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Ambassadors Extraordinary

**B.K. Nehru, Chester Bowles, and Ambassadorial Agency in Indo-American Relations,
1961-1969**

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Senior Essay in History

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Spring 2020

Abbreviations

SML	Sterling Memorial Library
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
JFKL	John F. Kennedy Memorial Library
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Memorial library
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
NSC	National Security Council

Introduction

In January 1962, Braj Kumar 'B.K.' Nehru, India's Ambassador to the United States, called on First Lady Jackie Kennedy at the White House for a "social" visit. Midway through, President John F. Kennedy himself walked into the room. Less than a month earlier, India had forcibly annexed Goa, a Portuguese colony on India's western coast. The move had drawn condemnation from much of the Western world; it did not escape notice that a nation that constantly preached non-violence had resorted to force to get its way. Nehru knew that a subtle diplomatic touch was needed to smooth relations and assuage American concerns, which was why his first words to Kennedy were "You must be very mad at us about Goa."¹

The Indian ambassador's blunt assessment revealed the complex reality of Indo-American relations during the first decades of the Cold War. The status quo that prevailed following the Second World War left Europe divided between the Soviet Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The attentions of these two Cold War blocs shifted to the remainder of the world – Latin America, Africa, and Asia – with both blocs wooing countries into their spheres of influence. One of the world's most populous nations, and occupying a strategic position between East, Southeast, and Central Asia, India was a tempting prize. Its political and economic alignments, however, placed it in a liminal ideological position; a committed representative democracy, it appeared a natural American ally, but its centrally-planned, avowedly socialist economy, with Five-Year Plans inspired by those pioneered in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, betrayed a left-wing political undercurrent.² The contradictions of the newly-independent Indian state's ideology were seen by India's early leaders not as a disadvantage but rather an essential feature of India's geopolitical posture: over the course of

¹ B.K. Nehru to M.J. Desai, 18 January 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

² Indeed, Soviet economists viewed India's Five-Year Plans as an homage to their own planned economy; see Stephen Clarkson, *The Soviet Theory of Development: India and the Third World in Marxist-Leninist Scholarship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

the 1950s, Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister and B.K. Nehru's uncle, developed and articulated a foreign policy that would come to be termed 'non-alignment.'³ With the purpose of charting an independent path on the global stage, India would, on principle, refuse to ally with either of the Cold War blocs, instead pursuing healthy relations with both.⁴

Yet such an emphasis on non-alignment belied the economic realities of independent India's first decades. The new nation was impoverished, with underdeveloped industry and a faltering agricultural sector that could not feed the country. Though economic self-reliance was a primary target of Jawaharlal Nehru's government, India was dependent in its initial years on food aid and economic assistance – chiefly from its former colonial ruler, the United Kingdom, as well as the United States, and Soviet Union.⁵ Maintaining a non-aligned posture, while still soliciting consistent economic aid from the different sides of the Cold War, required deft diplomacy from the new nation's policymakers, Ministry of External Affairs, and diplomats. On the other side of the relationships, the United States and Soviet Union both hoped to turn India into an ally and thereby dominate the geostrategic space around it.

B.K. Nehru's conversation with John F. Kennedy about Goa in January 1962 reflected the complexities of that diplomatic exercise. Kennedy warned the ambassador that, while he would have to condemn the annexation of Goa in public, he did not wish it to impact Indo-American relations in private. Yet the conversation hinted at another aspect of Indo-American diplomacy: the role of B.K. Nehru himself, and ambassadors like him. Kennedy explicitly asked for Nehru's cooperation in approaching members of the United States Senate in ways

³ To remove ambiguity, B.K. Nehru will be described as 'Nehru' for the remainder of this essay, while the Indian Prime Minister, his uncle Jawaharlal Nehru, will be referred to his full name position.

⁴ On the development of non-alignment, see Itty Abraham, "From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947-1965," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, Issue 2 (2008): 195-219.

⁵ The debates over aid to India were foundational to the post-war notion of development aid; see Ch. 2 of David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), and Section II of Gilles Boquérat, *No Strings Attached? India's Policies and Foreign Aid, 1947-1966* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003).

that Kennedy himself could not; in turn, the Indian ambassador undertook to try to convince his own government to accept arbitration on the acrimonious quarrel between India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir. Implicit in the interaction was the assumption that Nehru was a political actor with his own methods and opinions, some of which ran contrary to the consensus within his own government, and that he was prepared to actively promote his own vision of the Indo-American relationship. The conversation suggested that, even in an era of instantaneous communication in which capitals and governments could speak to each other directly without the need for ambassadorial mediation, ambassadors possessed significant political agency as actors in their own right.

This essay will analyse the political agency of Cold War ambassadors, with reference to the Indo-American relationship, through the actions of two ambassadors: B.K. Nehru, India's Ambassador to the United States from 1961 to 1968, and Chester Bliss Bowles, America's Ambassador to India from 1951 to 1953 and 1963 to 1969, though the essay concerns itself with the latter term. Through their exercises of agency, the essay will elucidate the methods of ambassadorial practice, and the individual actors and attitudes that underlay Cold War diplomacy. It will demonstrate the ways in which the two ambassadors rendered possible India's unique position in the Cold War, and worked to maintain consistent Indo-American relationship through the crises of the 1960s and various leaders – two Presidents of the United States, three Prime Ministers of India – to whom they reported over their tenures. To do so, the essay draws on archived diplomatic correspondence, memoranda, diaries, press archives, and autobiographical material.

The essay complements a rich strain of scholarship that has masterfully analysed the broad strokes of Indo-American relations, and Indian diplomacy during the Cold War, through

a deeper analysis of the specific mechanisms of day-to-day diplomacy involved.⁶ It draws on and extends biographical work around individual diplomats such as Chester Bowles, treating them as representing a distinct typology of Cold War diplomacy rather than as unique outliers.⁷ Its assumptions confront a school of geopolitics arguing that global diplomacy was driven by the impersonal self-interest of the great powers; while acknowledging the larger currents of Cold War relations, the essay contends that individual actions, attitudes, and prejudices played a significant role in determining foreign policy even among the great powers.⁸

The essay is divided into two sections, each with two subsections. It will first consider B.K. Nehru's tenure as ambassador in Washington, D.C., focusing on his efforts in negotiating factionalism within the American government, and his parallel attempts to influence American public opinion. It will then analyse Chester Bowles's near-simultaneous term in New Delhi, concentrating on his attempts to moderate and mediate Indo-American negotiations, and his to use his own political reputation to secure concessions for India. The essay makes no pretensions to exhaustivity; rather, it situates key moments in the actions of the two ambassadors within the larger tapestry of Cold War diplomacy, and examines the ways those larger patterns were affected by their endeavours.

⁶ Older work in this vein includes Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States, 1941-1991* (New York: SAGE, 1994) and Robert McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Newer, more focused work is exemplified by Engerman, *The Price of Aid*, on foreign aid competition.

⁷ Biographies of Bowles in particular tend to treat his political agency as *sui generis*; see Howard B. Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) and Richard P. Dauer, *A North-South Mind in an East-West World: Chester Bowles and the Making of United States Cold War Foreign Policy, 1951-1969* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005).

⁸ This school of geopolitics is exemplified by John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

1. Braj Kumar Nehru

1.1: Factionalism and the Quest for Aid

American aid to India defined Braj Kumar Nehru's career; when he presented his credentials to Kennedy in 1961, he had already spent three years as India's Commissioner-General for Economic Affairs in America, a position essentially created for him to solicit international economic aid. He fully expected that his new role would continue in the same vein, given the broad discretion he enjoyed as both a political appointee and the nephew of the Indian Prime Minister. Yet a year into his appointment, he found himself involved in an endeavour that threatened his economic aid victories – the Indo-Soviet MiG deal.

The Indian Air Force of the 1960s found its equipment woefully outmatched by its hostile neighbours, Communist China and America-supplied Pakistan.⁹ India would need to acquire better technology from one of the Cold War powers; despite the Air Force's existing relationship with British suppliers, the choice seems to have been between the United States and the Soviet Union. The technical factors involved in such a decision were complicated by economic issues: a frequent reason that the Indian government would use to justify, both internally and externally, its preference for Soviet equipment was a crippling lack of foreign currency reserves that had proven a consistent weight on developing India's economic progress. The Soviet Union was happier to accept payment in rupees, and barter arrangements for Indian goods, than was the United States. Another point in favour was the Soviet Union's willingness to allow India to manufacture aircraft in India under license; writing in the later Cold War, analyst S. Nihal Singh noted that America's consistent refusal to countenance a transfer of military technology played a significant role in India's turning to the Soviet Union.¹⁰

⁹ See Sumit Ganguly, Rahul Mukherji, and Rajesh Rajagopalan, "India and South Asian Security," *Defence and Peace Economics* 10, Issue 4 (1999): 336.

¹⁰ S. Nihal Singh, "Why India Goes to Moscow for Arms," *Asian Survey* 24, no. 7 (1984): 707-20.

For a non-aligned India mindful of the precarity of military assistance from either power, the prospect of self-sufficient military production was tempting.

