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Anger and Reconciliation: Relations between the United States and India, 1953-1956

Tom Donahue

I am indebted to Rob Weisbrot for his kind and constructive criticism and also to Larissa Taylor, who graciously allowed me to occupy her office for the writing of this and other papers. –T. D.
When Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected President of the United States in 1952, America held its breath to see how a Republican administration would handle the Cold War. By 1952, due particularly to the costs of the Korean conflict, enthusiasm for President Harry Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s policy of “containment” of Communism reached new lows. Eisenhower had been elected with a mandate from the citizenry: to get tough on communism. The candidate and his advisers were determined to prove to the Communists that the United States had turned over a new leaf. There would be no more debacles like Korea if the Eisenhower team had any say in the matter.

John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower’s foreign policy adviser during the election campaign and the certain nominee for Secretary of State, acted much like a candidate himself during the campaign. Dulles went on the record demanding a scrapping of the policy of “containment” and a commitment to a plan for the “liberation” of Eastern Europe and other Communist-dominated regions. As Election Day neared, Dulles’s rhetoric became more and more combative: “We must abandon the ‘containment’ policy,” he thundered, “and, above all, the defeatist, appeasing mood which gives it birth.” At the time, Dulles’s remarks were seen by many people, both in the United States and abroad, as irresponsible brinkmanship. He himself regarded them as little more than what they were: campaign pledges that could be ignored once the election was won. The conduct of the Eisenhower administration later proved that there was a great difference between the militant promises Dulles made to the American people and the more cautious policy decisions that Eisenhower and Dulles implemented.

However, damage was done to the relations the United States had with some foreign nations during Eisenhower’s first term; in particular to relations with those states that had

1 Cold Warriors, p. 10.

2 Ibid., p. 12.

3 Few words are so troublesome as the word “nation.” In this essay, I will attempt to distinguish between “nation” and “state,” the latter of which is the institutions of government under which a “nation” organizes itself. I use “nation” to refer generally to a discrete group of people, with a common geographic bond, who usually regulate their
refused to align themselves with either side in the Cold War. India was a leader of these newly independent Afro-Asian countries, which were soon dubbed the “Third World” by French journalists. India had a massive population, was committed to democracy, and enjoyed a certain international moral authority as the homeland of Gandhian nonviolence. By virtue of its geographic position it controlled the southern route between the oilfields of the Middle East and the vast resources of Asia. Almost all its fellows in the family of nations held the Republic of India in high regard, particularly in light of the authoritarian practices of many of its neighboring governments. It seemed natural that the United States should cultivate the closest of relationships with India. But the attitudes, rhetoric, and decisions of the first Eisenhower administration caused a serious downturn in Indo-American relations from 1953-1956. They were finally improved by the pull of events, both domestic and global, and by personal contact and the discovery of common ground between the two countries’ leaders.

Given the history of the two nations, it seems odd that their relationship should have been chilled for such a long time. Since 1917, India and the United States had been allies in two world wars and had a shared distaste for European colonialism. The United States provided moral support for the Indian nationalists during their struggle for independence. President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points of the First World War, which emphasized American commitment to nations’ right to self-determination, struck a chord deep in the heart of many Indians who dreamed of liberty and also turned the attention of Americans to the European colonies. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt promulgated the Atlantic Charter of 1940, which reëmphasized American support for self-determination. The Atlantic Charter, in combination with FDR’s Four Freedoms, again encouraged Indian nationalists like Mohandas K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru (soon to be India’s first prime minister), and Mohammed Ali Jinnah (soon to be Pakistan’s first chief of state). They had strong hopes that aid from the United States would relationships by means of a state structure, when given the freedom to do so. Thus, I use “nation” to refer to India both before and after it had secured statehood.
put pressure on Britain to quit India after the war. India was a touchy subject for British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill, a stalwart defender of the idea of empire, but FDR saw it as extreme hypocrisy for Britain to denounce the Nazi empire and all it stood for, while at the same time doing everything possible to preserve the British empire. FDR did not mince words with Churchill: "I can't believe," he said, "that we can fight a war against fascist slavery, and at the same time not work to free people all over the world from a backward colonial policy." Roosevelt drew up and sent to Churchill a plan for India's gradual transition to dominion status. Louis Johnson, the American "representative" in New Delhi during the Second World War, was firmly on the side of the Indian nationalists. But Roosevelt could only exert so much pressure. "Churchill," says Robert Sherwood, "would see the empire in ruins and himself buried under them before he would concede the right of any American, however great and illustrious a friend, to make any suggestions as to what to do about India." Roosevelt was distracted by the management of the war and did not press the matter. By the time the American president could turn a good amount of his attention to matters other than the conduct of the war, Roosevelt had died and Harry Truman, a neophyte in world affairs, had taken office. Truman did not have the prestige or moral authority necessary to play a significant role in the de-colonization of India. Indians eventually won their independence on 15 August 1947, with the good wishes of the United States, but with little else.

