

THE JOHNSON TREATMENT: COLD WAR FOOD AID  
AND THE POLITICS OF GRATITUDE

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AND THE POLITICS OF GRATITUDE

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ABSTRACT

In 1966, President Lyndon Baines Johnson declared, “India is a good and deserving friend. Let it never be said that bread should be so dear, and flesh and blood so cheap that we turned in indifference from her bitter need.” The sweeping presidential rhetoric did not match the record. While Johnson promised India vital U.S. food aid to combat a worsening famine, he also bristled at Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s public criticism of the U.S. military escalation in Vietnam. In this context, he ordered a review of American economic and agricultural assistance to India and pushed ahead with the implementation of the “short tether” policy – placing authorization of U.S. food aid shipments to India on a month-to-month basis, and making future deliveries contingent on the Government of India’s adoption of market mechanisms and modern technical inputs including pesticides, fertilizers, and mechanized irrigation to increase the nation’s food production – a strategy based on the U.S. agribusiness model.

While surplus U.S. grains, made available to India and other nations through the “Food for Peace” program, provided relief to low-income, urban populations, this master’s thesis, drawing extensively on documents from the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, emphasizes Washington’s use of food aid as a Cold War weapon. For a decade and a half, prior to Johnson’s “short tether” policy, U.S. policymakers hoped that generous U.S.

economic aid would spur a grateful, post-colonial Indian government to modify its foreign policy of Cold War nonalignment, support Washington's global anti-communist agenda, and forge better terms with its regional rival and U.S. military ally, Pakistan. American officials also reasoned that U.S. generosity would encourage the developing nation to adopt market-oriented economic policies. Borrowing from the colonial theorist Frantz Fanon and other scholars, this study illuminates how these expectations reflected common cultural assumptions that aid recipients owed their benefactors "gratitude." I argue that the metaphors of "gifting" and "gratitude," language commonly used by U.S. officials and members of Congress, actually disguised the exercise of hegemonic power as moral beneficence. President Johnson, who had initially perceived India's recently-installed first, female leader as girlish and deferential to U.S. leadership, implemented the short tether initiative not simply to spur Indian agricultural reforms – but to punish the nation and its new prime minister for challenging U.S. power and violating his own code of personal and political conduct.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined the thesis, “The Johnson Treatment: Cold War Food Aid and the Politics of Gratitude,” presented by Marc Anthony Reyes, candidate for the Master of Arts degree and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In May 2012, I met with my advisor, Dr. Dennis Merrill, at a coffee shop to discuss possible thesis topics. Over Roasterie coffee and whole-wheat bagels, I mentioned I was interested in looking at the United States' relationships with India and Pakistan during the Cold War. From this modest suggestion sprang a two-year project that has dominated much of my life. But looking back on how this process began, I cannot help but feel proud of how the final product turned out. This academic retrospection also reminded me how grateful and appreciative I am for all the help I received along the way. Since this thesis examines the role and power of gratitude, I feel it is necessary to highlight the many people and organizations that helped make completion of this endeavor possible.

This thesis served as my biggest research project yet and many times, I felt overwhelmed about where to start and who to ask for help. Fortunately for me, I received plenty of guidance from the University of Missouri – Kansas City's Miller Nichols Library. The friendly and helpful library staff answered my many questions about finding sources, using microfilm machines, and even gave me a crash course in how today's scholars can best utilize online archives to conduct research from any computer terminal. I needed many books to complete this project and their marvelous staff of talented professionals never asked why I was checking out Chester Bowles' memoir for a fifth time.

Besides local resources, this project required traveling and my time at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library was an incredible experience. My original research benefitted because of the expertise of the superb archival staff employed in the library's reading room. Everyone I encountered at the library offered wonderful suggestions but I especially want to single out archivist Jennifer Cuddeback who answered many questions,

before, during, and after my time in Austin, and who helped make my two trips to the library such successful outings.

This thesis received generous funding from a variety of sources. I obtained travel grants from UMKC's College of Arts and Sciences and School of Graduate Studies so I could present the preliminary findings of my research and receive quality feedback at regional history conferences. Regarding research funding, I was fortunate to win a significant research grant from UMKC's Women and Gender Studies' program. My second trip to Austin would not have been possible without such generous funding. I also had the crucial backing of UMKC's history department. From verbal support to monetary awards, I learned how dedicated and encouraging an academic department can be and there are several people I must acknowledge. Amy Brost offered guidance on all travel and research opportunities available to graduate students and assisted in the vital task of making sure all awarded grants were successfully processed. Drs. Chris Cantwell, Rebecca Miller Davis, and Viviana Grieco offered veteran research advice and their counsel was especially helpful as I juggled coursework, teaching, thesis work, and applying to PhD programs. From one-on-one visits in their offices to their recommendations of necessary breaks from the thesis, in this case it meant repeat viewings of *Game of Thrones* and *Breaking Bad*, I will always cherish their support and words of encouragement.

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confident and wonderful friend and it has been my pleasure to get to know him over the last three years. Over many one-on-one basketball games, Matt and I grew closer as not just young and hungry scholars but as friends who are not afraid of whatever our academic futures may hold. And last but certainly not least, I must mention my good friend, Rachael Hazell – my “bestie.” Rachael and I may both be history graduate students but as a rule, the two of us rarely discuss our work or research projects. Instead we strive to know each other outside of academia and find what motivates and inspires us as individuals. Topher, Matt, and Rachael are three very different historians but all three share two important characteristics in common: they are extremely talented historians and I eagerly look forward to seeing what they accomplish next.

As the thesis came together, I owed many thanks to my committee. Dr. Diane Mutti Burke has been involved in this project for over a year when some of the thesis’ contents made their debut in a research seminar she conducted. She encouraged me to think broader about how changing American gender norms during the 1960s affected LBJ and how they colored his actions in foreign affairs. In addition, she was the professor who told me UMKC’s Women and Gender Studies’ program offered research grants and I should consider applying. Dr. John Herron shepherded this project along when it was just a fifteen page prospectus. Even before I knew where I was going in the thesis, he stressed the theme of American wheat as a Cold War weapon. From him, I learned a great deal about constructing chapter hooks, how to build momentum in your narrative, and of course – “not giving it away for free.” The department’s students are fortunate to have him as both a professor and department chair. I admit it is a great regret that I will not see what he has in store for the history department during the rest of his tenure as chair. Lastly, words cannot truly express

how grateful I am for the guidance and profound wisdom I received from Dr. Dennis Merrill. In the three years I have known him, Dr. Merrill wore many hats for me: advisor, mentor, father figure. From him, I have learned more than just how to be a better student or writer; I am a stronger thinker, harder worker, and better prepared to help my own students. I can help them because he helped me. I know that no matter where I go and what I work on, I will always have the proud distinction of being a “Merrill student.”

Finally, closer to home, I must mention my “grad school widow,” my love Libby. Whenever I lacked confidence, she always had enough for the both of us. And the supportive cards and notes that dot my desk are a testament to her faith in me and my abilities. I thank my father Terry for always being excited whenever I talked about where my research and findings were taking me. And to the woman who taught me the importance of saying “please and thank you” – my mother Linda Reyes. This master’s thesis is dedicated to her. My mother has long emphasized the value of a good education and worked many jobs and many more hours to send me to good schools and provide for her one and only child. Even at the age of thirty, I am still trying to find new ways to thank her for being my mom.