Even these practical considerations, however, masked the larger political battles behind Indian military procurement.¹¹ Amidst the international polarization along Cold War lines, military aid was a signifier of favour and alignment, as with the American transfer of F-104 fighters to Pakistan; seeking military purchases could, in turn, be seen as signalling the desire for a stronger relationship. Stronger relations with the Soviet Union had long been the aim of a Soviet-leaning faction within the Indian government concentrated around Vengalil Krishnan ‘V.K.’ Krishna Menon, the powerful Defence Minister and counsellor to Jawaharlal Nehru. Menon’s faction was frequently at odds with the “America Lobby,” a group of senior Indian officials including B.K. Nehru and Finance Minister Morarji Desai who worked toward closer economic and military relations with the United States to propel India’s development.¹² Krishna Menon vocally advocated an Indian purchase of the new Soviet MiG-21 fighter to counter Pakistan’s F-104s.

The role of geopolitics in choosing the MiG-21 is disputed; historian Paul McGarr, for one, argues that practical considerations took precedence, and that the common belief otherwise was founded largely on Anglo-American misperceptions of Krishna Menon.¹³ The geopolitical implications of the deal were nevertheless considerable, if only because American perceptions of an improving Indo-Soviet relationship, mistaken or not, would do much to condition America’s own attitude towards India. There were, too, unmistakable signs that certain actors looked to use the MiG deal to marshal Indian public opinion towards support for

¹¹ See David Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); some of the historical issues specific to military aid are covered in the first few chapters of Stephen P. Cohen and Sumit Ganguly, *Arming Without Aiming: India’s Military Modernization* (New York: Brookings Institution, 2012).

¹² Engerman, *The Price of Aid*, 184-86.

¹³ See Paul McGarr, “‘India’s Rasputin’? V.K. Krishna Menon and Anglo-American Misperceptions of Indian Foreign Policymaking, 1947-1964,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 22, Issue 2 (2011): 239-60.

the Soviet Union despite the confidentiality of the negotiations: B.K. Nehru first learned of the rapid progression of the MiG deal through the *New York Times*' New Delhi bureau, which received the information from an anonymous government source.¹⁴ Whether or not the MiG project was intended as a gateway to a closer Indo-Soviet relationship, many in both India and the United States saw it as such.

When Phillips Talbot, Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, warned of factions within the United States Congress that could prove hostile to news of a MiG deal, Nehru averred that he could not involve himself in America's internal disputes: "As a foreign country" India could not "distinguish between the administration and Congress".¹⁵ Yet Nehru kept himself well-informed of political manoeuvrings in Congress through allies in the Democratic Party, and he was familiar with Kennedy's difficulties in keeping the party under control; a frequent dinner companion and "friend of India", the Senate Majority Whip Hubert Humphrey, candidly admitted that the House of Representatives was "completely out of hand".¹⁶ Humphrey's faction, including Senator William J. Fulbright, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was frequently opposed by fellow Democratic Senator Stuart Symington, who consistently attempted to block aid to India. "Why should we continue to give billions to India despite the steady opposition... we have received from the principal leaders of that country?" Symington asked of Kennedy, alluding to Krishna Menon's very public criticism of America.¹⁷

The MiG deal threatened to give Symington more ammunition to fire at the upcoming Indian aid bill, with even Congresspeople not ordinarily opposed to India incensed by the hated

¹⁴ B.K. Nehru to M.J. Desai, 5 May 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

¹⁵ B.K. Nehru reporting on a meeting with Talbot; B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

¹⁶ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 8 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

¹⁷ Symington Memorandum to Kennedy, quoted in Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 200. See also McMahon, *The Cold War*, 286-301.

spectre of the MiG, an aircraft with an outsize presence in American memory; Humphrey explained to Nehru that “too many American boys had been killed by it in Korea.”¹⁸ It was not just politicians who perceived the developments as an Indo-Soviet *rapprochement*; Kennedy’s Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, cautioned M.J. Desai, the Indian Foreign Secretary to whom Nehru reported, that though Kennedy understood that the MiG purchase did not change India’s policy of non-alignment, “the bulk of uninformed public opinion in the U.S.A. would not appreciate this point.”¹⁹ Two weeks earlier, Galbraith had warned a somewhat concerned Desai that the American public would be “allergic” to any MiG purchase.²⁰

Nehru’s own particular definition of non-alignment was centred around avoiding actions that might antagonize the West. Non-alignment, for Nehru, relied on external perceptions: the technical factors behind the MiG decision, secular as they were, would not matter to the American public. “We should not only be non-aligned, but should also appear to be non-aligned” he wrote to Desai, on hearing of the MiG deal.²¹ This assumption of the power to interpret India’s foreign policy stretched even the considerable leeway given to Nehru in that regard. Desai confessed himself “surprised at the tone” of Nehru’s dispatch, and sharply admonished him that America’s Ambassador Galbraith already adequately argued America’s case to the Indian government: “you in turn must be stressing our problems to the United States authorities.”²² It was a virtual command for Nehru to defend the MiG purchase, regardless of his own opposition thereto.

Desai’s remonstrance chastened Nehru enough that he ceased direct opposition to the MiG deal, but he continued to send telegrams bearing portents of the doom that would follow

¹⁸ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 8 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

¹⁹ M.J. Desai Note, 18 May 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

²⁰ M.J. Desai Memorandum for Jawaharlal Nehru, 4 May 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

²¹ B.K. Nehru to M.J. Desai, 18 May 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

²² M.J. Desai to B.K. Nehru, 23 May 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

a MiG purchase. He was unafraid to use his personal connection to Jawaharlal Nehru to bypass the Ministry of External Affairs' channels; when Kennedy confronted him during a "social visit" to the White House, he wrote to the Prime Minister of Kennedy's grave predictions for the India aid bill given Congress' jaundiced perceptions of an Indo-Soviet military pact. Yet he also seemed to have taken Desai's instructions to heart. At the same meeting with Kennedy, Nehru vigorously defended India's right to buy equipment from any country it wished; he repeated the Indian government's stance that backtracking on the deal could be seen as "yielding" to American pressure, despite his own wish for exactly such a reversal.²³ A month later, he argued to Talbot that the very fact that factions in Congress had used the deal as an excuse to reduce aid to India had made the MiG purchase necessary, to "make patent our independence of action" in the face of Western pressure.²⁴

Nehru's transformation into an ardent defender of the deal, at least to American officials, could be attributed to Desai's instructions, but was also informed by the dynamics of economic and military aid to India by both Cold War powers. In the game of one-upmanship that defined Cold War competition in India, aid by one bloc often inspired better offers from the other; Nikita Khrushchev himself, David Engerman notes, boasted that 70% of Western aid to India was "catalyzed" by Soviet aid.²⁵ Familiar with the dynamic from his time as India's Economic Affairs envoy, and Nehru sought to recreate the effect writ small. Shortly after hearing from Desai of the financial arrangements that made a MiG purchase desirable, Nehru asked whether similarly generous terms could not be sought America; though Desai was not encouraging in response, Nehru resolved to extract such terms from Kennedy.²⁶

²³ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 14 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

²⁴ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 25 July 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

²⁵ Engerman, *The Price of Aid*, 126.

²⁶ B.K. Nehru to M.J. Desai, 14 May 1962, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

In defending the necessity of the MiG deal, Nehru referred to India's defence shortcomings and the constant threat of Chinese aggression; he pointed out to Kennedy that, given Pakistan's aggression, the "anti-Communist" alliance between America and Pakistan was fast becoming an "anti-India" bloc.²⁷ By emphasizing India's ability to stymie Chinese ambitions in South Asia, Nehru tried to provoke a counteroffer from not only the United States, but also the United Kingdom, whose Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Edwin Duncan-Sandys, often mediated the West's interactions with India.²⁸ A British counteroffer of their English Electric Lightning was taken seriously enough that Jawaharlal Nehru met with Duncan-Sandys in June to explore the possibility.²⁹ It was no coincidence that Secretary of State Dean Rusk had coyly mentioned Duncan-Sandys to B.K. Nehru two days previously on Kennedy's; Kennedy was hinting that he could put together an agreement with the United Kingdom to match the Soviet terms.³⁰

Nehru's strategy was showing results, considering that just a month previously, Robert Komer of the National Security Council (NSC) staff had expressed to Kennedy the general consensus that there was no need to try and match a MiG offer.³¹ In contrast, consternation at Nehru's defence of the MiG deal, and the implications for Western influence in India, was high enough by June that Kennedy wrote to the British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, that he was "concerned" India would approve the MiG deal before America and Britain "had time to counter it"; in an earlier memorandum concerning the composition of that letter, Rusk almost exactly reiterated Nehru's defence of the MiG deal.³² Nehru's effectiveness in framing the MiG

²⁷ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 14 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

²⁸ See Paul McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States, and the Indian Subcontinent, 1945-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 192-215.

²⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru to B.K. Nehru, 15 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

³⁰ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 14 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

³¹ Komer Memorandum, FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia, Document 119

³² Quoted in Dean Rusk to American Embassy, London; FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia, Document 131; Rusk Memorandum, FRUS, 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia, Document 128.

deal as a lost opportunity for the United States to deepen its ties with India was reflected in Kennedy's subsequent endeavours to put together a Military Assistance Program package for India in his final days, the progress of which I discuss in subsequent sections on Chester Bowles. Tellingly, at the height of the Sino-Indian conflict in December 1962, discussion of the MiG deal featured prominently in a meeting on proposed assistance to India attended by Kennedy, MacMillan, and Duncan-Sandys; the notion that Western military assistance at that crucial juncture could tempt India away from closer cooperation with the Soviet Union was a prominent feature of American thinking.³³ Kennedy mentioned B.K. Nehru's argument explicitly during the conference, a sign of his strategy's contribution to the American decision to aid India considerably during the 1962 conflict.