India's year of independence was not a time of unqualified triumph. Religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims led the British to partition the subcontinent into two separate states: the Republic of India, a secular state with a Hindu majority, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim state which quickly established Islam as its religion. From the moment of their creation, enormous tensions existed between the two states. Millions died in the communal violence that was both cause and result of Hindus' flight to India and Muslims' flight

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4 Kux, p. 9.
5 Sherwood, p. 512.
to Pakistan. Neither government's hands were entirely clean in the communal strife. The two states almost immediately came to blows over the fate of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority province in the north of India. The history of the Kashmir conflict is too long and convoluted to go into here. Suffice it to say that both nations violated international law and both regarded control of all of Kashmir as vital to their national interests. In sum, India saw Pakistan as a militant Muslim nation which would like nothing better than to recreate the old Islamic Mughal empire in India. Pakistan saw India as a powerful and populous Hindu-dominated state, which would take any opportunity to reunify the subcontinent and crush Pakistan's sovereignty.

Despite these problems, American public opinion generally had high regard for Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister and Gandhi's right hand in the Indian independence movement. When Nehru came to visit the United States for the first time in 1949, *The Baltimore Sun* hailed him:

> He is in many ways the most impressive statesman to emerge on the post-war scene. His greatness is the greatness of a man who is neither exclusively oriental nor occidental, politician nor ascetic, highbrow nor dire poor. Pandit Nehru is part of all these things, and he speaks as a man who has straddled two worlds, two philosophies and two standards of living. The key to Nehru's greatness as a statesman is his ability to leave past conflicts behind him as he enters new situations. 

Nehru's visit, unfortunately, was not an unqualified success. Neither Truman nor Nehru was impressed by the other. But two factors insured that the United States would keep close ties with India. In 1949, the Chinese Communists had conquered the entirety of mainland China, driving Chiang Kai-Shek and his Nationalist party into exile on Taiwan. India had become the last of the Asian super-states that was free of Communist rule. Friendly relations with India became all the more imperative for the United States. Ties were further strengthened by the arrival of the new American ambassador in New Delhi. Truman's 1950 appointment of Chester Bowles, a New Deal Democrat and a friend of Third World interests, cemented relations between the U. S. and

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*28 January 1949.*
Indian governments. Relations stayed steady until it was clear that Eisenhower (and therefore Dulles) would win the 1952 presidential election. 

On March 3, 1953, Nehru wrote his biweekly letter to the Chief Ministers (Governors) of the Indian states to update them on the new denizens of the White House. "The new administration in the U. S. A.," he wrote, "has not yet come out clearly with its new policy. All that we know is that it has a certain bent of mind which does not take us toward peace." This point was essential to Nehru, the man who had originally articulated the policy of non-alignment with either of the Cold War blocs. Nehru was an ardent proponent of peace between the Western world and the Communists. He believed, and (therefore, by virtue of his immense personal prestige as the man who had led India to independence) most Indians believed, that India could not afford to become involved in the Cold War. The republic's strategic location astride the oil route would make it a battleground in the event of another world war. Furthermore, India's desperate need for development did not permit the massive buildup of arms that a military alliance with one of the ideological blocs would require. As Nehru's biographer, Sarvepalli Gopal, says:

For India, with much economic and diplomatic potential but little actual power, it was difficult to make any impact without at the same time arousing resentment in a world already riven by the cold war. ...[Nehru] emphasised from the outset that 'it was not a wise policy to put all our eggs in one basket...purely from the point of view of opportunism, if you like, a straightforward, honest policy, an independent policy, is the best.'

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1 *India and the United States*, pp. 64-67.
2 Kux, p. 99.
3 Gopal, vol. II, pp. 43-44.
Nehru also believed that alliances tended to increase militarism and make general war all the more likely. Throughout his 17-year tenure as India’s chief helmsman, Nehru encouraged other newly independent nations to join India in rejecting the adversarial principles of the Cold War. Nehru feared that a new and more belligerent administration in Washington, particularly one that espoused the “liberation” of Soviet-ruled countries, might bring the world closer to war.

Nehru must have worried that a Republican administration might be less willing to deflect the claims that Communists or fellow travellers had significant influence in India, an assertion that the more conservative Republicans in the U. S. Congress often brought up when asked for economic aid for India. Nehru himself was often the subject of these concerns. American Congressmen were well aware that Nehru had been a leader at the February 1927 International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels, Belgium. There, Nehru, already a leader of the Indian National Congress party, had rubbed shoulders with “European Communists, trade unionists, nationalists from Asia, Africa and Latin America, and secret service agents.” At this conference, Nehru “had come round to the Marxist viewpoint in its broad essentials. He agreed that imperialism and capitalism went hand in hand and that neither would disappear until both were put down. As against this, the forces opposing capitalism should be coordinated so as to strengthen each other.” Perhaps because of his sympathetic view of communism, Nehru was invited by the Soviet Ambassador to Germany to attend the November 1927 celebrations in Moscow marking the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. He was impressed by much of what he saw in Moscow. A year after his visit, Nehru wrote:

And Russia, what of her? An outcast like us from nations and much slandered...in spite of her many mistakes she stands today as the greatest opponent of imperialism and her record with nations of the East

has been just and generous...Russia goes to the East as an equal, not as a conqueror or a race-proud
superior. 13

The fact that Nehru had made such remarks in the past inflamed the conservatives in the United
States, while Senator Joseph McCarthy was at his most popular. Nehru compounded his sins in
the eyes of the American Right by declaring India’s solidarity with the (Soviet-backed)
Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. The approach Nehru took to development as Prime
Minister of India, which had the state take an important role in economic planning by means of
Five-Year Plans, was not calculated to ingratiate him to American capital and its proponents.