## CHAPTER 1

### LYNDON JOHNSON CONFRONTS THE HUNGRY WORLD

*“A change of supreme importance has now come over the world scene, and that is the renaissance of Asia. Perhaps when the history of our time comes to be written, this reentry of this old continent of Asia into world politics will be the most outstanding fact of this and the next generation.”<sup>1</sup>*

---Jawaharlal Nehru

*“Well, I thought India was pretty jammed with poor people and cows wandering around the streets, witch doctors, and people sitting on hot coals and bathing in the Ganges, and so on, but I did not realize anyone thought it was important.”<sup>2</sup>*

---Harry S. Truman

### **Introduction**

In presidential lore, “the Johnson treatment” referred to Lyndon Baines Johnson’s intense persuasiveness and intimate one-on-one interactions. Political reporters Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, in their book *The Exercise of Power* (1966), described “the treatment” as lasting anywhere from ten minutes to four hours. Its targets found no safe haven – whether it was Johnson’s office, theirs, or even the floor of the U.S. Senate, Johnson found his victims and pushed them into accepting his position. Evans and Novak claimed, “Its tone could be supplication, accusation, cajolery, exuberance, scorn, tears, complaint, the hint of threat...Its velocity was breathtaking”...the Treatment was “an almost hypnotic

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<sup>1</sup> Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 455.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 15-16.

experience and rendered the target stunned and helpless.”<sup>3</sup> In 1966, the nation of India tangled with Lyndon Johnson’s Administration over a host of inter-related issues:

Washington’s anti-Communist containment policy, New Delhi’s Cold War nonalignment, the Vietnam War, Indo-Pakistani relations, India’s mixed economy, and – increasingly the focal point of contestation – India’s agricultural policies and U.S. food aid. In short, India, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and their agricultural officials experienced Lyndon Johnson and his eponymous treatment.

This master’s thesis draws on the public and private records of the Johnson White House, stored at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Texas to analyze a dramatic moment in the history of U.S. economic assistance to India. In June 1966, as India faced an impending famine, the Johnson Administration suddenly placed deliveries of U.S. food aid to India, previously allocated through annual appropriations, on a month-to-month basis – the so called “short tether” policy. Provided under the auspices of the twelve-year old “Food for Peace” program, the food, consisting primarily of surplus American wheat, played a vital role in feeding India’s urban masses and stabilizing the country’s fractious and volatile political atmosphere.

This study places the administration’s food aid program within the broader context of Cold War development policies. Johnson’s policies no doubt reflected his desire to wean Indians from an over-reliance on subsidized grains and to pressure the Government of India

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<sup>3</sup> Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power A Political Biography* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1966), 104.

to adopt a more incentives-based approach to agricultural production.<sup>4</sup> Diplomatic historian Nick Cullather posited the theory that the Johnson White House's review of U.S. food to India and the implementation of the "short-tether" policy were to pressure India to end their 1965 conflict with Pakistan, but once the fighting concluded, to reinforce to India the urgent need to increase their own agricultural production and become less dependent on American largesse.

This study also emphasizes how the Johnson Administration politicized emergency food aid shipments to mute Indira Gandhi's later combative and vocal positions against U.S. foreign policy, especially her caustic public statements denouncing American military efforts against Communist control of Vietnam. By linking the delivery of American food aid to U.S. demands that India reform their agricultural sector along Western methods and express gratefulness for the United States' foreign assistance, this work stresses the importance of food as a Cold War weapon.

That U.S. foreign aid served as a tool of U.S. diplomacy is hardly an original finding. Historian Michael Latham examined how Washington's belief in economic development gradually evolved into a Cold War ideology. In his studies of post-World War II U.S. foreign policy, Latham chronicled how America deployed development assistance in the 1950s and 1960s to promote capitalist growth, counter leftist political movements, and

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<sup>4</sup> Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 215-218.

promote “the right kind of revolution” across the recently decolonized Afro-Asian world.<sup>5</sup> David Ekbladh documented that the roots of this “American Mission” are traceable to the 1930s and 1940s New Deal programs and the embrace of Keynesianism – when U.S. leaders, such as President Franklin Roosevelt, first imagined a new world order remade in America’s own image.<sup>6</sup> Nick Cullather’s *The Hungry World* examined Washington’s Cold War battle against hunger in Asia and emphasized the agricultural breakthrough, known as the “Green Revolution,” as a crucial moment in the history of America’s efforts of Cold War economic development.<sup>7</sup> This thesis builds on these previous works by highlighting how the leadership style and cultural outlook of a president, in this case a proud and ambitious colossus Texan named Lyndon Johnson, helped to shape U.S. development diplomacy on the Indian subcontinent.

Lyndon Baines Johnson fancied himself a “man’s man.” From his ten-gallon hats, alligator boots, and work rustling and driving cattle at his family’s ranch, LBJ’s actions sought to confirm Western demonstrations of masculinity. The voluminous scholarly literature that has explored his presidency is replete with colorful quotes that attest to his manly worldview. As he oversaw Operation Rolling Thunder and the aerial demolition of

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<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Nick Cullather, 5-8.

Hanoi, he once famously boasted, “I didn’t just screw Ho Chi Minh. I cut his pecker off.”<sup>8</sup> Explaining his desire to have both guns and butter, he contrasted his domestic Great Society, “the lady I love,” to “that bitch of a war” in Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Since the publication of Kristin Hoganson’s path breaking work *Fighting for American Manhood* (1998), historians of U.S. diplomacy have come to accept how cultural constructions of gender have both underpinned and shaped exercises of American power.<sup>10</sup> Gender has informed the thinking of American diplomats as far back as the war with Spain in 1898, to the outbreak of the Cold War in the 1940s, and to the 1960s and 1970s debacles in Southeast Asia.<sup>11</sup> This study similarly emphasizes the role of gender in Indo-American relations – especially after Indira Gandhi became India’s Prime Minister in 1966. It was India’s first woman prime minister, the daughter of India’s first ruler Jawaharlal Nehru, who ended up on the receiving end of Johnson’s short tether policy. Her official visit to the White House that year not only resulted in American promises of foreign aid for India’s economic and agricultural development but also brought out the president’s gentlemanly charm. But a similar visit to

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*. (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 240.

<sup>9</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. (New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), 251.

<sup>10</sup> Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2-4.

<sup>11</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 8-15; Robert Dean, 3-4.

Moscow in the summer of 1966, where Gandhi publically criticized the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, earned her the president's personal wrath.