Managing Presidents and the State Department was a far cry from managing the American public, to whom legislators were ultimately accountable come election day. B.K. Nehru acknowledged that being the face of India, and charming the American public, were integral parts of his duties as ambassador.³⁴ His ability to present a sympathetic India was, however, often tested by Indian policies, and his strategies to maintain a good public perception of India were often unorthodox by necessity. To that end, in May 1962, Nehru appeared live on national television to tell the American people that the Indian armed forces were inadequate to defend India.

Though Kennedy's opinion of India was not harmed by Indian efforts to buy Soviet MiG fighters, the same could not be said of the larger body of American public opinion; recall Senator Humphrey's warning to Nehru that the MiG inspired irrational hatred in an American public that had not forgotten the Korean War.³⁵ Nehru was in a difficult position; while pushing

³³ Memoranda of Conversation, 20 December 1962, FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia, Document 230 and 231

³⁴ B.K. Nehru, "A Diplomat's Diary," *Akashvani* 35, no. 48 (1970): 7-8.

³⁵ B.K. Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 8 June 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

for a deal with the West, he had to accept the possibility of the MiG deal and mitigate the American public anger that would likely ensue. The problem worried both Nehru and Kennedy enough that the administration, through Nehru, tried to persuade India to play what M.J. Desai, coolly termed a “trick” on Congress and the public by delaying any MiG announcement until the India aid bill was passed.³⁶

Had India acquiesced, it would have been a remarkable instance of collaboration between the United States government and a foreign nation behind the backs of Congress; that the administration would even imply such coordination speaks to the importance of Nehru’s role as a conduit for such actions. In any event, Desai refused, and the exchange embarrassed both nations when it was leaked to *Mainstream*, an Indian Communist Party weekly with strong ties to V.K. Krishna Menon.³⁷ Nehru had no choice but to hedge his arguments; he would need to drum up support for American financial assistance in a British aircraft sale to India, and yet justify a MiG deal to ameliorate the public outrage were it to come to fruition. It was to make such a statement that Nehru appeared on NBC TV on May 23, 1962.

Nehru might have experienced some *déjà vu* on arriving at the studio; this was his second appearance on NBC to defend an Indian decision he disagreed with in two years. In December 1961, he had skilfully defended the Indian annexation of the Portuguese colony of Goa, framing the issue for American viewers in terms of anticolonialism and territorial integrity; would America have tolerated Rhode Island remaining a French or Spanish or even

³⁶ M.J. Desai to B.K. Nehru, 27 July 1962, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

³⁷ *Baltimore Sun*, 11 September 1962. Phillip Potter, of the *Sun*’s well-informed New Delhi bureau, implied that the leak originated from Krishna Menon’s Defence Ministry; *Mainstream*’s editor, Nikhil Chakravarty, was close to Krishna Menon.

Turkish colony?³⁸ His appearance was well-received; “everyone seemed to have heard of me” afterward, he later wrote with characteristic modesty in a draft of his autobiography.³⁹

The rhetoric of territorial sovereignty would not, however, work in this instance; Nehru would have to emphasize India’s pressing need for modern fighters to counter Chinese aggression, and incite sympathy for India’s position. To that end, when asked about India’s defence readiness, he held nothing back. The armed forces were “badly equipped”, he said bluntly, and “did not have the latest equipment”. This left India unable to address either Pakistan’s aggression or “the more fundamental problem of our border with China”. Despite this, he noted, India had sent troops to the United Nations mission in the Congo, saving American money and lives. Perhaps most surprisingly, when it was remarked that Krishna Menon was disliked in America, he went so far as to imply a personal opposition to Krishna Menon’s policies. Though Nehru’s interlocutors praised his “expert” handling of their questions, this public criticism of India’s Defence Minister by its Ambassador was notably out of character for a diplomat who was usually the soul of propriety in public.⁴⁰

Nehru’s aims were several. Emphasizing India’s strategic plight could sway sympathy and make Kennedy’s assistance in a British aircraft deal more palatable to the public. Implying his own separation from Krishna Menon’s faction was a targeted message to Congress; in highlighting the existence of pro- and anti-Soviet factions in the Indian government, Nehru implied that American generosity could undercut Krishna Menon and strengthen the pro-America groups, an argument that Galbraith advanced to Kennedy independently.⁴¹ Nehru had, finally, hedged his arguments against the possibility that the MiG deal would go forward;

³⁸ Text of Interview with B.K. Nehru on the ‘Today’ programme, WNBC/TV, 21 December 1961, in Press Coverage, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

³⁹ Handwritten note, in Press Coverage, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

⁴⁰ Text of Interview with B.K. Nehru on the NBC Network, 23 May 1962, Subject File 5, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

⁴¹ Galbraith to State Department, 25 July 1962, FRUS, 1961-1962, Volume XIX, South Asia, Document 159.

playing up India's woeful inability to contain China provided a reason for the anti-Soviet American public and Congress to nonetheless tolerate a MiG purchase.

The strategy seemed effective; as Ian Graham of the RAND Corporation noted two years after the interview, press coverage of the MiG deal was more ambivalent than might have been expected.⁴² Travelling in the months after the interview, Nehru was careful to restate his arguments in major regional newspapers. In the *Columbus Dispatch*, he accused Pakistan accepting American warplanes, supposedly to as an anti-China measure, just to deploy them against India; to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, he emphasized India's need to rearm in the face of Chinese aggression.⁴³ Nehru hoped to reach a broad cross-section of the American public, ensuring that his counter-narrative was present to combat the bad press of the MiG deal. The *New York Times* commented in an editorial that a MiG deal "does not justify Senate restriction on aid to India".⁴⁴ The *Baltimore Sun* noted that India had true "defence inadequacies" it needed to rectify.⁴⁵ Their positive coverage was not accidental; Nehru was a frequent guest at the editorial luncheons of both newspapers, using those friendships to the advantage of his press strategy.⁴⁶

Nehru's conception of his ambassadorial role certainly included interpreting India's interests in his own way, and crafting his rhetoric and reputation towards that end, but many in the Indian Parliament disagreed vehemently; Krishna Menon's allies in the Lok Sabha, the Indian lower house, were infuriated by the interview. The Socialist Member of Parliament Hari Vishnu Kamath commented that he would rather diplomats were "seen more and heard less" (in sharp contrast to Nehru's own conception of the profession), and several Communist

⁴² Ian C. Graham, "The Indo-Soviet MIG Deal and its International Repercussions," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 5 (May 1964): 823-32.

⁴³ *Columbus Dispatch*, 17 June 1962; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 2 October 1962.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, 16 June 1962.

⁴⁵ *Baltimore Sun*, 9 August 1962.

⁴⁶ See TA/DA Claims, and Engagements Book, in Diaries/Notebooks, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

parliamentarians walked out of the chamber in protest. Even moderates in the ruling Congress Party took offence at B.K. Nehru's criticisms of India's defence inadequacy; Jawaharlal Nehru was left to play the conciliator, though he refused to recall his nephew.⁴⁷ While sentiment may have played a role in his refusal, the Prime Minister himself was not averse to hedging his own rhetoric; analyst Ian Graham noted that even as he assured the Indian upper house, the Rajya Sabha, that India would take its decisions independently, he promised to inform Kennedy and Duncan-Sandys before he took a decision on the MiG deal.⁴⁸ He may not have disapproved of his nephew's attempting, as the *Indian Express* put it in a supportive editorial, to "extricate this country from a difficult and embarrassing position."⁴⁹

In any event, diplomatic telegrams from the time are conspicuously empty of any censure for the interview; the Prime Minister seemed to have accepted B.K. Nehru's broad conception of his responsibility to seek the best possible deal for India. Having failed to see the ambassador recalled, Krishna Menon's faction turned to the press. Left-leaning publications excoriated B.K. Nehru, and even the mainstream *Hindustan Times* ran a scathing cartoon depicting the grinning ambassador waiting tables on Kennedy and his advisors: "Any change for the waiter?" asks Kennedy dismissively.⁵⁰ The divided press coverage, indicative of internal debates among Indian intelligentsia, served B.K. Nehru's purpose by demonstrating to American observers that pro-America factions in Indian politics was alive and well, and that further American generosity might strengthen them. Even should the MiG deal have gone through, the debates surrounding it in India might have inspired America and the West to try harder to outbid the Soviet Union next time; Nehru's hedging could have had beneficial long-term effects on aid.

⁴⁷ Transcript of Lok Sabha Session, 29 May 1962, Subject File 5, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

⁴⁸ Graham, "The Indo-Soviet MIG Deal," 826.

⁴⁹ *Indian Express*, 31 May 1962.

⁵⁰ *Hindustan Times*, 31 May 1962

Thus, Nehru's ambassadorial discretion, and the flexibility it implied, allowed him to pursue his own vision of Indo-American relations. The value of his efforts would be revealed just months later, when Communist China advanced into Indian territory and the MiGs failed to materialize; it was American assistance that proved crucial to Indian military efforts. Though the MiG deal would eventually come to fruition, the China crisis would be the downfall of Krishna Menon, and weakened his faction for some time. Nehru's strategies – playing the Cold War powers against each other, while building up India's image in America – had paid off.