Nehru outlined his intended program in an article he wrote in October 1940:

[G]reater production must be allied to juster and more equitable distribution... That means a rapid growth of
industry, scientific agriculture and the social services, under more or less state control...We believe that [an
equitable world economy] cannot be based on the individual profit motive...It means a new world order,
both politically and economically, and free nations co-operating together for their own as well as the larger
good. 14

This combination of state control of the economy and a renunciation of the profit motive did not
go over well in conservative Western circles.

In his September 1953 tour of Asia, the new Majority Leader of the U. S. Senate, William
F. Knowland of California (the first Republican to hold the office in a long time), expressed
concern at India’s unwillingness to help prevent the spread of Communism to Southeast Asia.

The New York Times reported:

[The Senator said] that India appeared unwilling to join in positive steps to avert this danger. [He] clearly
was not in sympathy with this attitude, which puzzles most Americans who come here...[as a result,
Knowland] was uncertain as to further assistance in the purely economic sphere. 15

This was one of many questions raised by conservative U. S. Congressmen as to the morality of
India’s non-alignment policy. Nehru was regarded with great suspicion by those Westerners who

13 Nehru, p. 452.
15 23 September 1953.
saw the ideological conflict with international communism as an unambiguous moral binary. He had balanced too often on the razor’s edge to satisfy their demands for what an ideological non-enemy should be.

II

Nehru and his government were deeply suspicious of John Foster Dulles. Dulles had infuriated India in 1947, when he mistakenly stated that “in India Soviet Communism exercises a strong influence through the interim government.” 16 Such was not at all the case. In 1948, Stalin had in fact directed the Communist Party of India to rebel against the Provisional Government of India. Relations between the two nations were hardly amicable. 17 Dulles’s assertion occasioned much resentment and was remembered when he took over the State Department.

Dulles had been the chief negotiator of the Japanese-American Peace Treaty of 1951. India had refused to attend the treaty signing ceremony, “giving as its objections that the treaty did not give Japan a position of ‘honor, equality and contentment among the community of free nations’ and did not enable all countries ‘specifically interested in a stable peace in the Far East’ to subscribe to it sooner or later.” 18 Dulles went from bad to worse in the eyes of the Indian government because of his devout and sometimes abrasive Presbyterianism, which could spill over into fellow-feeling for the Christian leaders of some Asian governments. Before he became Secretary of State, Dulles had defended in private the authoritarian rule of American allies such as Chiang Kai-Shek and Syngman Rhee: “Well, I’ll tell you this,” said Dulles to a friend. “No matter what you say about them, these two gentlemen are modern-day equivalents of the founders of the Church. They are Christian gentlemen who have suffered for their faith. They

16 *India and the United States*, p. 74.
have been steadfast and have upheld the faith." 19 Nehru and most of the Indian elite were
disgusted by the strong-arm tactics of Chiang and Rhee. Nehru saw the two American-allied
leaders as representing "the most decadent aspects of Asia." 20 Dulles's obvious sympathy for
the two strongmen meant that the Eisenhower administration's diplomatic service was beginning
operations with a significant deficit in India's books.

From 1953-1956, American foreign-policy-makers did little to alleviate Nehru's fears.
Eisenhower and Dulles firmly believed in the value of collective security pacts. Eisenhower saw
his mandate as balancing the budget and giving the armed forces of the U. S. a "new" and more
efficient look. Mutual defense treaties lessened the costs of containment for the United States. In
their first year in office, Eisenhower and Dulles were alarmed at recent developments on the
world scene. France's counter-insurgency war against the Vietnamese Communists seemed
certain to become a debacle. The increasing power that Communist China had displayed in the
Korean struggle and instability in the oil-rich Middle East made it essential for the U. S. to have
dependable partners in Asia. The U. S. military and intelligence communities thought that
Pakistan fit the bill nicely, because of two considerations:

[1] Pakistan's near-contiguous border with the Soviet Union, and hence the desirability of establishing air
bases and intelligence-gathering facilities there, and [2] Pakistan's proximity to the Persian Gulf, and
hence its potential role in the defense of the Middle East oilfields. A Joint Chiefs of Staff study of
American interests in South Asia, dated March 24, 1949, succinctly summarized this view: the Karachi –
Lahore area of Pakistan, it noted, 'might be required as a base for air operations against [the] central USSR
and as a staging area for forces engaged in the defense or recapture of Middle East oil areas.' [In addition,
Pakistan was] the largest Muslim nation in the world; and its army, [was seen as] the best in the Middle
East." 21

Pakistan wanted to increase its military power and knew of American fears, so it played
itself up as seriously concerned about the threat from the Sino-Soviet bloc and as a loyal ally of

19 Hoopes, p. 78.
20 Gopal, p. 189.
21 McMahon, p. 818.
the free world in the Cold War. As a result, the Eisenhower administration and the Congress quickly responded to Pakistan’s request for military aid. The United States sent armor and aircraft to Pakistan.