In addition to gender, coloring LBJ's approach to India were cultural conceptions of gift giving and gratitude. In Lyndon Johnson's world, a world shaped in no small part by U.S. popular culture, the act of gifting warranted reciprocal gratitude. Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin claimed the role of anonymous donor did not suit LBJ; he often let his recipients know of his "good works." He told her as much when he explained, "Some men want power simply to strut around the world and to hear the tune of 'Hail to the Chief.' Others want it simply to build prestige, to collect antiques, and to buy pretty things. Well, I wanted power to give things to people – all sorts of things to all sorts of people, especially the poor and the blacks." Johnson's desire to bestow gifts reads as genuine, yet incredibly paternalistic; he saw his gifts as transfers of power, with the ability to reform and redeem.<sup>12</sup> While Johnson, his staff, and the president's supporters in Congress viewed food aid as a means of winning Cold War allies, they also expected recipients of U.S. giving to show appreciation, gratitude, and due deference. Johnson especially needed reassurance that the recipients of his gifts were grateful for what he had done for them. As America wrestled with the racial turmoil of the 1960s, Johnson tried taking comfort in reciting his administration's many civil rights achievements. In one particular 1967 episode, he told his staff, "I asked so little in return. Just a little thanks. Just a little appreciation. That's all. But look at what I got instead. Riots in 175 cities. Looting. Burning. Shooting."<sup>13</sup> Despite the

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<sup>12</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 173.

worthiness of the cause and political capital he spent making sweeping civil rights legislation a reality, and considering their overall effectiveness, Johnson believed opposition and ingratitude “ruined everything” when he tried to help people in need.<sup>14</sup>

History is full of examples of colonial and hegemonic political systems that found justification through metaphors of generosity and gratitude. The colonial theorist Frantz Fanon explained how French colonialism in Algeria “sought a justification for its existence and the legitimization of its persistence through its works.” Ritualized visits by French officials to colonial Algeria, with their pomp and circumstance and their mandatory tours of glimmering and lavish, French built hospitals and sanatoriums, according to Fanon, conveyed the message to natives and non-natives: “This is what we have done for the people of this country; this country owes us everything; were it not for us, there would be no country.”<sup>15</sup>

Drawing on Fanon’s work, the historian of U.S.-Cuban relations, Louis A. Pérez explored the centrality of gratitude in the moral calculus of U.S. power in the strategic Caribbean region. According to Pérez, the American press, Congressional orators, and certainly the administration of William McKinley often thought of and understood Cuba metaphorically: as a needy child, a damsel in distress, or a hemispheric Armenia. These cultural constructions in fact masked the pursuit of power and self-interest as beneficence. Thus, when Americans went to war with Spain in 1898 and “gave” the gift of freedom to their benighted neighbors ninety miles away, they expected thankfulness and cooperation. For the next one-half century, despite numerous military interventions sanctioned by the U.S-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, translated by Haakon Chevalier (New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc. 1965), 122.

imposed Platt Amendment, the domination of Cuba's economy by North American capital, and Washington's support for Cuban dictators, U.S. officials could not shake the assumption that Cubans were fortunate to have such a generous neighbor. Pérez concluded that Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution came to be viewed by Washington officials as the ultimate expression of ingratitude – a disorientating turn of events that remains incomprehensible to diplomats and pundits to this day.<sup>16</sup>

Indira Gandhi's India never posed the level of challenge to U.S. hegemony as did Fidel Castro's Cuba. Gandhi, moreover, continued her father's posture of nonalignment during the Cold War, whereas Castro eventually cast his lot with Moscow. But in the turbulent 1960s, when U.S. global power seemed limitless and Third World unrest threatened global stability, Washington maintained a diverse and extensive Cold War arsenal. In Cuba, a punishing economic embargo and severance of diplomatic relations became the weapons of choice. In Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson deployed B-52 bombers and more than half-a-million American soldiers to secure U.S. interests. In India, American wheat, grown and harvested in the nation's heartland and sent to the subcontinent as a symbol of American generosity, manifested U.S. power and Lyndon Johnson's personal quest for global mastery. From Washington's perspective, years of generous U.S. assistance warranted Indian gratitude, gratitude best expressed by standing shoulder to shoulder with Washington on urgent matters of international diplomacy.

This introductory chapter draws mainly on existing secondary literature in order to sketch the origins of Indo-American relations and to particularly explain the underlying

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<sup>16</sup> Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 219-225.

dynamics and complexities of the aid relationship. It emphasizes that clashing Cold War political priorities, contrasting economic interests, gender politics, and the politics of gratitude did not arise during the Johnson presidency, but are traceable to America's rise to global power and India's rise as an independent state during the years immediately following the Second World War.

### **India: The Voice of the Nonaligned Movement**

How India wound up on America's development radar revealed more about the United States' concerns about Communism spreading in Asia than a desire to make new friends with the far-flung nations of the developing world. The United States emerged from World War II as the world's most powerful state – militarily, diplomatically, and economically. As the wartime U.S.-Soviet alliance disintegrated over a variety of geo-political and ideological issues, especially the Soviet postwar occupation of much of Eastern Europe, Washington made the containment of Soviet influence its global priority. President Harry S. Truman publically declared the containment doctrine, also known as the Truman doctrine, in his March 1947 address to Congress in which he requested authorization to provide \$350 million in military and economic aid to pro-U.S. governments in Greece and Turkey to bolster both countries against possible Soviet or Soviet-backed aggression. Congress obliged the president, and a year later, citing the urgency of quelling hunger and outmaneuvering local Communist Parties, the Truman Administration launched the massive, \$13 billion European Recovery Program – the Marshall Plan – to assist the reconstruction of war-torn Western Europe. While the use of economic aid to advance U.S. international interests did not register as an entirely new innovation, Washington previously never

allocated aid of this magnitude. The economic aid programs that would be later established in India bore a distinct Cold War stamp.

Washington's Cold War priorities, however, initially dimmed the prospects for an Indo-American aid relationship. Whereas the Truman Administration deemed the nations of Western Europe to constitute vital strategic and economic partners, the United States had few concrete interests in British India. The American press did welcome India's emergence to nationhood in August 1947, just a few months following the enunciation of the Truman Doctrine, and the U.S. government granted the new state immediate diplomatic recognition. The widely admired Mohandas K. Gandhi (no relation to Indira Gandhi) who led India's peaceful independence movement had by 1947 become widely admired in the West. Rejecting military or autocratic rule, India, moreover, adopted a parliamentary form of government and popular U.S. periodicals, such as *Time* and *Newsweek* lauded the former colony – with its population of three hundred and fifty million people - as the “world's largest democracy.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite a shared faith in democratic rule, Washington and New Delhi nonetheless found themselves disagreeing over a litany of geo-political and economic issues. Historian Andrew Rotter has gone so far as to describe the two ideological soul mates of that era as “comrades at odds.” Whereas Washington perceived the greatest threat to world peace to be Soviet expansionism and Communist ideological fervor, the new Indian government led by the anti-colonist activist Jawaharlal Nehru viewed the on-going system of European

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<sup>17</sup> Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947-1963*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1-2.

colonialism as the greatest impediment to global stability, human rights, and social justice. While Nehru did not identify himself as a Communist or Communist sympathizer, he also feared that the Soviet-American ideological contest would breed a dangerous and expensive arms race that would divert global resources from the all-important task of placing emerging nations – including India – on a path toward steady economic and political development. Thus, in foreign affairs, instead of choosing a superpower with which to cast its lot, India adopted a strict policy of nonalignment.