2.1: The Press, the Government, and the Short Tether

Nehru's strategies for maintaining and encouraging aid to India were successful during the Kennedy years, but factors beyond his control soon altered the situation. Nehru was entertaining friends, including Senator Humphrey, in December 1963, when he learned that Kennedy had been shot. Weeks later, before departing for India for consultations, he attempted to pay his respects to the new President, Kennedy's former Vice-President, Lyndon Baines Johnson; Rusk blithely informed him that his days of easy access to the White House were over, since Johnson thought that foreign affairs were "not his business".⁵¹ This impression of Johnson as uninterested in foreign policy would take root in Nehru, who described Johnson as "basically a Texan" ignorant of world affairs in a confidential 1969 speech at the Indian Defence College, echoing the idea in a 1985 letter to the Johnson policy advisor Walt Rostow.⁵²

Nehru's new exclusion from the White House coincided with the beginnings of the Johnson Administrations 'short tether' policy. Frustrated with India's stubborn adherence to non-alignment, Johnson shortened the duration of food aid agreements for India, sometimes even to weeks or months, with renewal subject to his personal approval and contingent upon political promises from the Indian government.⁵³ The sudden stoppage of food aid permissions came as a surprise to both Nehru and the Indian government, which sent him a series of frantic telegrams as he pressed his contacts for information. Nehru eventually reached Johnson through the intercession of Tom Mann, a close friend and the Undersecretary of State for Latin America, and to his surprise found Johnson well-disposed and eager to resolve the problem.

⁵¹ B.K. Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second* (New Delhi: Viking, 1997), 416-19.

⁵² Speech to the Defence College (undated, 1969), Speeches/Writings/Articles, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML; Rostow to B.K. Nehru, 8 July 1985, Subject File 10, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML. Rostow strongly disagreed, citing Johnson's foreign policy experience under Eisenhower.

⁵³ Kristin Ahlberg argues that Johnson wished to force India into agricultural reforms; Kristin Ahlberg, "'Machiavelli With a Heart': The Johnson Administration's Food for Peace Program in India, 1965-1966," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 4 (2007): 665-701. Other perspectives are more ambivalent; see Ch. 13 of Barry Riley, *The Political History of American Food Aid: An Uneasy Benevolence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Tellingly, Johnson asked Nehru to come directly to him for assistance with any future food aid disruptions.⁵⁴ Though Nehru characterized the meeting as a fruitful one, the implications were not lost on him: Johnson was taking direct control of food aid to India and demanded, at the very least, a channel to influence Indian policy in return. Indeed, the illusion that Johnson took no hand in foreign policy was quickly dispelled; by 1965 it was an open secret in Washington that no foreign policy decisions – particularly concerning India – were taken without Johnson’s personal consent.⁵⁵

Nehru’s strategy in response was twofold. On one hand, he was prepared to act as such a conduit for Johnson, especially in instances where Johnson’s desires matched his own. Though he disliked the short tether, he was often able to use the threat of food aid stoppage to buttress his own arguments on Indian policy. Nehru’s uncle, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, had died in 1964, and his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, had passed the External Affairs portfolio to a new Foreign Minister, Swaran Singh, with whom B.K. Nehru had little connection; Johnson’s short tether provided leverage for Nehru’s suggestions. In one memorable example, Nehru flew to Canada, in 1965 to convince Shastri, who was attending a conference, not to go to war with Pakistan amidst intensifying border skirmishes. Receiving a lukewarm response, he returned to Washington, where Dean Rusk saw him on short notice, communicated America’s desire for peace in South Asia, and provided a police escort to the airport so that he could return to Canada and pass the message to Shastri, who was much more receptive given American pressure.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Johnson’s personal oversight of the short tether excluded the NSC and State Department from his decision-making. Many of his advisors were, in fact, opposed

⁵⁴ Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 433

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 426-7

to the short tether; B.K. Nehru used that opposition to his advantage. As the Cold War in Asia grew in complexity, amidst the growing Vietnam conflict and the Sino-Soviet split, Nehru continued to make versions of the case for Indian aid that he had made during the Kennedy years – namely that the short tether would only push India towards the Soviet Union. When Johnson proved intractable, he made the argument separately to Komer and the National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy.⁵⁷ His audience were, as Kennedy appointees, familiar with and sympathetic to the argument, and they took up the Indian cause with Johnson with a vigour that was surprising even to Nehru; decades later, researching for his autobiography in the Johnson Library, Nehru was surprised to find a note from Bundy to Komer: “The President’s in a good mood, let’s try again on the Indian issue.”⁵⁸

Their opposition to the short tether, drawing from Nehru’s arguments, was pointed enough that Johnson complained to his Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, that he received “fourteen memos from everybody in the government” when he tightened his food aid policy: “it starts with [Ambassador to India Chester] Bowles and then it goes to State...”⁵⁹ Though Johnson would persist in micromanaging Indian aid, despite Nehru’s mistaken assumptions of his foreign policy indifference, millions tons of food were shipped to India during 1965 and 1966 despite the short tether, a feat for which Nehru modestly claimed much credit.⁶⁰ Even with a President less friendly to India than Kennedy, playing America against the Soviet Union paid off for India’s aid prospects.

Much of his success in that endeavour owed itself to his press strategy, through which he would put the lessons learned during the MiG affair to good use. “My foreign policy is the

⁵⁷ Komer Memorandum, Document 195, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXV, South Asia; Paul Y. Hammond, *LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1992), 75.

⁵⁸ Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 467

⁵⁹ Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 706-7.

⁶⁰ Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 432.

Great Society,” Johnson once boasted to Nehru, explicitly linking his foreign endeavours to his domestic platform of fighting hunger, poverty, and racial injustice.⁶¹ This gave Nehru an opening to attack the short tether in the public arena by framing Johnson’s failure to aid India as symptomatic of his weak commitment to his domestic agenda. Newspapers in both nations had already noticed that Nehru was no longer a regular presence at the White House.⁶² Amidst a second major stoppage of food shipments in 1966, Nehru left Washington for New York City with his wife, telling the press that in light of Johnson’s intransigence there was nothing an ambassador could do in Washington.⁶³ The *New York Times*, with whom Nehru had a good relationship, responded with an article describing Johnson’s decision to tighten aid as a “serious error”; the *Washington Post* followed suit two weeks later.⁶⁴

Nehru had chosen his timing well. Johnson was coming under attack from critics within the Democratic Party on similar lines. Just weeks later, in December 1966, the prominent Democratic Senator and left-wing stalwart George McGovern publicly accused Johnson of “failing to match his words with deeds”, questioning Johnson’s promise to end world hunger given the stoppages of food shipments to India.⁶⁵ Nehru had chosen the specific press strategy well, too; this time, the emphasis was not on India’s need for American assistance, but rather Johnson’s failure to live up to his promises, and to Kennedy’s ideals. Such a message was apt; amidst an intensifying Vietnam conflict and domestic polarization, Johnson wanted to avoid further attacks. Before matters could go further, Johnson summoned Nehru to Washington; all smiles, he promised to personally ensure that food shipments would go through.⁶⁶ Nehru’s

⁶¹ Memorandum, Document 195, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXV, South Asia; on the linkage of the Great Society to foreign policy, see Kristin Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

⁶² For instance, *Chicago Daily News*, 27 October 1965; *Times of India*, 3 February 1966; *Miami Herald*, 20 October 1966; *Washington Post*, 17 December 1966

⁶³ Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 465-6.

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, 29 November 1966; *Washington Post*, 11 December 1966

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, 6 December 1966

⁶⁶ Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 466-7; Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 257.

media blitz had been successful enough that even Johnson's 19-year old daughter, Luci, had read the editorials and asked her father whether he would let the Indians starve.⁶⁷ For now, at least, the answer was 'no'.

Unfortunately, Johnson and the Democratic Party's loss of support, would have long-term repercussions for India; Johnson would go on to withdraw from the 1968 Presidential race. His Vice-President, Nehru's friend Hubert Humphrey, would be soundly defeated by the Republican nominee, President Eisenhower's former Vice-President Richard Nixon – to the considerable detriment of Indo-American relations. For the moment, though, Nehru's strategy worked, his targeted press initiative forcing Johnson to temporarily concede. The press strategies he used during the MiG affair and the short tether era evince his broad understanding of his discretion as ambassador, going far beyond the limits of strict diplomatic propriety in his fight for India's interests.

⁶⁷ Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 467

2: Chester Bliss Bowles

2.1: Mediating and Moderating

As America's Ambassador to India, Chester Bowles had a task that was both similar, and very different from, B.K. Nehru's. Where Nehru was charged with securing economic aid for India, Bowles, ostensibly on the other side of the table, was tasked with determining India's aid requirements and passing the American government's concerns to B.K. Nehru's superiors. Yet Bowles, like Nehru, had to contend with factions within the United States that were leery of deeper Indo-American ties, in particular the pro-Soviet elements within the Indian government that had opposed Nehru's efforts during his tenures as economic envoy and Ambassador in Washington.

Bowles's own background as a veteran Democrat, and former Governor of Connecticut, proved a mixed blessing; while it lent him invaluable political experience and contacts, it also marked him as a politician whose best was behind him. His previous significant appointment – Undersecretary of State – was marked by conflict between his liberal, pro-foreign aid stance and the more conservative bent of his State Department colleagues, one of whom devoted entire pages of his autobiography to an unflattering account of Bowles's brief year in the position.⁶⁸ Kennedy, despite some personal affection for Bowles, consequently reappointed him roving ambassador to developing countries, and eventually to a six-year stint in New Delhi, a move widely seen as a demotion considering that Bowles had already served in that position a decade previously.⁶⁹

Bowles's activities in New Delhi were largely shaped by his particular ideal of diplomacy. Even by the standards of the pro-aid faction in America – including a number of

⁶⁸ George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 169-71.

⁶⁹ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles*, 192-211; see also Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46-8.