On 10 November 1953, Nehru had warned the Pakistani government that acceptance of American military aid would mean that Pakistan had entered the Cold War:

“That means to us that the cold war has come to the very frontiers of India... This is a matter of serious consequence for us... All our problems will have to be seen in a new light... Some people imagine that a country’s policy should be what they call a “strong” policy – strong policy apparently meaning that we should go about looking as fierce and ferocious as possible, threatening everybody, telling everybody that we will punish them if they don’t behave as we want them to behave... that [idea] represents great immaturity in political thinking.”

By “some people”, Nehru obviously meant the United States government. Although Eisenhower sent a letter to Nehru explaining his decision and assuring him that any Pakistani use of American arms against India would elicit a strong American response, the government of India were not comforted. They knew too well that India, and not the USSR, was perceived by Pakistan as the real threat to Pakistani interests. After all, India saw Pakistan as the primary threat to its own security. Why should Pakistan think any differently about India? Memories of the violence of the Partition and the struggle for Kashmir were too recent and too strong. Nehru’s government undoubtedly felt that the United States was undermining its preeminent position in South Asia. Indo-American relations hit a new low. Nor were they improved by the efforts of Vice President Richard Nixon, who visited India in December 1953. Nixon reported in Washington that he believed Nehru’s anger was due to “his personal thirst for influence, if not control, over South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.” Nehru certainly did want to see India increase its influence (and, by extension, his own). But it is the tone of Nixon’s remarks that seems to conflict with the truth. Nehru was not as blatantly power-hungry as Nixon made him out to be. Reporting on Nixon’s trip, the New York Times quoted an unnamed source as saying,

\[22\] India and the United States, p. 75.
\[23\] Gopal, p. 241.
"The time has come to put an end to Washington's patience with Nehru. The U. S. should take a firmer course with Nehru who has often embarrassed the U. S." 24 Many Indians were avid readers of the Times. This disparagement of their duly elected (and fantastically popular 25) leader cannot have pleased them.

The United States had miscalculated the psychological effect that the Pakistani arms deal would have on India. Americans still did not understand the depths of the fear and dislike India had for the Pakistanis, nor did they appreciate the ramifications of a military pact between India's enemy and the most powerful nation in the world. This misunderstanding cost the United States. As a result, Nehru decided to enhance relations with America's enemies. Zhou Enlai, Communist China's representative to the world, flew to New Delhi in 1954 for talks with Nehru. India and China agreed to respect each other's sovereign territory, to coexist peacefully, to keep out of each other's internal affairs, to denounce aggression, and to act for mutual benefit. 26 The agreement to adhere to these principles, which Nehru called panchsheel (Hindi for "five principles"), bound together two nations which accounted for a third of the world's population. Nehru recommended that all Third World nations accept the principles, much to Washington's dismay. "Panchsheel," says non-alignment scholar H. W. Brands, "expressed nothing the United States could not accept, but its origins and tone implied what American leaders took as insufficient vigilance against the communist threat. They feared—rightly—that to the degree it gained widespread currency, it would erode support for collective security." 27 This fear was codified in the National Security Council's policy paper on South Asia, NSC 5409, which was approved by Eisenhower in February 1954. Though it stressed the importance of good relations with New Delhi, NSC 5409 catalogued a long list of reasons why Indo-American relations were likely to remain unfriendly for some time:

24 Kux, p. 110.
25 Gopal, p. 162.
26 India and the United States, p. 79.
27 India and the United States, p. 80.
There are serious restraints to close relations with the United States in every [South Asian nation except Pakistan. India is committed to a policy of non-alignment in the East-West struggle which often leads it to oppose Western policies. Its leaders sometimes give the impression that they are speaking for other countries of free Asia. 28

Implicit in the above statement is American resentment of India's view of itself as first among the Afro-Asian nations (and therefore a threat to U. S. hegemony). India saw its leadership of the Third World as the natural consequence of its size and position. The first Eisenhower administration, which so emphasized collective security, saw the non-aligned nations as potential allies and resented India's neutralist protection of them. Dulles angrily denounced any opposition to U. S. pact-building. A State Department memorandum of a January 1954 conversation in which Dulles urges Eisenhower to approve military aid to Pakistan offers ample evidence of his attitude to India's prime minister:

The Secretary stressed the effect, now that Nehru had raised strong public opposition [to the arms deal], of not going ahead. He said that this one act would do a great deal to establish Nehru as the leader of all South and Southeast Asia and nations in that area would henceforth be reluctant to proceed on matters with the West without Nehru's support. 29