Nehru, as early as 1946, articulated his and by extension India's, vision of nonalignment for developing nations: "We propose, so far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale."<sup>18</sup> The policy, which would eventually inspire the establishment of a multi-national non-aligned movement, not only reflected India's development priorities, it also reflected the country's still smoldering anti-colonial attitude. A year later, in 1947, at the first Asian Relations conference, Nehru vowed that India never again would be the "pawn" or "plaything" of larger powers. Finally, Nehru's non-alignment also reflected the prime minister's foreboding of international life in the new atomic age and his conviction that India and its Asian neighbors might play a unique role as champions of world peace. "In this atomic age," he declared on one occasion, "Asia will have to function effectively in the maintenance of peace. Indeed, there can be no peace unless Asia plays her part."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 37.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

India's policy of nonalignment certainly played an important role in increasing tensions between the United States and India, but another foreign policy issue marred the relationship as well: India's perpetual disputes with its neighbor and sectarian nemesis, Pakistan. Mohandas K. Gandhi hoped to chart a non-violent path to independence, but the ultimate decolonization of the Indian subcontinent turned out to be a bloody affair fueled by sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims. Unable to win the support of Muslims for the creation of unified state, British authorities yielded to demands for a partition of the former colony into two parts: a Hindu-majority state in India and a bifurcated Muslim state in West and East Pakistan. Power devolved to each new state, but joy and celebration quickly turned into violence and mayhem as long-standing religious and cultural tensions as well as disputes over the two nation's exact borders, spilled over as Hindus attacked Muslims and Muslims struck back against Hindus and Sikhs. In assessing the carnage, historian Robert McMahon wrote "Although the exact toll will never be known, anywhere between 225,000 and 500,000 Indians and Pakistanis were slaughtered in the weeks following independence." The creation of the sovereign states of India and Pakistan also touched off a refugee movement where over eleven and half million people, in the two countries, fled their ancestral homes for safety on the other side of the border, in a state where they would be in the religious majority.<sup>20</sup>

Making bad matters even worse, by October 1947, India and Pakistan had gone to war over the disputed state of Kashmir to which both India and Pakistan laid claim. Viewing the regional clash as a distraction from the larger, global Cold War, American policymakers sought to bring the two warring nations to the negotiating table and help resolve the Kashmir

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 3.

dispute. By 1949, after the U.S. banned arm sales to both countries, a United Nations Commission recommended a plebiscite to decide the future of Kashmir. Soon a ceasefire was implemented and tensions slowly melted away.<sup>21</sup> The United States had momentarily facilitated a cold peace in South Asia, but in the years that followed, New Delhi and Karachi would fail to implement the recommended plebiscite and find a path to a lasting peace. The 1947 conflict turned out to be only the first of what currently stands at a total of four Indo-Pakistani wars. It also became increasingly difficult for Washington to avoid being charged with taking sides in the intractable conflict.

The policy of nonalignment and the sectarian violence in South Asia provided plenty of challenges to the U.S.-Indo relationship but foreign affairs were not the only areas where the world's largest democracy and the world's oldest democracy clashed. The United States and India bickered over differing economic philosophies and approaches to national development. In her book, *India and the West* (1961), British economist and development expert Barbara Ward surmised that "it was hard for people in the West to imagine the scale and depth of Indian poverty." Ward informed her readers that even the worse slums in the United States or England were not as destitute as the tenements in Calcutta or Bombay. Instead, Ward told her audience to imagine squalor beyond the "poorest tobacco roads in the southern states of America."<sup>22</sup> In documenting India's many woes, she described a nation beset with inadequate housing, lack of employment or occupational opportunities, and families subsisting on an unhealthy amount of food. But rather than ascribing these

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<sup>21</sup> Dennis Merrill, 24-25.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Ward, *India and the West*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1961), 141.

conditions to the history of exploitative colonial capitalism, many westerners drew on Katherine Mayo's derogatory 1920s account *Mother India* which characterized Indian culture as mired in "inertia, helplessness, lack of initiative and originality, lack of staying power and of sustained loyalties, sterility of enthusiasm, weakness of life – vigor itself – all are traits that truly characterize the Indian not only of today, but of long-past history."<sup>23</sup>

To remedy India's economic woes, the Nehru Administration embraced an economy built on a quasi-socialist foundation with a large role for the state. In particular, Indian industries such as steel, oil, and agriculture featured heavy government intervention. The approach bore a greater resemblance to democratic socialism in Western Europe than it did to the modest welfare state recently established under the New Deal in the United States. It certainly contrasted to models promoting a self-regulating market and laissez faire capitalism that many U.S. economists touted. India's Prime Minister held the latter in special contempt. The "free world," he complained valued individual freedom more than the greater good. As an anti-colonist activist and Congress Party leader earlier in the century, Nehru admired the Soviet Union's experiment in central planning, and on more than one occasion, he went so far to describe himself as a socialist. But he also rejected "pure Socialism," pragmatically encouraged private investment in agriculture and industry that coincided with the nation's development needs, and refused political alliances with India's Socialist Party.<sup>24</sup> "If nationalization would increase our production," the pragmatist explained in an early meeting with the press, "we will have it. If it does not, we shall not have it."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*. (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1927), 16.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Rotter, 131-132; Dennis Merrill, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Dennis Merrill, 14.

Nehru's practical blending of economic models, much like his foreign policy of Cold War nonalignment, also reflected his deep-seated nationalism. His critique of liberal capitalism belied concerns that private development, especially foreign investment from Westerners, might imperil India's economic sovereignty. After organizing and fighting a decades-long struggle for independence, Pandit Nehru did not want to replace one colonial system with another. While he had written in various publications that the United States had, unlike the European powers, largely avoided the acquisition of overseas colonies, he also warned his audiences of "American dollar imperialism." By that he meant the power of U.S. companies to dominate world trade, infiltrate the Indian economy, and thus indirectly achieve controlling authority over India's future. In short, he remained "mistrustful of American motives."<sup>26</sup>

Nehru's ambivalence toward U.S. style capitalism also reflected culturally-constructed ideas about America, the West, and money. It partly reflected his distaste for excess that he had long associated with British colonial consumption habits. It most likely also arose from his own status as a member of India's high-ranking Brahmin class – which afforded him the opportunity to be schooled privately in England and to acquire the refinement befitting of a gentleman. Whatever the source, from the East, Nehru saw American culture as crass, shallow, and decadent. On one occasion the Prime Minister lectured Indians departing for America "As far as I can see, there is neither breadth nor depth about the average American...The United States is hardly a place where one could go at present in search of the higher culture."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Rotter, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 32.

## **The Cold War Comes to Asia & Nehru Comes to America**

The Truman Administration did not endorse Indian nonalignment and questioned the wisdom of state-owned and operated industries, but at the same time did not turn its back on the new nation. America's attention to Asian affairs went into overdrive in 1949 as the Communist Party of China made rapid headway against the Chinese Nationalist Party, of the Guomindang, in China's increasingly bloody civil war. Long before President Dwight D. Eisenhower coined the phrase "domino theory," policymakers in Washington worried that a Communist victory in China, a fear that came to fruition in October 1949, would lead to the rest of Asia following suit. U.S. officials also worried that if the new Chinese government implemented a centrally-planned, socialist economic model that proved successful in bringing millions of poor Chinese peasants out of poverty, much of the developing world, particularly in Asia, might eagerly adopt similar Communist policies. India, founded on democratic ideals and eager to catapult from colonialism and dependency to modern industrial power, eventually emerged as a U.S.-backed alternative to the Chinese communist model of development. But the relationship arose only gradually and always remained subject to stresses and strains.