Bowles's Democratic acquaintances, like the Kennedys and Senator William J. Fulbright – Bowles was radical in his internationalist vision of global unity, held together by American economic aid.⁷⁰ While this was a vision B.K. Nehru himself found useful while Bowles was in Washington, it gradually alienated Bowles's superiors, leading to his assignment to India.

These circumstances behind Bowles's move were more than a blow to his career aspirations; they proved a significant hindrance to ambassadorial work. Bowles had long been active in formulating America's policy towards South and Southeast Asia, and he hoped to continue shaping America's stance towards India even from New Delhi, through his recommendations to the State Department. Yet he had left behind in the United States government a group of policymakers who had wearied of his constant restatement of his points; Harris Wofford, then advising Kennedy on civil rights, noted that Bowles was "excluded" from the inner circle quickly since "everyone knew what his position would be, and his long arguments... would be boring".⁷¹ The phrasing was apt; Bowles's new Ambassadorship removed him from meetings of the National Security Council, thus excluding him from the behind-the-scenes decision making of American foreign policy. Even his assignment as Ambassador, though it removed him from Washington, proved somewhat unpopular: Dean Rusk would later write of his preference for experienced career diplomats over political appointees for important ambassadorships, citing Bowles as his example for the latter.⁷²

Bowles therefore left Washington without many allies in the State Department for his vision. Nevertheless, his arrival in 1963 coincided with a high point in Indo-American relations, with the memory of American assistance during the 1961 China crisis fresh in the Indian conscious. There were signs that Kennedy hoped to exploit that goodwill to deepen

⁷⁰ See Chester Bowles Interview, 11 November 1969, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, LBJL, and Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 379-91.

⁷¹ Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 343. Wofford himself disliked Bowles even though he leaned similarly left.

⁷² Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 527.

America's military ties with India, to create a counterweight to Communist China's expansion. Such a prospect had often been previously ignored in favour of the robust Pakistani-American military relationship that Bowles himself had attempted to hinder in its early days, during the Truman administration.⁷³ There now appeared the very real possibility that Washington favoured an Indian alliance.

In April 1963, a few months before Bowles flew to India, he was present at a Cabinet-level meeting about India. Kennedy and Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara were enthusiastic enough about the prospect of using India to counter China that they agreed to proceed independently of the United Kingdom – in concert with which America usually acted in South Asia – and even resolved to inform Pakistan that they felt it necessary to “go ahead with [Jawaharlal] Nehru” despite the lack of foreseeable resolution for the Kashmir problem.⁷⁴ Dean Rusk himself travelled to India and Pakistan shortly afterward to speak with the leaders of both nations about containing China, part of the objective of which was to explain to Pakistan the necessity of American military and economic aid to India.⁷⁵ A week earlier, Kennedy had received an acerbic letter from Jawaharlal Nehru questioning the United States' objectivity in their attempts to mediate the Kashmir dispute; Rusk's memorandum was conspicuously conciliatory, emphasizing the need to smooth over the “misunderstanding” given the importance of securing Jawaharlal Nehru's cooperation.⁷⁶ Bowles therefore had good reason to believe that, despite his demotion, he could nudge the two countries closer together. His primary obstacles were India's own reluctance to deepen the relationship, and Congressional doubts about the reliability of Jawaharlal Nehru and his government as allies – a concern the

⁷³ McMahan, *The Cold War*, 110-12.

⁷⁴ Komer Memorandum, 25 April 1963, Document 283, FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia; see also National Security Council Meetings, 1964, no. 514: 9 May 1963, NSF, JFKL

⁷⁵ Rusk Memorandum, 25 April 1963, Document 282, FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia

⁷⁶ The letter is described in Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Volume 3: 1956-1964* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 259.

State Department shared. Much of Bowles's function was therefore to assuage such doubts and ensure a good working relationship between the two nations.

As a visible pro-India voice in the United States, and a beloved former ambassador, Bowles's arrival in New Delhi in July 1963 was popularly acclaimed enough that Air India erected a billboard displaying a caricatured Bowles playing cricket, captioned "Chester Bowles Again".⁷⁷ Yet the encouraging signs Bowles had seen in Washington masked the growing cracks in the Indo-American relationship. America had recently agreed to fund a new long-range transmitter for All-India Radio, a fixture of Indian public life, in return for airtime that America could use to broadcast to Southeast Asia. On Bowles's arrival in New Delhi, he was informed that factions within the Congress were opposing the deal as a violation of the principles of non-alignment.⁷⁸ Bowles noted in his diary the considerable effort he spent persuading Indian policymakers of the necessity of the deal, but to little avail. Caving under pressure from within his party, Jawaharlal Nehru reneged, publicly distancing himself from a project he had once enthusiastically supported. The agreement was abandoned, to the frustration of Bowles and State Department.⁷⁹

The entire affair, an unfortunate start to Bowles's ambassadorship, made it apparent to observers in both New Delhi and Washington that the goodwill America had purchased itself within the Indian government with its generous assistance during the China conflict, just a year earlier, was rapidly fading. While Krishna Menon himself had fallen from grace, a faction suspicious of increasing American influence remained a strong force within the Congress. Kennedy and Rusk had acknowledged the importance of Jawaharlal Nehru's cooperation as

⁷⁷ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles*, 242

⁷⁸ Chester Bowles note (undated, January 1963), Box 392, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, 4 September 1963

the key to collaboration with India. The aging Prime Minister's inconstant stances, however, only alienated Bowles's superiors.

Bowles's first task would be to present the desires of both sides in as palatable a manner as possible. His early correspondence is illuminating. In September, he wrote to Kennedy with enclosing a survey conducted in Bombay that revealed public admiration of Kennedy after the 1962 conflict, slyly noting that it had been organized by a figure "associated with Krishna Menon" an attempt to both flatter the President and reaffirm that the pro-Soviet faction of the Congress had considerably weakened.⁸⁰ Conversely, his communications with Jawaharlal Nehru often involved moderating India's stance on Pakistan. This was important enough to Bowles's efforts that when the Prime Minister criticized the Pakistani-American relationship in the Lok Sabha, Bowles added his own advisory note urging restraint to a harshly-worded letter from Kennedy.⁸¹ Bowles privately opined to his government that Indo-Pakistani relations were unlikely to improve even should the United States attempt to mediate, or tie further aid to a thaw. Nevertheless, India's public anti-Pakistan rhetoric damaged the Indian cause in Congress, which already viewed the non-aligned nation with a jaundiced eye.⁸² That attitude extended to America's foreign policy apparatus; Komer noted that the United States' intelligence agencies were "perennially scared" of losing their investments in Pakistan, particularly America's strategically vital Peshawar base, even at risk of alienating India.⁸³

Securing economic and military aid for India in such an environment was difficult, and Bowles found it necessary to subtly moderate Indian demands to match what Washington was willing to give. In October 1963, Bowles sent Jawaharlal Nehru a lengthy memorandum containing his suggestions for India's ongoing rural development projects, in which he

⁸⁰ Bowles to John F. Kennedy, 9 September 1963, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁸¹ Bowles to Jawaharlal Nehru, 16 August 1963, Box 334, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁸² Bowles to Rusk, 30 July 1963, Document 313, FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia

⁸³ Komer Memorandum, 17 July 1963, Document 311, FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia

offhandedly, but frequently, mentioned the quantum of American aid he believed India should request; the numbers, naturally, originated from confidential White House discussions he had been privy to before his arrival in India.⁸⁴ He dealt similarly with a setback in relations around the project to create an industrial city, to house India's largest steel plant, at Bokaro. The initiative was the brainchild of Jawaharlal Nehru, who hoped to secure American funding, but Congress was reluctant to authorize the money after the reversal of the Voice of America deal and other problems in the Indo-American relationship; Bokaro rapidly became a sticking point in Kennedy's intercessions with Congress.⁸⁵ When Bowles visited Jawaharlal Nehru to deliver a letter from Kennedy, he offhandedly explained that progress on Kashmir could ease the tensions produced by the Bokaro and Voice of America affairs. Bowles expected little improvement on Kashmir, but his hints to the Prime Minister about the Bokaro problem had been understood; shortly afterward, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been monitoring Congressional opposition through B.K. Nehru, withdrew India's request for assistance with Bokaro.⁸⁶

The prudent gesture implied a certain tractability on Jawaharlal Nehru's part that assuaged doubts in the State Department. The loosening of tensions opened the door to the military agreements Bowles had been lobbying for since his first term in New Delhi, and about which he had deluged Washington with telegrams in preceding months.⁸⁷ Bowles flew to Washington in November 1963 to convince Kennedy in person, and though Komer recommended that Kennedy lower Bowles's expectations to realistic levels, some sort of military package seemed certain.⁸⁸ Kennedy promised that the NSC, with Bowles's participation, would discuss the specifics on his return from a cross-country tour, ending in

⁸⁴ Bowles to Jawaharlal Nehru, 30 October 63, Box 334, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁸⁵ Transcript, telephone conversation between Kennedy and George Ball, 19 August 1963, Dictation Belt 26A.3, Telephone Records, JFKL; on Bokaro, see Engerman, *The Price of Aid*, 229-34.

⁸⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru to John F. Kennedy, 28 Aug 1963, Box 334, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁸⁷ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles*, 255

⁸⁸ Komer Memorandum, 12 November 1963, Box 118, President's Office Files, JFKL

Dallas, Texas.⁸⁹ Bowles, elated, remained in Washington sounding out key officials. He may have been too optimistic; B.K. Nehru reported to New Delhi that senior State Department officials showed little enthusiasm for giving India the fighter aircraft it wanted at a 4 November meeting.⁹⁰ However, there was definite movement towards some package; preliminary discussions on the magnitude of military assistance – an encouraging sign for Bowles – were underway when Bowles heard of Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas.