In September 1954, Dulles hammered out the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization with the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan. In 1955, he arranged the Baghdad Pact between Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Britain. Small wonder that India felt that it, as well as the Communist countries, was being contained. The Indian army's reaction to the Baghdad pact was that "with a continuous and rapid flow of arms Pakistan would, within in a year, be in a superior military position to India." 30 Nehru saw the pacts as evidence of continued Anglo-Saxon imperialism: "The habit of the West to carry the white man's burden in the East still continue[s], even though conditions in the world and in Asia have changed greatly." 31 As something of a countermove to

28 NSC 5409, p. 2.
30 Gopal, p. 272.
31 Kux, p. 121-2.
Dulles's pact-building, Nehru initiated the Bandung (Indonesia) Conference of April 1955, to which all African and Asian nations were invited. Nehru saw the Conference as a chance to preach the benefits of non-alignment for the developing countries. Washington determined to prevent him from making a clean sweep: The Pakistanis were encouraged to plead the case of collective security. They did so, and not without success. While the Conference embraced Nehru's principles of *panchsheel*, it also recognized the right to collective defense, which directly contradicted the neutralist basis of Nehru's diplomacy. The Indian delegation was exceedingly displeased. "Pakistan made hell," grumbled one of Nehru's lieutenants.

In response to the United States's undermining of his plans, Nehru conducted a highly publicized state visit to the Soviet Union in June 1955. He became the first foreign dignitary to address the Soviet people on television and was much impressed by the Soviet Union's technical and economic progress and the reforms implemented since Stalin's death. Washington dismissed the visit in public, but an Assistant Secretary of State implied in a telegram that the visit had done much to enhance Nehru's international stature and that Washington was displeased: "Nehru was on his way to Moscow...we did not want to appear to be climbing on the bandwagon or building up Nehru too much." The administration must have been even more unhappy when Soviet Premier Nikolai Bulganin and Communist Party General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev paid a month-long visit to India in November and December of 1955. They toured the country, greeted by huge crowds wherever they went. The visit ended in Kashmir, where Khrushchev promised that the formerly neutral Soviet Union would support India on the Kashmir question. The Soviets also stated that they would push for a seat for India as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Nehru and his government were delighted.

The U.S. embassy in India, in typically guarded fashion, offered an assessment of the Soviets' journey: "[Our] preliminary evaluation of the effect of the Bulganin, Khrushchev visit

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32 *India and the United States*, p. 85.
33 *Ibid*, p. 84.
on India and on U. S. security is that it will represent a gain for Russians...Communist powers may well regard visit as another step toward total conquest of Asia." 35 Even the liberal New York Times opined that Nehru's evident respect for the accomplishments of the Soviets and his flirtation with Fabian Socialism "put a large question mark behind his professed neutrality." 36 American public opinion took a dim view of India's giving Khrushchev the red carpet treatment.

American public opinion was of great significance, because the U. S. Congress controlled the purse strings of the federal government and usually followed the currents of public opinion. Bad press in the U. S. led to bad results when the Congress decided the amount of development aid to give to India. This aid was crucial to Nehru and his government. India was massively underdeveloped and its second Five-Year Plan called for great progress to be made in the industrial sector. The Government of India lacked the foreign currency necessary for extensive industrial development, however, and so it desperately needed long-term loans from Western countries to have a hope of meeting its development goals. In 1955, in particular, the United States Congress was not so sympathetic. Angry debate centered on Nehru's recent displays of friendliness toward the Soviets. Congressman Alvin Bentley of Michigan lambasted Nehru as a Communist sympathizer:

Two years ago, [Nehru] termed President Eisenhower a warmonger and a threat to world peace...He has placed an order with the Soviet Union for a million-ton steel mill for which he is reported to be paying $91 million...I have examined the record carefully and it would appear that Indian neutrality is entirely weighted in favor of communism. 37

Despite the efforts of such Democrats as Senator Hubert Humphrey, Congress slashed aid for India's development program. The Administration requested $70 million for development for India, the House cut it to $60 million, the Senate to $50 million, and the Executive Branch tentatively to $40 million (well below the level of development aid for fiscal years 1954 and

35 Ibid., p. 298.
1955). Because of sour relations, India lost much-needed American aid. This was a myopic decision on the part of Congress, as the liberals attempted to make clear. Whether or not the American government liked Nehru and the Indian Congress Party, the fact remained that the two were the best hope for continued democracy in India and that India was the free world’s key to Asia. As Hubert Humphrey said when defending Nehru’s record:

Today India is a free nation...more than a hundred million persons in India went to the polls less than two years ago...I know that there will not be a counterforce in Asia against Red China merely by building up Formosa and Korea. It takes people to oppose people...I say that no other country on the face of the earth that has gained its independence within the past ten years has done a greater job in assuring the freedom and independence of its people, and in fighting the battle against communism within its own ranks, than has India. 39

Humphrey raised a key issue in the debate on relations with India. The United States could not ignore the fact that Communist China was the most significant threat to American interests in Asia. From a strategic standpoint, it was vitally necessary to cultivate good relations with the only Asian nation that could match China in terms of population size. The existence of a huge and friendly democracy on the Asian mainland could only strengthen America’s hand in terms of the struggle with the Communists for global influence.