The first official appraisal of India's significance to U.S. national security came in April 1949 with the completion of the National Security Council position paper, "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia (NSC 48)." The paper highlighted not only the gathering strength of Mao Zedong's army in China, but also the proliferation of Communist insurgencies throughout Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, Malaya, and French Indochina. NSC 48 recommended the dispatch of fact finding missions to the region to assess the need for U.S. military and economic aid to non-Communist factions willing to

align with the United States. But it did not discount India's potential importance to the Asian Cold War. National Security Council (NSC) staffers singled out India as a nation eager "to form and lead a regional bloc or third force" and refused "to align itself with any power bloc." Economic assistance to India, they wrote, might build up India as a non-Communist but still unaligned state.<sup>28</sup> Even a small amount of American aid could possibly reverse the prevailing characterization clung to by Indian leaders like Nehru that the United States stood as a materialistic and self-indulgent power. But what form would aid to India take? The NSC did not recommend providing India with immediate and generous aid but instead more targeted economic assistance, such as small-scale loans. One thing was certain: whatever the administration might provide to India would have to be duplicated with regard to Pakistan.

To explore the possibilities, the Truman White House invited Nehru to make a state visit to the United States. By almost all accounts the encounter constituted a diplomatic disaster. Nehru planned to discuss India's many economic needs, including the possibility of U.S. financial aid, but when he met in private with President Truman the two heads-of-state spoke in generalities and spent little time discussing India's myriad of economic woes. Face to face meetings between the Prime Minister and Secretary of State Dean Acheson proved more substantial, but while Nehru raised the possibility of American food aid for his nation, the two clashed in their assessments of the Soviet threat, the Chinese revolution (which Nehru viewed more as an anti-colonial movement than a pro-Soviet movement), and of course the tangled Kashmir dispute. In the months that followed, the Truman Administration advanced the first U.S. military and economic aid to assist French forces fighting Ho Chi

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<sup>28</sup> Dennis Merrill, 44.

Minh's growing insurgency in Indochina, but nonaligned India remained off Washington's list of aid recipients.

Awkward moments during the Nehru visit were not confined to official meetings in Washington D.C. Today the visits of heads-of-state usually last a few days and the visiting dignitaries do little if any sightseeing. But when Nehru touched down in Washington on October 11, 1949 – landing in *The Sacred Cow*, a not-so-clever named plane sent by President Truman to pick up Prime Minister Nehru – what followed next was a three-week American odyssey with stops in California, Chicago, and New York. Three weeks touring a new country provided plenty of opportunities for American hosts and their Indian guest to clash. One of the most memorable faux pas came at a dinner held in his honor in New York City. Nehru's assumptions of Americans – as greedy, crass materialists – received reinforcement when one of the invited guests, an American business leader, leaned over to him and said, “Mr. Prime Minister, do you realize how much money is represented at this table? I just added it up, and you are eating dinner with at least twenty billion dollars.”<sup>29</sup> Nehru's response went unrecorded, but crass displays of conspicuous wealth undoubtedly offended the Indian Brahmin. During the same trip to New York City, he subsequently told a large audience: “You will not expect me to say that I admire everything that I find here in the United States. I do not.”<sup>30</sup> Upon returning to India, he reported to his cabinet it “would be foolish to rely upon America for any help.” And in a conversation with his secretary, he was even more direct: “Americans think they can buy up countries and continents.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.; Dennis Merrill, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Rotter, 90.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 32.

The latter comment reflected more than an assessment of political and economic realities. It in fact reflected a complex cultural choreography. At times Nehru described himself as a “Hindu agnostic” but Hinduism, like other important “isms” in his life, such as nationalism and socialism, shaped his thinking on the world. Hinduism, like other Dharmic religions, such as Buddhism and Jainism, is shaped by a tradition of *dāna*, which means, roughly, “royal giving.”<sup>32</sup> The Indian view of *dāna* stresses unconditional giving to those with less. There are no caveats or strings attached to acts of generosity. Practitioners of *dāna* are encouraged to let go of material rewards and strive toward a monastic lifestyle. Hoarding wealth and resources is discouraged; one must make do with less. For *dāna* to occur there must be recognition of one’s social status and the obligations that position carries. For instance, a wealthy and powerful figure, such as a king or queen, “should feel obliged to give to those less powerful and wealthy. He or she is by definition a donor, expected by all parties to be generous.” As a result, donors should not expect any thanks; it is their duty to perform these works. *Dāna* already requires them to be generous.<sup>33</sup> When Nehru got down to brass tacks with Secretary Acheson, and again when he dined with “twenty billion dollars,” he feared this meant cozying up and aligning with those out of cosmic balance. How could he toast to such opulence and court people who had the capacity to alleviate so much misery in the world but chose not to exercise this power? In short, during the three years following India’s independence, U.S.-Indo relations were at odds, but they were not comrades yet.

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<sup>32</sup> Andrew J. Rotter, “Feeding Beggars: Class, Caste, and Status in Indo-U.S. Relations, 1947-1964,” in *Cold War Constructions: Culture, Politics, and the Cold War*, edited by Christian G. Appy. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

### **The Beginning of the U.S.-Indo Aid Relationship**

On June 25, 1950, the Korean War began when the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, after receiving promises of aid and the implicit go-ahead by Soviet Union dictator Joseph Stalin, attacked the U.S.-supported regime in South Korea.<sup>34</sup> The ensuing three year “police action” on the Korean peninsula produced many consequences, besides the hundreds of thousands of casualties each side experienced. Alarmed that the outbreak of a hot war on the Korean peninsula might represent only the first step in a much larger program of Soviet military aggression, the Truman administration determined to triple U.S. defense spending and to increase military aid to U.S. allies globally. As far as India went, the war initially increased tensions between Washington and New Delhi – the Nehru government voted to condemn the North Korean attack in the United Nations but opposed the dispatch of a U.S.-led multinational military operation to defend South Korea. But over the course of the following year, the Truman Administration determined that a nonaligned India was preferable to a communist-led India. By the end of 1952, the United States embarked on not one but two endeavors providing India with U.S. development assistance aimed at bolstering its non-communist posture.

The U.S.-Indo aid relationship began in earnest in 1951 when India requested emergency food aid from the United States to combat a worsening famine. By early 1950, the failures of India’s monsoon season lead to droughts that crippled northern and southern Indian states. Large population centers –such as the heavily populated states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal – suffered with diminished crops resulting in a year of inadequate

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<sup>34</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66.

food production. When the rains finally did come, heavy rains turned into flooding and soon India, once reeling from drought, watched as flash floods washed out what food crops remained. The following year, Nehru directed his ambassador in Washington, his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, to request emergency food aid from the United States government.<sup>35</sup> By summer 1951, after a lengthy congressional debate, where aid opponents argued against aiding the leading nation of the nonaligned movement, President Truman signed the Emergency Indian Wheat Bill and India received a \$190 million loan to purchase surplus American wheat.