⁸⁹ Chester Bowles Diary Entry, 14 November 1963, Box 392, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁹⁰ B.K. Nehru to Y.D. Gundevia, 14 November 1963, Subject File 17, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML.

2.2: Connections, Expertise, and Ambassadorial Leverage

“Kennedy”, Bowles wrote in his diary when he heard the news, “never really understood what I wanted to do.”⁹¹ The laconic statement belied a larger problem. While Bowles had not always seen eye to eye with the late President, he had in Kennedy a superior with whom he had a longstanding familiarity, and who was committed to a good Indo-American relationship. His successor, Vice-President Lyndon Baines Johnson, was a Southern Democrat whose relationship with the Kennedys was rocky; a Congressperson later recalled that Johnson was “snubbed” and mocked by the President.⁹² Bowles felt it impossible to assume that the new administration would adopt Kennedy’s foreign policy agenda.

With the military aid program on indefinite hold after the assassination, Bowles returned to New Delhi with the feeling that Rusk and the State Department were unlikely to support his agenda, and without any connection to the new President.⁹³ As it turned out, Rusk and McNamara recommended to Johnson a “modified Bowles proposal” for military assistance on a timeframe that, while cautious, would nonetheless open the door to closer Indo-American military cooperation.⁹⁴ Johnson’s administration also found the time to approve the planned visit to India of General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to investigate India’s military needs.⁹⁵

Despite these encouraging developments, Bowles complained bitterly to his predecessor, Galbraith, that he was being impeded by Rusk.⁹⁶ He believed that his allies lay elsewhere – though Johnson was President, the surviving Kennedys remained a powerful

⁹¹ Chester Bowles Diary Entry, 22 November 1963, Box 392, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁹² Thomas P. O’Neill, *Man of the House: The Life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O’Neill* (New York: Random House, 1987), 182.

⁹³ Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, 482-6

⁹⁴ Footnote to Bundy Memorandum, 11 December 1963, Document 342, FRUS 1961-1963, Volume XIX, South Asia; see also Komer Memorandum, 20 December 1963, National Security Files, Country File: India, Vol. I, LBJL

⁹⁵ Rusk Memorandum, 16 January 1963, Document 3, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXV, South Asia

⁹⁶ Bowles to Galbraith, 20 September 1963, Box 330, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

political force given the national, and indeed international, adulation of John F. Kennedy in the wake of his death. Bowles was aware that the Kennedy brothers, Robert Kennedy in particular, had long disliked him for having gone on public record in 1961 with his opposition to the Bay of Pigs operation.⁹⁷ He nevertheless hoped to draw on their shared nostalgia, and common opposition to Johnson, to advance his policies with their influence.

In January 1964 Bowles, wrote to Robert Kennedy, then Attorney General, with his condolences and the suggestion that “Bobby” take a trip outside America to soothe his grief – perhaps to India, which had not seen a high-ranking American official in years, excepting Maxwell Taylor’s visit.⁹⁸ Though he received a form letter in reply, he repeated the request shortly after. He simultaneously wrote to Jackie Kennedy, enclosing a catalogue of India’s memorial services for the late President; knowing she had enjoyed her last trip to India, he hoped she would agree to another visit.⁹⁹ A Kennedy visiting India while John F. Kennedy’s assassination was fresh in the global conscious would have flattered Indian politicians and given the world the impression of a strengthening Indo-American relationship, one useful to Bowles’s purposes.

Bowles also asked Robert Kennedy to intercede with the State Department, which he remained convinced was sabotaging his efforts; in July, he complained of their “baffling” refusal to allow him to invite Jim Patton of the National Farm Union to India to consult on the agricultural crisis.¹⁰⁰ From the third Kennedy brother, Senator Edward Kennedy, he requested support in Congress for an Indo-American Foundation he hoped would bring the two countries closer together.¹⁰¹ While these gestures were not substantive to his larger goals of economic

⁹⁷ See Ch. 2 of Robert Dallek, *Camelot’s Court: Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York: Harper, 2013); National Security Council Meetings, 1961: no. 478, 22 April 1961, NSF, JFKL

⁹⁸ Bowles to Robert Kennedy, 10 January 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

⁹⁹ Bowles to Robert Kennedy, 5 February 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹⁰⁰ Bowles to Robert Kennedy, 24 July 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹⁰¹ Bowles to Edward Kennedy, 25 March 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

and military assistance to India, they would have given his more important proposals the appearance of the Kennedys' support, a buffer he believed he needed against a President and State Department on whose support he felt unable to rely.

Bowles understood that the larger initiatives he had hoped for – particularly the military assistance package he had hoped Kennedy would approve – would nevertheless need Johnson's support. The new administration, however, seemed much less interested in South Asia than Kennedy had been; when America refused to aid either side during the brief Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, it signified not a careful neutrality but rather a broader disengagement from South Asia.¹⁰² The Johnson White House was far too preoccupied with the quagmire that the Vietnam conflict had become. This Vietnam preoccupation even had actively deleterious effects on Indo-American relations, with Johnson often displeased with India's public statements as a member of the International Control Commission in Vietnam; on one occasion, Johnson demanded that India donate a mobile ambulance team to the American forces in Vietnam as a token of support.¹⁰³ Bowles had argued for years that Indian assistance was the key to resolving Southeast Asian problems; now, the lack of said support seemed poised to undo his efforts entirely.

Yet Bowles saw opportunity in Johnson's Vietnam endeavours: the more important Vietnam became to the administration, the greater the potential value of India's role in Southeast Asia. There were encouraging signs from the Indian side. Jawaharlal Nehru had died in May 1964, and with him intractable non-alignment; his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, seemed inclined to cooperation on Vietnam. Though Bowles had estimated a fifty-fifty chance of India acceding to Johnson's request for a token ambulance team, he easily convinced Shastri

¹⁰² McGarr, *The Cold War in South Asia*, 345-63.

¹⁰³ Sumit Ganguly, "U.S.-India Relations During the Johnson Years," in *The Hope and the Reality: U.S.-Indian Relations From Roosevelt to Reagan*, edited by Harold A. Gould and Sumit Ganguly (New York: Westview, 1992): 81-91.

in person, playing off the new Prime Minister's concern over the state of Indo-American relations.¹⁰⁴ Shastri went further at Bowles's urging, offering Johnson salient information concerning North Vietnamese preparations for American air raids, gleaned through India's position on the International Control Commission.¹⁰⁵ Bowles believed Johnson would reciprocate active Indian support in Vietnam with the military and economic package that was being considered before Kennedy's death.

Bowles's history uniquely qualified him to advance such suggestions. Before and during his time in the Kennedy White House, he familiarized himself with the geopolitical situation in Southeast Asia, with such enthusiasm that his frequent briefings on Vietnam became an inside joke in the White House.¹⁰⁶ Though Kennedy often dismissed his suggestions, the State Department acknowledged his understanding of the issues around the Vietnam conflict.¹⁰⁷ As Johnson's foreign policy increasingly centred around Vietnam, Bowles believed he could win leverage on South Asian issues by offering assistance on Southeast Asia. In mid-1964, Bowles wrote directly to Johnson, acting "beyond his jurisdiction" to offer salient advice concerning the South Vietnamese factions America was contending with.¹⁰⁸ Johnson seemingly forgave the impertinence, since Bowles followed with detailed political suggestions for the emerging American presence in Vietnam, while slipping his advocacy of India into his advice; alongside his suggestions on Vietnam, he noted the importance of preventing left-wing insurgencies from subsuming other Asian republics, segueing into the Indian military assistance plan Kennedy had been due to approve.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Rakove, *Nonaligned World*, 231.

¹⁰⁵ Mark A. Lawrence, "The Limits of Peacemaking: India and the Vietnam War, 1962-1968," in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968*, edited by Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004): 231-59.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory T. D'Auria, "A Connecticut Cassandra in Camelot: Chester Bowles, John F. Kennedy and the Vietnam War," *Connecticut History Review* no. 28 (1987): 39-57; Ball, *The Past*, 169-71.

¹⁰⁷ See Ch. 5 of Dauer, *North-South Mind*

¹⁰⁸ Bowles to Johnson, 19 May 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹⁰⁹ Bowles to Johnson, Undated (Late 1964), Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

Bowles would have liked to present India as a bulwark against Communism in Asia should South Vietnam fall, but he had learned from the consequences of his public disagreements with a President during the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Despite his growing pessimism, his public statements, even within the Embassy, expressed support for the war.¹¹⁰ He thereby won enough credibility that Komer grudgingly admitted he had “good”, if imperfect, ideas.¹¹¹ Unfortunately for Bowles, however, India quickly lost interest in cooperating on Vietnam. An illness meant Shastri never returned from negotiating with Pakistan at Tashkent in 1965. Bowles was unimpressed by his successor, Jawaharlal Nehru’s daughter Indira Gandhi, writing to Robert Kennedy that she was a “disappointment”.¹¹² Though he criticized her domestic policies, his dissatisfaction stemmed partly from her refusal to assist America in Vietnam, a grave setback to Bowles’s objectives after the brief period of cooperation with Shastri.