Even Winston Churchill, Nehru’s old imperialist opponent, had only good wishes for Nehru and his government. In a 21 February 1955 letter to Nehru, the old warrior (and staunch anti-Communist) wrote:

I hope you will think of the phrase ‘The Light of Asia’. It seems to me that you might be able to do what no other human being could in giving India the lead, at least in the realm of thought, throughout Asia, with the freedom and dignity of the individual as the ideal rather than the Communist Party drill book. 40

Churchill proved an astute observer of the Indian political scene. Contrary to the fears of American Congressmen, India’s Congress government was firm in its opposition to any Indian Communists who might be in league with the Soviet Union. Nehru had to restrain his lieutenants

from executing Communists upon a mere hint of ties with Moscow. Nehru himself called the
Indian communists anti-democratic and distorters of truth. He allowed the communists to contest
elections, in which they moderated their political program so that it looked not much different
from that of the Congress party. Many observers believed that Nehru had tamed communism in
India. 41

Nehru and the Congress party dominated Indian politics, largely because of Nehru’s
immense popularity amongst the Indian citizenry. The New York Times claimed that Nehru was
the only unchallenged leader in the world who ruled through love and not through fear. 42 It was
evident that Nehru could govern as long as he so wished. Yet he strove to strengthen the
institutions of democracy, allowing Parliament and the governments of the states to make
decisions with which he disagreed.

Nehru nurtured the prestige and vitality of the Parliament... sat regularly through the question hour and all
important debates, treated the presiding officers of the two houses with extreme deference... By transferring
some of his personal command to the institution of Parliament, he helped the parliamentary system to take
root. 43

The United States government could not reasonably claim that Nehru was a communist tool.

III

The Eisenhower administration slowly came to realize how essential India was to its
grand strategy in Asia. Eisenhower himself had always had more friendly feelings for India than
had Dulles and was more inclined to generosity when it came to foreign aid. After the Korean
ceasefire, the United Nations asked India to chair the commission which repatriated prisoners
taken during the war. The Indian army division that handled the repatriation process was

42 Book review, 7 October 1956.
scrupulously impartial in adhering to the desires of each and every prisoner and refused to be moved by the machinations of either the Communists or the UN forces. In October 1953, Eisenhower shared his thoughts on India’s efforts in a letter to Dulles:

It appears to me that [the Indians] have operated with exemplary tact, fairness, and firmness, and that this conduct must reflect a splendid attitude on the part of the Indian Government...I wonder whether it would not be a good idea to look for a chance to say something publicly about our admiration of the whole Indian contingent. 

Eisenhower’s views were best expressed in the meetings of the National Security Council, where he shook off his public persona as a golf-playing grandfather and revealed his true eloquence and persuasiveness. In one meeting, he expressed his commitment to foreign aid:

[The President said in regard to foreign aid that] we should be thinking in terms of decades or even of generations from the point of view of our country’s welfare... We should therefore look upon the assistance we give to foreign nations as an investment which will keep us out of a catastrophic war and perhaps provide our grandchildren with a life something like our own. We must not be begrudging or small-minded in our approach to the problem of foreign assistance, and we must educate our people to understand why it is necessary. 

Why then, if Eisenhower felt so much sympathy for the developing world, did he allow Indo-American relations to drift for so long? Part of the answer lies in Eisenhower’s Eurocentrism, particularly during his first term. His experiences as supreme commander of the European Allied forces in World War II and as NATO’s first supreme commander meant that he had for six years had daily contact with the leaders of Europe. India was thus not at the top of Eisenhower’s first term foreign policy agenda. Balancing the budget, the strengthening of Europe, the efficiency of U. S. security, and the defense pacts needed to ensure that efficiency were Eisenhower’s priorities.

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44 Kux, pp. 99-105.
45 Eisenhower Papers, p. 616.
47 Melanson, p. 194.
48 Bowie, p. 189.
Eisenhower also had to overcome frequent opposition from aid-wary conservatives in Congress. He fought throughout his two terms to impress on Americans and their legislators the importance of the Third World. His landslide reelection in 1956 undoubtedly made things a bit easier for him with the Congress, but Eisenhower never succeeded in procuring as much aid for foreign countries as he probably would have liked.

The temporal structure of the American presidency probably had something to do with the de-emphasis of development aid during Eisenhower's first term. Eisenhower was the first president to be reelected since the passage of the act which limited the president to two consecutive terms. First term presidents usually focus their attention on domestic politics, trying to fulfill their mandate from the electorate. If they turn their attention to international affairs, it is only because they are forced. Once they have been returned to the White House (and no longer have to face the electorate), presidents since Franklin Roosevelt have usually focused their attention on the international scene, attempting to leave behind a great legacy in the dramatic realm of foreign affairs. It should come as no surprise that Eisenhower titled his memoir of his first term *Mandate for Change* and called its successor *Waging Peace*.

A fourth reason might be found in the closeness of Eisenhower's relationship with Dulles. Contemporary historians have convincingly refuted the old accepted image of Dulles running foreign affairs for an incapable Eisenhower. There seems to be no question that Eisenhower was in charge. But Dulles did have a strong influence on Eisenhower when crucial decisions were made. "The two were," says Richard Immerman, "in a real sense a team." As such, Dulles had an immense impact on the formulation of the administration's policies.