Passage of the Emergency Indian Wheat Bill by no means quelled Congressional critics. Enraged by India's ambivalence toward Communist aggression in Korea, its public criticism of the U.N. crossing of the thirty-eighth parallel in November 1950, and its call for negotiations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, aid opponents in essence decried India's lack of gratitude and suggested that the nation did not deserve U.S. aid. Wisconsin Republican representative Alvin O'Konski warned that if America awarded India after failing to back the U.S. side during an armed conflict, "We are going to look like a bunch of stupid jackasses if we pick that nation and give them a gift of \$190,000,000."<sup>36</sup> It is curious to know what smart jackasses look like in this context but O'Konski's outrage was real and represented the same concerns many Americans felt after supplying India with aid, even if to prevent a famine. Truman's second ambassador to India, Loy Henderson, went

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Rotter, "Feeding Beggars: Class, Caste, and Status in Indo-U.S. Relations, 1947-1964," in *Cold War Constructions: Culture, Politics, and the Cold War*, edited by Christian G. Appy. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Rotter, 272.

further than O’Konski by explicitly linking U.S. aid with expectations of Indian gratitude. Decades after serving in his post as the U.S.’s ambassador in New Delhi, Henderson remembered Nehru would “at times consent to accept American aid, but when he did so it was usually with reluctance and without grace or gratitude.”<sup>37</sup> Although the United States and India had found a way to begin cooperating on economic aid, they had not found a way to close the gap that existed between American notions of gratitude and Indian notions of *dāna*.

The second phase of development assistance featured the dispatch of modest U.S. financial support for the launching of India’s Community Development Program (CDP) in 1952. Working under the umbrella of President Truman’s Point Four program, which was announced in his January 1949 inaugural address, but not actually funded and implemented until 1951-1952, the CDP offered hope to boost the Indian standard of living, especially in food production. Nehru initially intended that the CDP’s predecessor, the Indian-financed “Grow More Food” (GMF) program would render U.S. aid unnecessary. But the GMF strategy of setting state food targets and exhorting peasants to meet them through land reclamation and intensive cultivation lacked the funding and technical resources needed to succeed.<sup>38</sup> After the United States’ emergency wheat loan in 1951, Pandit Nehru proved more willing to accept American offers of aid. And spurred by the crisis in Korea, the Truman Administration indicated its willingness to help. On January 5, 1952, the U.S.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 273.

<sup>38</sup> Nicole Sackley, “Village Models: Etawah, India, and the Making and Remaking of Development in the Early Cold War.” *Diplomatic History* Vol. 37, No. 4, 2013, 767.

Ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, and Prime Minister Nehru signed the Indo-American Technical Agreement.

The agreement between the two nations sent hundreds of American agricultural advisors to India to offer Western expertise on how to maximize agricultural output and put India on the path to self-sufficiency in food production. The American side of the bargain called for expertise; the Indian side funded the project – approximately eighty percent of the agreement. Indian rupees established a village-by-village development program that would identify, provide assistance, and work to build and modernize 16,500 villages as CDP pilot projects. The program would eventually encompass all 500,000 villages throughout India.<sup>39</sup> The CDP consultants emphasized greater educational opportunities and better access to health care, but increasingly the nation’s food output ranked as the program’s priority. The effort hinged on India’s willingness to adopt Western approaches to food production, such as the use of more fertilizers, pesticides, and better soil management and irrigation methods. To finance the new inputs, the Truman Administration and the U.S. Congress allocated \$54 million in U.S. funding – a level of support that would gradually rise over the course of the decade.

President Truman articulated the principles for the program in his 1949 inaugural address announcing the Point Four program. “Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace,” he pronounced...“And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge. Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 768.

satisfying life that is the right of all people.”<sup>40</sup> In the audience that brisk January 1949 afternoon was the new junior senator from the Lone Star state of Texas, Lyndon Baines Johnson. Johnson, already a Capitol Hill veteran as a result of his twelve years as a representative in the U.S. House, shared Truman’s vision of the United States as a more active force in the world, dispensing expertise and resources to make the world a better place. During his own presidency, Johnson would elevate and expand the goals of the Community Development Program – education, health, food, and technical assistance – to meet the greater demands of a hungry world. Years later, when describing his own foreign policy, Johnson envisioned America building new houses, new schools, new hospitals, and new roads to those in need. In faraway lands, like South and Southeast Asia, he vowed to leave a positive American footprint.<sup>41</sup>

As the 1950s proceeded, so too did the belief that India, with U.S. economic assistance would develop into Asia’s democratic counterweight to the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Ambassador Bowles, a former Democratic governor of Connecticut and a devout New Dealer, popularized the notion that India’s experiment in democracy would naturally draw comparison to the communist model underway in China. In a letter to Assistant Secretary of State George McGhee, Bowles intoned: “Communist China and an India striving to remain democratic would inevitably be placed in economic comparison.” If the United States did not assist India and its government fell, replaced by anti-democratic elements, perhaps by India’s own Communist Party, much of the former colonial world

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<sup>40</sup> Orville Freeman, *World Without Hunger*. (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1968), 27.

<sup>41</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, 267.

might reject democratic rule as ineffective. Bowles informed President Truman, “If India...under democratic government grows stronger, all of the free nations of South Asia and the Middle East will be buttressed.” The ambassador thus became the administration’s leading advocate of continued and expanded economic assistance to India – to be invested primarily in India’s rural areas. Pointing to the recently concluded Chinese Civil War, Bowles stressed the importance of village improvement to George McGhee “This is where the communists won in China. This is where the battle for India will be decided.”<sup>42</sup>

### **In Search of Allies on the Indian Subcontinent**

As 1952 drew to a close, so too did the Truman Administration. The next year saw major world events such as the end of the Korean War and the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Stalin’s successor, Nikita Khrushchev, actively sought better relations with Western nations and a noticeable thaw in relations appeared as America’s new leader, President Dwight Eisenhower, took office. Elected on a platform of crusading against “Korea, Communism, and Corruption,” Eisenhower’s victory marked the end of the two-decade White House dominance by Democratic administrations. As the White House transitioned to Republican rule, India watched and waited to see what direction the new administration’s foreign policy would take and how their approach to foreign aid would differ from the outgoing Truman administration. On the campaign trail as the standard bearer for the market-oriented Republican Party, Ike preached the gospel of “trade not aid” – a formula for foreign aid that elevated market mechanisms abroad and budget balancing at home. In the fiscal year of 1953, the U.S. distributed \$44.3 million in total grants and loans to India. To India and its U.S. supporter’s surprise, however, in the next year’s budget, aid nearly doubled

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<sup>42</sup> Dennis Merrill, 86.

to \$87.2 million in development loans and grants. When it came to foreign economic assistance and the Cold War, Congressional critics notwithstanding, the two U.S. political parties were more often than not in accord.