Since serious military cooperation looked increasingly unlikely, Bowles smoothly switched his advice to the White House on Vietnam onto economic matters, using his “special channel” to Johnson to advocate sweeping land reforms and rural infrastructure development to counter Communist infiltration in South Vietnam.¹¹³ While Bowles believed in the efficacy of such projects, it did not escape Johnson’s notice that the suggested plan resembled Bowles’s suggested measures for American economic assistance to India; large-scale aid to Vietnam to counter Communist influence would have been precedent for a similar approach in India. Johnson sharply reminded Bowles that India did not accede to American demands in the same way South Vietnam did, pointedly expressing his hope that Bowles was “equally frank with our Indian friends” about their intensifying public criticism of the Vietnam War.¹¹⁴ The rebuke,

¹¹⁰ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles*, 310; Interview with Embassy staffer William Weathersby, Box 398, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹¹¹ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles*, 309.

¹¹² Bowles to Robert Kennedy, 25 November 1966, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹¹³ Bowles to Johnson, 27 February 1967, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹¹⁴ Johnson to Bowles, 19 July 1967, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

while mild, reminded Bowles that Johnson tolerated India's independence in international matters far less than Kennedy had. Using Vietnam to solicit aid to India was, unfortunately, futile if India was unwilling to play along.

Bowles knew, further, that his credibility at the White House had suffered during the Kennedy years; any attention to his suggestions would require him to demonstrate his utility to the administration in as many ways as possible. His status as a veteran Democrat proved useful in that endeavour. The 1964 Presidential election was a referendum on Johnson, and even Bowles's bitterest critics had to acknowledge how invaluable his support had been during Kennedy's 1960 campaign.¹¹⁵ In June 1964 Bowles wrote to Johnson, who had begun campaigning in earnest, offering his advice on modifying the Democratic Party's 1960 platform, "much of which" he claimed to have personally written.¹¹⁶ Though he certainly exaggerated his contribution, the reception was positive enough that, less than two months later, Bowles felt able to suggest to Johnson that he choose Hubert Humphrey, the Senator from Minnesota (and a close friend of B.K. Nehru's), as his running mate. Humphrey, naturally, was of the same liberal persuasion as Bowles, who noted that he was globally identified with the "Roosevelt-Truman-Kennedy-Johnson effort" to work with the developing world.¹¹⁷

Tying domestic politics to foreign policy was a risky strategy, but Bowles's invocation of the popular legacies of Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy seems to have worked; upon Johnson's sweeping victory in November 1964, Bowles was asked to contribute to drafts of his inaugural speech.¹¹⁸ Bowles's contributions sufficiently endeared him to Johnson that the newly-elected President extended an ideological olive branch by personally asking him to draft a speech on foreign aid. Bowles did so, taking the opportunity to recommend that America

¹¹⁵ Schaffer, *Chester Bowles* 167-9

¹¹⁶ Bowles to Johnson, 22 June 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹¹⁷ Bowles to Johnson, 3 August 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹¹⁸ Bowles to Johnson, 24 December 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

focus its foreign aid efforts on countries that held out “the greatest promise” – such as India.¹¹⁹ The personal line to Johnson that Bowles kept open through his efforts would prove useful when Bowles found it necessary to criticize the short tether. Bowles called the policy “self-defeating” and used his personal line to Johnson to send urgent requests for food aid amidst the worsening Indo-American relationship of 1966.¹²⁰

Despite Bowles’s best efforts, the Indo-American relationship fell into a deteriorating spiral; the greater Johnson’s forbearance in economic aid, the more India turned to the Soviet Union, and consequently the greater Johnson’s ire.¹²¹ Bowles informed the State Department that given significant aid during India’s economic troubles, the absence of similar American assistance was conspicuous; anti-America factions within the Congress, triumphantly argued that ‘when the chips are down’ the Soviet Union had come through with aid where America had not.¹²² Yet matching gestures from Johnson were not forthcoming so long as the Indo-Soviet relationship continued to improve. While Bowles had expended no little effort to improve India’s relationship with America, he understood that a break in the Indo-Soviet relationship would make Johnson much more amenable to his ideas.

Bowles received his opportunity in March 1967, when Svetlana Alliluyeva, youngest child of former Soviet leader Josef Stalin, arrived at his Embassy requesting asylum. Following the death of Indian paramour Alliluyeva wished to leave the Soviet Union for good. Bowles cabled Washington with his intention to grant her a visa and see her out of the country, absent the State Department’s express refusal.¹²³ He suspected that refusal was likely; indeed, Foy Kohler, the State Department’s Soviet expert, fresh off a stint as Ambassador in Moscow,

¹¹⁹ Bowles to Johnson, 11 January 1964, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹²⁰ Bowles to Rusk, 4 September 1966, Box 336; Bowles to Johnson, 9 November 1966, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML.

¹²¹ McMahon, *The Cold War*, 314-17.

¹²² Bowles to Rusk, 4 September 1966, Box 336, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹²³ Memorandum attached, Bowles to Rostow, 18 March 1967, Document 208, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union

shouted to “throw that woman out of the Embassy at once!” when apprised of the situation.¹²⁴ Bowles, however, had already sent her to the airport, from where she flew to Rome. Clearly Bowles intended to present his superiors, and the Indian and Soviet governments, with a *fait accompli* that he justified days later in a long memorandum to the State Department. However, his reasoning – that Alliluyeva, if turned away, would have caused an undesirable press scandal – appeared somewhat thin.¹²⁵ Though sympathetic to Alliluyeva, he also hoped her undetected departure from India would perturb the Indo-Soviet relationship driving India closer to the United States as a consequence.

Bowles had correctly assumed the Soviet government would be displeased; he soon received a sharply-worded protest note from the Indian Foreign Secretary, C.S. Jha, that had been sent under Soviet pressure.¹²⁶ There remained the danger, however, that the affair would impact America’s own relationship with the Soviet Union. Bowles hastened to send his assistant, Richard Celeste, to dine with the Soviet Ambassador’s assistant and gauge the Soviet government’s mood. Celeste reported, to Bowles’s satisfaction, that while the Soviet Union was charging India with “conspiring” with America to spirit Alliluyeva away, they thought it best to let the matter “die down” where Soviet-American relations were concerned.¹²⁷ Bowles transmitted Celeste’s report to Rusk and Richard Helms, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, in his words, assuring them the affair would not harm Soviet-American diplomacy.¹²⁸ The report mollified Washington enough that Bowles escaped censure for his risky endeavour. The effect on the Indo-Soviet relationship, however, was negligible; the two countries continued growing closer. Bowles’s attempts to use his personal expertise to make himself

¹²⁴ Preface to Rosemary Sullivan, *Stalin’s Daughter: The Extraordinary and Tumultuous Life of Svetlana Alliluyeva* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

¹²⁵ Bowles to Rostow, 18 March 1967, Document 208, FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union

¹²⁶ Bowles to C.S. Jha, 10 March 1967, Box 332, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹²⁷ Richard Celeste memo, 1 April 1967, Box 328 Chester Bowles Papers, SML

¹²⁸ Bowles to Rusk, info Helms, 11 Mar 1967, Box 336, Chester Bowles Papers, SML

useful to Johnson worked in some ways – he was appointed to lead a delegation to Cambodia in 1968 in recognition of his Southeast Asia expertise – but the impact on Indo-American relations was less significant than he had hoped.

Conclusion

In November 1980, two days after the American Presidential election, Indira Gandhi personally wrote to “Bijju” – her cousin, B.K. Nehru – asking for a favour. Having returned to power after three years, Gandhi found India diplomatically adrift. The brief 1970s zenith of Indo-Soviet cooperation had faded, but relations with the United States remained frosty.¹²⁹ Gandhi hoped that an overture to President-elect Ronald Reagan would lay a foundation for better Indo-American ties, but Reagan had refused to see any foreign dignitaries before his inauguration. Gandhi believed B.K. Nehru, travelling to America as her personal envoy, could use his connections to track down Reagan and deliver a message of goodwill.¹³⁰

Basing himself in the Indian Consulate in New York, as during his time as economic envoy, Nehru proceeded to contact old acquaintances from his ambassadorial days. Within the week, he reached the right people; by November 20, he was in Washington, D.C., being introduced to Reagan in what he described as a fruitful interaction.¹³¹ An old friend, former World Bank President and prolific presidential advisor John J. McCloy, had arranged for him to see Reagan even before the emissaries of stronger American allies, the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.¹³²

B.K. Nehru’s success was a testament to the personal style of diplomacy in which he was extremely adept, and the persistence of the personal connections he cultivated during his years in diplomacy. Indira Gandhi’s to foster good relations with the United States, however, was symptomatic of a different trend: the deterioration of the Indo-American relationship during, and since, the ambassadorial tenures of B.K. Nehru and Chester Bowles. The tense

¹²⁹ Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 363-5.

¹³⁰ Indira Gandhi to B.K. Nehru, 4 November 1980, Subject File 45, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

¹³¹ B.K. Nehru to Indira Gandhi, 20 November 1980, Subject File 45, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML; Nehru, *Nice Guys*, 582-3.

¹³² B.K. Nehru to Indira Gandhi, 25 November 1980, Subject File 45, B.K. Nehru Papers, NMML

relationship of the Johnson years worsened precipitously under his successor, Richard Nixon. Things improved little enough over the following decade that a 1982 report to the Committee on Foreign Relations described the relationship as at its worst since its historic low in 1971.¹³³ Gandhi's hoped not to curry special favour for India but to salvage a relationship that had shed the mutual goodwill of the Kennedy years.