Dulles's real thoughts on public affairs present an interesting problem. He may very well not have believed in many of the public statements he made. There is strong evidence to support

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49 Ibid., p. 253.
50 *India and the United States*, p. 90.
51 Immerman, p. 8.
52 Ibid., p. 9.
the argument that Dulles's tough rhetoric was primarily meant not to international Communism, but rather to protect himself from possible right-wing Republican accusations of being soft on Communism (of all things). Dulles had acted as foreign policy adviser for moderate Republican Thomas Dewey in the 1948 presidential campaign. Under Dulles's instruction, the Dewey camp had advocated a continuation of Truman and Acheson's bipartisan approach to foreign affairs, which had infuriated the isolationist Republican right. In addition, as chairman of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Dulles had approved the nomination of Alger Hiss for president of the endowment and had become closely associated with him, to the point of defending Hiss's already questionable record. As Eisenhower's Ambassador to Moscow, Charles Bohlen, put it, "Mr. Dulles...was concerned lest the right wing of the Republican Party might mount a campaign against him which might cause him to leave the office." From the evidence and from what we know of Senator Joseph McCarthy's attitudes toward the State Department, Dulles had good reason to be concerned.

Thus, it is not so surprising that a meeting with Nehru in March 1956 finally made Dulles understand how great were Indians' fears regarding Pakistan:

I never appreciated before the full depth of their feeling. I had assumed that India with its far greater population and economic strength would feel relatively immune from any serious threat. However, they feel that Pakistan, or at least West Pakistan, is essentially a military state, largely run by the Army, that they are a martial people, that they are fanatically dedicated to Islam and may develop the urge to attack India or at least to try to take Kashmir or parts of it by force.

Dulles had finally come to realize the problems inherent in dealing with developing nations such as India in the Cold War. By virtue of their newness, these states were extremely touchy where their sovereignty was concerned. Survival (which meant development) was their immediate goal. A neighboring nation with a history of enmity would naturally be perceived by developing

53 Hoopes, p. 71.
54 Cold Warriors, p. 13.
55 Hoopes, p. 142
56 Cold Warriors, p. 13.
states as a much greater threat than Soviet imperialism. The rhetoric of the United States also mattered a great deal more to less-developed nations than it did to the old and established European powers. The states of the Third World did not have the experience of power politics that their Western counterparts did. They would as often as not take public pronouncements by American officials at face value. Dulles, though he was more Asia-conscious than Acheson, was still devoutly Christian and ethnocentric. His formative experiences as a diplomat had all been in Europe. Thus, Dulles conducted diplomacy in the time-honored fashion of the West: he believed that what one said to the international press had little bearing on what one agreed to in the salon. He had not taken into account the possibility that the new nations and their leaders might take wholly different approaches to diplomacy than did the Western nations.

Even though Dulles had come to a fuller understanding of the effects his rhetoric had on the Third World, he did not substantially alter his style of public speaking. He again antagonized the non-aligned nations in a speech he gave at Iowa State College in June 1956. "[T]he principle of neutrality," he thundered, "pretends that a nation can best gain safety for itself by being indifferent to the fate of others. This has increasingly become an obsolete conception, and...it is an immoral and shortsighted conception." One can easily imagine the anger Nehru must have felt at such a direct attack.

However, under Eisenhower's direction and with Dulles's consent, the State Department had arranged with the Indian government to have Nehru informally visit Eisenhower in December 1956. The U.S. government knew of the importance Nehru attached to face-to-face contact. In a 1955 letter to Dulles, Eisenhower aired his thoughts on Nehru's *modus operandi*:

57 *FRUS, 1955-1957*, vol. VIII, p. 309
58 Immerman, p. 11.
59 Bowie, p. 56.
60 Department of State *Bulletin*, 18 June 1956, pp. 999+1000.
61 *India and the United States*, p. 90.
I am struck by the amount of evidence we have that Nehru seems to be more often swayed by personality than by logical argument. He seems to be intensely personal in his whole approach... [We should] ...do everything possible to win the personal confidence and friendship of Nehru. 42

The State Department accordingly invited Nehru for a three-day visit, which was largely to be spent on Eisenhower's farm in Gettysburg.

