not stem from a basic sympathy for Communism or a basic anti-Americanism. Rather,

Cold War neutrality served India's national interests; Indian elites understood that "realistic considerations of national security and prestige" informed Nehru's ideological position. For this reason, he advised that USIS materials should avoid creating a "vituperative" impression and must recognize that India's current long term foreign policy objectives may not be 'too vitally different from our own, regardless of disagreements on methods and certain conflicts of interest.'<sup>71</sup>

The efforts of the Eisenhower administration to forge a more balanced approach to the subcontinent after 1956 reflect a growing sensitivity to the kinds of concerns Ramsey had raised. In 1956 Eisenhower proposed a program of economic aid to India to assist in its Five Year Plan for food self-sufficiency. A bilateral agreement under the PL 480 program, which diverted U.S. agricultural surpluses to developing countries, brought Nehru and Eisenhower together for several days of face-to-face talks that did much to clarify the nature of the misunderstandings between the two states. But key members of Congress made it clear that they would be unwilling to authorize more substantial cooperation with a nation that could hardly be called an ally to the United States. The following year, with India's economy in dire straits, the administration worked assiduously to design a generous aid package to India through various channels within the U.S. Executive as well as through multilateral agencies, thus avoiding a potentially damaging debate on an aid bill in Congress. The formal U.S. announcement of the administration's economic aid package in March 1958 was accompanied by a new direction in U.S. policy toward Pakistan, which involved a "halting, low-key effort to begin limiting, if not reducing, the U.S. military commitment to Pakistan."<sup>72</sup>

The global U.S. PD program also faced difficulties in Congress, which slashed by more than a quarter the funds that Eisenhower had requested for the USIA in 1958-9, while USIS once again had to weather criticisms from America's media corporations over the perceived competition from its news file in international markets. It was curious that this charge was leveled in particular at USIS in

India, given that the U.S. government's news file was in fact still quite unpopular with Indian newspapers. A lengthy USIA report on PD strategies in India that August noted that India's stability was decisive for the "preservation and growth" of the free world. While the USSR had been investing heavily and, as result, Indians regarded the Soviet government as more trustworthy than the U.S. government, the report insisted that nonetheless the "conceptual gap between Indians and Americans...is narrowing."<sup>73</sup> It also endorsed the administration's plans to promote rapid and substantial bilateral cooperation in the development area as a policy strategy that would have significant benefits in public opinion terms. For the first time, the PD implications of the administration's India policies were being considered during the course of policy-making rather than as an addendum to policy implementation. The report also noted that certain aspects of the U.S. PD program in India had achieved notable successes in the previous two years: its film circulation program dwarfed the efforts of all the other national efforts combined, and the market for U.S. books, particularly *Reader's Digest*, was vibrant.<sup>74</sup> The interest was reciprocal: the Library of Congress convened a meeting on improving its holdings on South Asia in same year.

With Ensminger still in place as the director of Ford Foundation programs in India, Ford continued to dispense aid for rural development and medical projects. By the end of the 1950s it had added a program of educational exchanges in the area of technical and management studies, which led, in the decade to come, to a collaboration with the MIT Sloan School of Management and the Harvard Business School for the establishment of the Indian Institute of Management Studies. In the coming decade Ford would also step into the urban planning area, offering extensive advice to the city of Kolkata in its efforts to implement a master plan for urban growth. Ford developed a harmonious relationship with the state government of Bengal despite the government's pro-Communist sympathies.

### *Conclusion*

The foregoing discussion has analyzed the public diplomacy relationship between India and the United States prior to Indian

independence in 1947, before going on to place the development of U.S. PD strategies in the context of U.S. foreign policy during the post-independence decade of 1947–1957. Drawing on previously unpublished sources on the planning and execution of U.S. PD in India, the author’s analysis highlights the foreign policy constraints that hampered Washington’s efforts to court hearts and minds in India during this foundational decade. Whereas the U.S. diplomatic staff in India appeared to do their jobs in an effective manner—Ambassador Chester Bowles, for example, was an outstanding contributor to Indo-American public engagement—PD policy planning in Washington suffered from a number of crucial shortcomings in the Indian context. Washington’s Cold War policies, Congressional attitudes to India, racial disparities, and the Eisenhower administration’s turn to Pakistan as its major partner in the region were severe setbacks to U.S. public diplomacy.

Four key weaknesses, in particular, contributed to the stunted diplomatic relationship between the United States and India up to 1957:

1. Inattention to the PD implications of U.S. foreign policy in Washington. For example: Congress’ delays and rhetorical attacks on India during the passage of the Wheat Loan Bill; the Eisenhower administration’s alliance with Pakistan.
2. Slow development of certain key aspects of the PD program, particularly a VOA India service, after 1947.
3. Poorly crafted messaging in relation to American racial issues and global anti-Communism.
4. The ongoing absence of a constituency for improved relations with India among the American public and within Congress.

The archival record suggests that Soviet competition in PD terms was also substantial. U.S. assessments on the Soviet programs were generally free of hyperbole and well illustrated with evidence, and

presented a picture of an effective (if not insurmountable) form of competition in India.