The change in administration did alter the United States' policy on nonalignment in the Indo-Pakistan rivalry. As war raged in Korea, the Truman White House not only bolstered U.S. military spending, it looked to strengthen and extend U.S. military alliances in strategically vital areas.<sup>43</sup> Hoping to make the oil-rich Middle East more secure from Soviet penetration, U.S. officials originally eyed Egypt as a potential ally. But the overthrow of Egypt's pro-British monarchy and the rise of nationalist firebrand Gamal Abdel Nasser placed U.S. plans on hold. The new Eisenhower Administration proved more determined to collect developing world allies. Shortly after taking office, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles undertook a whirlwind tour of the Middle East and South Asia and returned to recommend U.S. military assistance to countries located on the "Northern Tier" of the region – the states located on the southern periphery of the Soviet Union. The list of nations included the future members of the Baghdad Pact: the colonial power Great Britain, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and India's nemesis, Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> In their meetings with Dulles, officials in Karachi demonstrated their willingness to disavow any pretense to Cold War alignment. Such claims were music to the ear of the dour Dulles who in a 1956 commencement address at Iowa State College, declared neutrality "has increasingly become an obsolete conception,

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<sup>43</sup> Robert McMahon, 123-124.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 160-164.

and, except under very exceptional circumstances, it is an immoral and shortsighted conception.”<sup>45</sup>

The northern tier strategy became formal policy in early 1954 with the completion of the National Security Council’s first official position paper on South Asia, NSC 5409. After a half decade of matching economic aid programs in India and Pakistan, the new approach would continue economic aid to nonaligned India – whose government publically refused to accept military aid anyway – but added the provision of military equipment to Pakistan. India of course welcomed economic resources, but feared U.S. military aid to Pakistan. The Nehru government vehemently protested the new U.S. policy, predicting – accurately as it turned out – that U.S. weapons provided to Pakistan would more likely be deployed against India in Kashmir than against the Soviet Union. Political scientist Baldev Raj Nayar went so far as to argue that American military aid to Pakistan aimed at “containment of India through the ‘satellization’ of Pakistan.”<sup>46</sup> In time, Pakistan became known in Washington as America’s most allied ally – having joined the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (or the Central Eastern Treaty Organization, or CENTO) the following year.

As long as the Eisenhower White House insisted on growing closer to both nations, while at the same time arming and building up a military partnership with Pakistan, the

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 113.

<sup>46</sup> Gary R. Hess, “Global Expansion and Regional Balances: The Emerging Scholarship on United States Relations with India and Pakistan.” *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 56, No. 2, 1987, 264.

outlook for better U.S.-Indo relations appeared dim. To resolve Indian anxieties about the future of U.S. foreign assistance, American diplomats needed a new aid approach to India. Fortunately for the Eisenhower Administration, foreign aid advocates in Congress already were at work on a program designed to unload the U.S.'s surplus grain deposits while still keeping in place New Deal agricultural price controls, which promised farmers higher prices at harvest. While the new Food for Peace program, which would be made operational in 1954 under the auspices of Public Law 480 (PL 480) was not aimed solely at India, New Delhi would become the world's leading recipient of surplus U.S. grain, mainly wheat. The objectives of the U.S. food aid strategy aimed to supplement but not replace the technical assistance program designed to help India increase its own food production.

### **Food Aid and the Evolution of Food for Peace**

Providing American agricultural assistance, to famine-stricken nations, did not originate during the Cold War. Ireland in 1848 and India in 1899 received temporary American surplus agricultural commodities to mitigate their respective famines.<sup>47</sup> One of the twentieth century's earliest examples of American food aid was the U.S. government's campaign to help starving Belgium and French populations during World War I. American food administrator, and future president Herbert Hoover, performed a Herculean-task by feeding millions of Europeans devastated by the carnage of the First World War. Another American endeavor, the European Recovery Program - also known as the Marshall Plan - succeeded in preventing a continent-wide famine following World War II. But what made the Marshall Plan unique, compared to earlier food assistance programs, was the United States' commitment, for the first time, to maintain a multi-year supply of food aid to Europe,

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<sup>47</sup> Kristin L. Ahlberg, 15.

not vulnerable to annual Congressional budgetary approval.<sup>48</sup> In its first year, 1948-1949, nearly forty percent of the \$4.2 billion allotted in European aid was devoted to the three F's: food, feed, and fertilizers. At the program's end in 1952, nearly thirty percent of the U.S.'s total aid package, \$13.5 billion, was committed to these three aid resources.<sup>49</sup> But the United States' experiment with long-term agricultural assistance was just beginning.

By the mid-1950s, the United States experienced a true "first-world problem:" too much food. As European nations recovered from the destruction of World War II and their food situations became more stable, unloading excess American agricultural commodities proved harder to do and by mid-1953, government-owned agricultural surpluses surpassed the \$5 billion mark prompting congressional action.<sup>50</sup> The federal government spent millions to store a vast reserve of grain that was more likely to sit and rot than feed needy people.

Advocates for greater foreign aid expenditures, such as Minnesota's Democratic senator Hubert Humphrey, saw America's increasingly larger wheat surpluses as less a burden and more of an opportunity to earn goodwill around the world for the United States and its foreign policy objectives. Senator Humphrey noticed that India, in years of good or bad crops, consistently came up short in feeding its growing population. In order to help a struggling nation, one that rejected the common Third World paths of dictatorship or military junta, Humphrey preached "For humanity's sake and because it aimed to be a free and independent, democratic country, India needed and deserved our encouragement and our

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<sup>48</sup> Mitchel B. Wallerstein, *Food for War-Food for Peace: United States Food Aid in a Global Context* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1980), 32.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

generous assistance.”<sup>51</sup> Humphrey, working with Kansas Republican senator Andrew F. Schoepel, introduced a Senate bill to use American agricultural surpluses to feed a hungry world. A week after the bill’s introduction, the Senate passed the measure on a voice vote and sent it to the U.S. House. The Senate bill certainly received a boost from Texas Democrat and Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson, who by pledging his support for the bill, helped deliver a key foreign policy victory for the Republican president. Johnson’s meteoric rise to Senate leader – within four years of his first term he was already his party’s leader in the upper chamber – centered on his abilities to build consensus, move legislation, round up votes, and trade favors with members of both parties.

Despite a bipartisan call to use surplus wheat as a potentially valuable American aid resource, like many foreign aid assistance program, the proposal ran into strong opposition. Pennsylvania representative Karl C. King called the Senate bill “the finishing touches on the purest socialistic scheme ever perpetuated on this country.” Oklahoma congressman Page Belcher described the bill as another “giveaway program” and Democratic congressmen Augustine B. Kelly and Martin Dies stated they could not support the legislation because the definitions of what constituted “friendly nations” that could receive American food aid were not stringent enough – the point obviously related to nonaligned India, among other nations. Although Johnson helped steer the proposal towards passage, he sympathized with some points raised by congressional foreign aid critics – especially the notion that U.S. generosity

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<sup>51</sup> Hubert H. Humphrey, *The Education of a Public Man: My Life and Politics*. (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 119.

should yield diplomatic benefits.<sup>52</sup> A little more than a decade later, Johnson would occupy the White House and rather than nurturing bipartisanship and consensus he would bulldoze ahead with his own “short-tether” policy that required Indira Gandhi’s India to earn its food aid.<sup>53</sup>

Supporters of greater American food aid ultimately triumphed over foreign aid skeptics and critics and on July 10, 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act (also known as Public Law 480). Upon the signing of the law, which created the Food for Peace program, Eisenhower remarked that it was his hope that the program would “lay the basis for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products, with lasting benefits to ourselves and to people of other lands.”<sup>54</sup> Aid advocates pulled off an impressive legislative feat. Not only had proponents successfully crafted and shepherded PL 480 legislation through Congress, an institution typically weary of any foreign assistance program, but also had convinced a Republican president, who initially favored a trade-not-aid approach to foreign policy objectives, to invest additional American resources in economic development strategies.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Robert J. McMahon, “Toward Disillusionment and Disengagement in South Asia,” in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968* edited by Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147.