By the time Nehru arrived in Washington, much had transpired to make him more disposed to cordial relations with the United States. In October 1956, England, France, and Israel had attacked Egypt after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser seized and nationalized the Suez Canal. Nehru castigated the Western powers for engaging in imperialist tactics, but was surprised and impressed when Eisenhower roundly condemned his European allies' actions. At the same time, the Red Army had moved in to crush a nationalist uprising in Soviet-controlled Hungary. While the free world was outraged, Nehru (who thought that information about the repression was unclear) appeared to offer quiet support for the Soviets:

In a 9 November speech in Calcutta, Nehru seemed to accept Soviet explanations of their actions in Budapest, describing the crisis as an internal Hungarian affair. The same day at the United Nations, India voted against a resolution for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. India was the sole non-Communist country to cast a negative vote. 43

Nehru was caught in a position of extreme hypocrisy. How could he, the great nationalist and anti-colonialist, condemn an imperialist action (and a limited one at that) and then remain largely silent at the Soviets' crushing of a democratic nationalist movement? World opinion was not slow to accuse him of not practicing the doctrines that he was so quick to preach. Humbled, Nehru reexamined the Hungarian situation and agreed that the Soviets were guilty of barefaced aggression. In a 19 November speech to the Lok Sabha (the Indian equivalent of the House of Commons), Nehru denounced the Soviet repression. A British Broadcasting Corporation analyst weighed in:

43 Kux, pp. 139-140.
Never before has Mr. Nehru spoken out so positively against Russian imperialism and for the repressed peoples behind the iron curtain. And it seems, from India’s latest resolution before the United Nations, that she means to follow this up.

Nehru’s sudden policy reversal (or indecisiveness, as his supporters saw it) had revealed that even India’s Cold War policy had to contend with ethical dilemmas. Nehru had been shown to be fallible, which meant that the United States could deal with India on a more equal moral footing.

Nehru met Eisenhower with a host of concerns weighing on him. India’s economy was in danger undergoing hyperinflation and the People’s Liberation Army was making aggressive moves along the Sino-Indian border. The two leaders engaged in long and frank talks. They disagreed on many issues: Eisenhower was unhappy with India’s cultivation of Moscow in light of the recent Hungarian crisis. Nehru made his case against a U.S. alliance with Pakistan and expounded in no uncertain terms his belief that non-alignment was the right policy for India, which could not afford to be involved in the Cold War in this crucial stage in its development:

Nehru...said that he used the word neutrality in its traditional sense as meaning a position of aloofness from power combinations. He made clear that he did not use the word to distinguish between concepts of government based on the dignity of man and those based on dictatorships...He said if a country is to be an ally of any other in a defensive organization, it must do its military part. He said that India was in no position whatsoever to attempt to arm in proportion to its population and geographical size.

The force of Nehru’s argument impressed Eisenhower, who had never taken as dim a view of Nehru’s neutralism as had some of his Republican colleagues. Neither leader came away with his views substantially changed, but Eisenhower was convinced that Nehru would never countenance an alliance with the Soviet Union and Nehru believed that Eisenhower was sympathetic toward India. They both discovered that their counterpart genuinely desired world peace.

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64 Gopal, p. 296.
65 Eisenhower Papers, pp. 2448 + 2449.
66 Kux, p. 143.
From that point on, Indo-American relations were on a new footing that was to last through Eisenhower’s second administration and the Kennedy years. In January 1957, Eisenhower approved (and, indeed, seems virtually to have written himself) a new NSC policy paper on South Asia, NSC 5701, whose language was very different from NSC 5409. It was much more supportive of India and the policies of Nehru’s government:

It is in the U. S. national interest that the genuine independence of India be strengthened and that a moderate, non-Communist government succeed in consolidating the allegiance of the Indian people... The Indian policy of non-alignment will on occasion bring India into opposition with U. S. [activities], and a strong and increasingly successful India will add weight to this opposition. Nevertheless, over the longer run, the risks to U. S. security from a weak and vulnerable India would be greater than the risks of a stable and influential India... [We should] support the continuation in power of elements which are non-Communist and basically oriented toward the free world, recognizing that the Congress Party comes closest to fulfilling this specification and providing India with a strong, stable and popularly-based government. 67

Note that Eisenhower chose to use the positive term “non-alignment” rather than “neutralism”, which connoted cowardice to American ears. NSC 5701 became the basis for Eisenhower’s policies toward India in his second term. Eisenhower effected a paradigm shift in American policy-makers’ perception of India. The president worked with Democrats in Congress, including John F. Kennedy, to push through increased aid bills for India; a tradition that continued after Eisenhower had left office. By 1958, Indo-American relations were back on a firm footing.

How can we account for the downturn in the relations of the two nations and the upswing they took four years later? Dulles’s combative rhetoric continually hit the nerve of the young and insecure Indian state. When his rhetoric was combined with collective security agreements between the U. S. and India’s bugbear, Islamic Pakistan, India understandably felt threatened.

67 NSC 5701. Italics mine.
Eisenhower, though sympathetic to the plight of the Third World, both could not and would not turn much attention to it until he had strengthened American defenses and secured reelection. When he had done so, and when Dulles was awakened to the possibility that the old European paradigm for diplomacy might not work for the developing world, Indo-American relations soon took a turn for the better. The two world crises at the end of 1956 provided the impetus necessary to bring the two nations together to rediscover their common ground. Eisenhower came to a full understanding of India's central role in the Third World and how desperately it needed aid. Nehru was brought to the realization that the Soviet Union, despite its friendliness to India, could indeed be a cruel and domineering imperialist and therefore good relations with the United States were worth preserving. The two countries' leaders brought India back to its proper position in the world order: neutral in regard to military machinations, but with its sympathies engaged on the side of democracy and freedom.
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