At the same time, the image of the United States was burnished by the steadily-expanding Fulbright program, by the government's substantial aid to Indian libraries under the terms of the Wheat Loan, its book and film programs, and most especially by the Ford Foundation's philanthropic projects. The Eisenhower administration's efforts to rebalance its approach to South Asia after 1957, when it began to plan a substantial economic assistance package, also constituted an auspicious development because, for the first time, the records of the USIA show that PD considerations were in play during the policy planning stages. In the years prior, and in both the wartime and post-independence contexts, public diplomacy had been an afterthought to policy-making rather than an ongoing consideration during policy-making. This suggests that research into subsequent phases of the relationship will reveal more positive contributions by U.S. PD to Indo-American relations.

*Postscript: Looking Toward the 1960s: The Context for PD in the Development Decade.*

Eisenhower's decision to extend substantial amounts of economic aid to India in 1957 prompted a spike in interest in Indian development both within his administration and in wider foreign policy commentaries. American development economists like Walt W. Rostow joined the bandwagon, elevating India to the status of a test case for the efficacy of aid and technical assistance in facilitating Third World modernization. This intellectual ferment garnered further political interest in India: a two-day meeting of the Committee for International Economic Growth, a private think tank, in May 1959 attracted a number of prominent attendees. Two of them, Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard Nixon, were future presidents of the United States.<sup>75</sup> Kennedy would soon enter office with a foreign policy team that included a number of officials that were deeply sympathetic to India; former Ambassador

Chester Bowles and economist John Kenneth Galbraith chief among them.

His administration tilted toward India over Pakistan, and the warmest point in the entire Cold War bilateral relationship would occur as a result of Kennedy's decision to extend military aid to India after its brief border war with China in 1962. Kennedy also presided over a large increase in U.S. development assistance and general diplomatic engagement with the developing world. Under Kennedy, PL 480 funds extended into a range of areas with implications for U.S. public diplomacy, such as technical assistance, technical education, and educational exchange. The president had, furthermore, entered office with a campaign commitment to improving America's global reputation. Kennedy and his appointee to head USIA, Ed Murrow, facilitated a number of significant reforms to U.S. PD, including closer presidential involvement in PD policy-setting, higher funding for cultural activities, and more detailed policy and public opinion evaluation.<sup>76</sup>

But race in America remained a divisive issue. While the global media depicted some of the worst excesses of the Southern backlash, under Murrow USIA sought to present the ongoing civil rights struggle in the most positive terms possible, highlighting the progressive stance of the federal administration on racial issues.<sup>77</sup> Nehru also visited the United States in 1961 to an enthusiastic media reception, although Jackie Kennedy's goodwill tour of India and Pakistan was a far larger media event. At the same time, escalating U.S. involvement in Vietnam, deepening tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir—which Kennedy wished to see settled—and India's ongoing effort to maintain good relations with the USSR were obstacles to improved relations over the long term.

The making and implementation of U.S. PD strategies in India during the 1960s thus promises to be an interesting avenue of further study. Future research should consider whether the Kennedy administration really represented a new direction in the administration of PD in the case of India, or conversely whether the

problems that beset U.S. PD in India under Truman and Eisenhower persisted in this period. Whether USIA's attempt to deal more frankly with race was a success in the Indian context, in which the public had great sympathy for African Americans and respected the civil rights movement's commitment to non-violent techniques, will be a key avenue for research. So, too, will be the question of how the structural tensions between India and the United States played out in terms of PD. Whether the Kennedy administration accommodated India's neutralist aspirations and its determination to exercise regional influence will be a guiding question for the next phase of this research into public diplomacy and Indo-American relations.

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26. "Termination of the Weekly Radio Program 'America Today,'" Jan. 13, 1947; Classified General Records 1942-1963 (CGR); U.S. Embassy New Delhi (New Delhi); Record Group 84, Records of Foreign Service Posts (RG 84); U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (NARA).
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36. "Study of USIA Operating Assumptions," Volume 2, Dec. 1954; Office of Research Special Reports, 1953-1997 (SR); Record Group 306, Records of the United States Information Agency (RG 306); National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (NARA).
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## Author Biography

Sarah Ellen Graham is a lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, and was previously an adjunct lecturer at the University of Southern California. She was a postdoctoral fellow for 2007–8 at USC's Center for International Studies and the Center on Public Diplomacy. She has written a book on U.S. attitudes to public diplomacy in the 1918–1953 period and has published articles on U.S. public diplomacy in UNESCO (for which she was awarded the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations' Bernath Article Prize), on public diplomacy and the Indo-American relationship, and on Washington's prospects for effective track-two diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific. Her current project centers on the role of attitudes in the Indo-American diplomatic relationship from 1942 to the present, and while visiting the Center, Sarah intends to explore the public diplomacy aspects of this case in historical and contemporary contexts. Sarah also has an ongoing interest in International Relations theory, and hopes to engage in dialogue or workshops with the USC Master of Public Diplomacy program on the intersections between studies of public diplomacy and IR theory.

Graham's research project for the Center is titled, *U.S. Public Diplomacy and Indo-American Relations* <[http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/research/project\\_detail/us\\_public\\_diplomacy\\_and\\_indo-american\\_relations](http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/research/project_detail/us_public_diplomacy_and_indo-american_relations)>.

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