It is tempting to conclude, then, that the efforts of Chester Bowles and B.K. Nehru were in vain. Such a judgment ignores the reality of their successes, particularly during the first half of the 1960s. Even as the so-called 'third world' was pressured by the Cold War powers to discard its neutrality, India received a steady flow of economic aid from America despite its parallel recourse to the Soviet Union, a position unthinkable for most nations. Even amidst the deteriorating relationship of the Johnson and Gandhi years, both diplomats were deeply involved in ensuring the smooth passage of aid – as late as 1967, during the heyday of the short tether, B.K. Nehru advised Johnson, using his experience as India's economic envoy, on persuading European nations to expand their own food aid to India.

Nor does the deteriorating relationship imply that the ambassadors' efforts were stymied by the impersonal great power ambitions described by the John Mearsheimer tradition of geopolitical theorists.¹³⁴ Indeed, both their successes and failures reveal that they operated in an environment of individuals, in which the personalities and attitudes of people such as Kennedy, Johnson, Nehru, and Gandhi were significant determinants of foreign relations. The initiative taken by the ambassadors to moderate the interactions of these personalities, adjust and influence the desires of both nations, and generally work to foster closer relations between India and the United States, may have been doomed to fail given the rapidly diverging interests

¹³³ *United States-India Relations: A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982).

¹³⁴ See Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*

of both nations during the Cold War. Yet their successes in delaying and mitigating the decline of the relationship, even when its faltering arc had become clear, were significant.

Their efforts testify to the remarkable level of agency that both ambassadors possessed, and the extent to which they, and the organizations and officials to whom they reported, were aware of their role as political actors in their own right who worked to further their own visions of the Indo-American relationship. Their independent actions in doing so – moderating statements from both sides, catalyzing and advocating for consistent levels of economic aid, interacting with and convincing legislators in both nations – ultimately rendered possible the unique position of India in the Cold War, and through foreign aid laid the foundations of the developmentalist Indian state that continues to define India today.

The political agency of Cold War ambassadors remains an understudied field, more anecdotally referenced than rigorously analysed; it is to be hoped that more diplomatic history will consider the perspectives on great power diplomacy of the ambassadors charged with executing it. This essay hoped, through a studied microhistory of two individuals, to shed light on the techniques of ambassadorial agency, and thereby reveal the paradoxes and idiosyncrasies that lie behind the curtain of global diplomacy. It demonstrates that no understanding of geopolitics is complete without a deeper look at the individual actors, with their preferences, eccentricities, and attitudes, that drove, and continue to drive, the currents of international relations.

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Bibliographic Essay

The inspiration for this senior essay came from a book I read some years ago that had been recommended to me by a friend at Yale; titled *Nice Guys Finish Second*, it was the autobiography of the Indian civil servant and diplomat Braj Kumar Nehru. Though Nehru's thoughts on his economic endeavours, and his insight into the reorganization of the Indian government after independence in 1947, were interesting, I was particularly struck by his recollections of his time as India's Ambassador in Washington, D.C. Nehru was in office in an age of instant global communications, and was in contact with his superiors in New Delhi daily, receiving replies to his missives by telegram within hours and sometimes making multiple phone calls a day to India; yet the core of his diplomatic activity appeared to centre around private meetings and discussions with American officials wherein he suggested policy, hashed out arguments, and modified his superiors' positions to fit his own visions of an Indo-American relationship. He was also extremely dismissive of many senior figures in the Indian government, in particular the left-wing element led by V.K. Krishna Menon, and detailed the efforts of his own faction to strengthen Indo-American military and economic ties, occasionally in defiance of the strict wishes of Nehru's uncle, the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Nehru's account hinted at the role of ambassadors as policymakers and opinionated actors in their own right, even in an age in which instructions from their nations could reach them instantaneously and foreign policy was increasingly centralized and controlled. Such a role challenged my naïve intuitions about modern ambassadors, and in particular of the way India handled its diplomacy during the Cold War; it conflicted with the Indian popular narrative that foreign policy in those decades was entirely formulated and executed by Jawaharlal Nehru himself. I wondered whether Nehru's account was exaggerated, and, if not, whether he represented a unique anomaly in Cold War diplomacy. During my first year at Yale, I was introduced to Yale's archives while researching for a class paper, and I learned that Yale held

the papers of alumnus Chester Bowles, who had been American's Ambassador to India while B.K. Nehru was in Washington. A quick glance through his letters revealed much the same independence and opinionated stubbornness that had marked B.K. Nehru's autobiography, a fact that did not seem like a coincidence. As I became more interested in India's unique position in the Cold War, and the diplomacy that non-alignment necessitated, I decided to work on that diplomatic game from the perspective of these diplomats, to explore the mechanisms of diplomacy between India and America and the people who carried it out.

I was fortunate enough to be able to conduct archival research in both nations. B.K. Nehru's self-compiled papers at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, which I visited over summer, were a treasure trove of information. A collection of diplomatic telegrams to and from the Indian Embassy in Washington during his tenure, which would have been nearly impossible to find in any other archive, detailed his attempts to both carry out and argue with the foreign policy decided by his superiors; particularly noticeable was his frequent use of his relationship with the Prime Minister to bypass the usual channels and directly confront Jawaharlal Nehru about India's foreign policy choices, a clear sign of his political independence. Other letters and telegrams detailed his meetings with senior Kennedy administration officials, and often Kennedy himself, highlighting the importance of these interpersonal connections in the ambassador's role. Invitations and event programmes further revealed Nehru's diverse connections in American civil society and frequent appearances in the American press, which were surprising to me considering how infrequent press coverage of ambassadors is today. I believed these seemingly innocuous documents hinted at a broader ambassadorial effort to influence American public opinion towards India. Though not all his diplomatic documents related to his tenure in Washington, they were nevertheless helpful in creating a picture of Nehru's importance in Cold War diplomacy. Most strikingly, a handwritten letter sent to Nehru over a decade after his tenure by his cousin, the then-Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi, notes her belief that only Nehru, by then retired, had the connections to secure a private meeting with the new American President-Elect, Ronald Reagan; that Nehru was in fact able to meet with Reagan privately, before any other world leaders, showed the power of his personal connections and supported my arguments concerning the importance of individual diplomatic actors in forming such connections. I was lucky to have enough time to take extensive notes, since the library did not allow photography and the line to photocopy was close to a year long.

Over Fall 2019, I visited the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, Massachusetts, and the Chester Bowles Papers here at Yale. Documents I found there complemented those from New Delhi in many ways, with the telegrams and letters being particularly useful. Bowles, like Nehru, had to contend with factions within his own government that were wary of India; his own telegrams reveal his frustrations with anti-India and pro-Pakistan officials of the State Department, and his efforts to move Indo-American relations closer, often calling on his personal connection to Kennedy in the same way Nehru invoked his own with the Indian Prime Minister. Like Nehru, Bowles also had to delve into the politics of his host nation, often butting heads with the V.K. Krishna Menon faction that both Nehru and Bowles's predecessor, John Kenneth Galbraith (whose papers I briefly looked over at the Kennedy Library) had trouble with. Further, as with Nehru, various particular incidents highlight Bowles's ability and willingness to take action on his own terms. Perhaps most famously, when the late Soviet leader Josef Stalin's daughter turned up at his embassy in New Delhi requesting asylum, Bowles informed the State Department that, absent any strong prohibition from them (and in defiance of India's wishes), he intended to secret her onto a flight out of the country; without waiting long for his superiors to respond, he proceeded without really consulting anybody, having independently judged it best.

Midway through the tenures of these ambassadors, Kennedy was assassinated; though I did not get the chance to visit the Presidential Library of Lyndon Baines Johnson, his successor, I was able to access various online records that supported the archival research I had done; recorded phone calls between B.K. Nehru and Johnson, for instance, showed the latter's tenacity in pestering Johnson, and the Congress, about food aid to India. Other online archives proved useful as well; *Foreign Relations of the United States* contained both copies of telegrams I had found in the physical archives I visited as well as some that were not in the libraries, along with, crucially, State Department memoranda and meeting notes that revealed much of what the American government thought of the actions of Bowles and B.K. Nehru, giving me the valuable opportunity to compare perspectives on both sides.

The most valuable published work I consulted was, in fact, often biographical or autobiographical; B.K. Nehru's aforementioned autobiography was immensely useful, as was Bowles's own account of his time in New Delhi, *A View From New Delhi*, and biographies of Bowles such as Howard B. Schaffer's 1993 biography *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War*. My essay is also in conversation with a body of work that has focused on India's foreign relations during the Cold War to explore the complex reality of 'non-alignment' and the diplomatic manoeuvring that it required. Some older work has been useful in sketching out the broad strokes of such foreign policy; Dennis Kux's *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States, 1941-1991* and Robert McMahon's *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* are noteworthy for their breadth and lucidity. My essay has been able to engage slightly better, however, with newer work that has focused more on the factionalism, rivalry, and politics behind India's torn and sometimes contradictory policy towards the Cold War powers; in particular, Paul McGarr's *The Cold War in South Asia* has been a useful source for Indian and American diplomatic manoeuvring during the early Cold War, and David Engerman's recent monograph *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in*

India, whilst exploring India's economic ties during the Cold War, often comments on the ideological struggle within the Indian and American governments as it does. The utility of all these historical works in providing context and information, which may not be adequately represented in the citations of the essay, was invaluable.

There is much less work on the theory of diplomacy and the ambassadorial role. Though I looked through the latest edition of the venerable *Satow's Diplomatic Practice*, it contained little of interest, and while Henry Kissinger's *Diplomacy* explored the *realpolitik* of the Cold War, the topic of my thesis, his focus is more on great power relations than on the activities of individual diplomats within it. Little to no work outside biographies has prioritized the work of individual ambassadors during the Cold War, a niche toward whose development I hope my essay will contribute.