<sup>53</sup> Peter A. Toma, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchel B. Wallerstein, 35.

<sup>55</sup> How PL 480 functioned was a lot more complicated than previous food aid programs.

Historian H.W. Brands (116) explained that the Agricultural Trade Development and

Each reauthorization of the law expanded the program. After all, it not only served U.S. Cold War interests, it eliminated unwanted agricultural surpluses, and it kept U.S. farm prices high. Yet complaints that recipients of food aid and development assistance as a whole constituted an ungrateful – and disloyal – lot never went away. By the end of the Eisenhower presidency, most of the fundamentals of the U.S.-Indo aid relationship fell into place. The leader of the “free world” dispensed both its technical and food aid to needy nations in order to advance America’s global, Cold War agenda. Despite its nonaligned posture, India ranked as a major recipient of both forms of aid. Yet in return for what Washington perceived as pure American generosity, U.S. officials expected overt gratitude – and gratitude meant more than a polite thank you. They expected that at the very least New Delhi might soften its criticisms of U.S. policies, downplay its antagonism toward America’s allies in Karachi, and buckle down and continue the hard work of increasing its own food production according to U.S. prescriptions for agricultural modernization. Lyndon Johnson’s decision to adopt the “short tether” policy toward U.S. food aid to India in 1966 in many ways carried Indo-American relations to their logical next step.

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Assistance Act of 1954 (PL 480) “aimed to create new markets for American products among countries too poor to buy them otherwise.” To accomplish these transactions, the U.S. government arranged “the “sale” of wheat, corn, and the like to countries such as India – except that Washington rebated the purchase price to the buyers.” If that sounds like the U.S. government, using tax dollars, paid American farmers to sell crops to India, that is exactly what happened. Farmers, firms that transported agricultural commodities, and farm state congressmen all vigorously supported Public Law 480.

## **A New Frontier: Tilting Back Toward India**

The last critical component of the Indo-U.S. relationship involved a significant increase in U.S. aid levels. Partisans of the era attributed the America's growing financial commitment to India and the former colonial world as a whole to the coming to power of John F. Kennedy. A long-time sympathizer with anti-colonial movements and a sworn Keynesian, the new president promised, in his soaring inaugural address, greater U.S. involvement with the increasingly proliferating new nations of the developing world. Indeed, his well-known Assistant National Security Advisor, the former M.I.T. economist W.W. Rostow christened the 1960s "the decade of development." Kennedy professed, in a May 1961 congressional address, "The great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the whole southern half of the globe – Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, the lands of the rising peoples."<sup>56</sup>

Historians of U.S. foreign relations, however, have explained how the growing U.S. interest in what was called "Third World development" first took root in the second Eisenhower Administration. By the time Ike won re-election in November 1956, U.S. national security managers identified what they called "the Soviet economic offensive" as a threat to American influence in former colonial states. Nikita Khrushchev had in fact not only increased Soviet aid to developing states, he specifically targeted nonaligned nations and delivered rubles to advance what the United States largely shunned – assistance to large, state-owned industries. Soviet help to build a modern, publically-owned steel plant in Bhilai, India stood out as a shining example. Annual U.S. aid expenditures for India subsequently

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, 142.

rose – growing from \$89.8 million in 1958 to \$194.6 million in 1960.<sup>57</sup> U.S. bilateral aid was supplemented by loans from the World Bank – which helped the Tata Corporation erect a modern, privately-owned steel facility in Jamshedpur, near Calcutta. The Eisenhower Administration remained true to its military alliance with Pakistan, but Ike went out of his way to strengthen Indo-American ties, hosting a second state visit by Prime Minister Nehru in 1956 – and becoming the first U.S. president to visit India in 1959. Both visits remained free of the rancor and insensitivities that marred Nehru’s 1949 visit to the United States. On issues that still separated the two nations, especially U.S. military aid to Pakistan, the two elder statesmen agreed to disagree without being disagreeable.<sup>58</sup>

The Kennedy Administration sought to build on this momentum. It sent America’s star liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith to occupy the ambassador’s residency in New Delhi and by 1962 the dollar value of development aid to India reached its peak at \$465.5 million. In addition, Congress reauthorized PL 480 a number of times, each time upping the amount of surplus agricultural commodities distributed. Thus, during a seven year period – 1956 to 1963 – the United States sent over \$2 billion in surplus agricultural commodities to India under PL 480.<sup>59</sup> While the Kennedy team, from the president to Lyndon Johnson, now his Vice-President, maintained the strategic alliance with Pakistan, they adopted diplomatic language more respectful toward the nonaligned perspective. The ballooning aid to India, moreover, suggested a tilt in India’s favor. National security advisors, such as McGeorge Bundy and his deputy W.W. Rostow, believed a realignment back towards India made more

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<sup>57</sup> Dennis Merrill, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Rotter, 214, 276-278.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

sense for U.S. national security and that Pakistan, after years of U.S. military aid, even in collaboration with other “northern tier” states, could not mobilize the ground forces necessary to stop a Soviet invasion aimed at seizing Middle Eastern oil fields.<sup>60</sup>

As the Kennedy Administration choreographed a pivot back to India that would not rankle relations with Karachi, the President tasked his second in command to tour South Asia and report about India and Pakistan’s commitment toward fighting communist expansion, including the revolutionary movement occurring in a small Southeast Asian country – Vietnam. To the surprise of many, the earthy and energetic Lyndon Johnson made a favorable impression on Jawaharlal Nehru and his cabinet ministers. The Prime Minister described in detail, to the visiting V.P., India’s new Five Year Plan for development, which promised greater resources to educate Indian children and continued national support for village improvement projects. Johnson and Nehru hit it off so well that after the dinner held to commemorate Johnson’s first day in India, the Indian host and his American guest held a long and informal talk lasting to nearly midnight. Johnson was told by U.S. Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith that it was uncommon for Nehru to stay up so late.<sup>61</sup>

In their conversations, the Indian Prime Minister patiently listened to Johnson’s plea that India take a more vigorous stand against a Communist takeover in South Vietnam. But when he pressed further on the Vietnam issue, for example how India could help the American effort in Vietnam, the Indian head-of-state remained noncommittal. Nehru informed then-U.S. Ambassador Galbraith that India did not relish telling other nations how

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<sup>60</sup> Robert McMahon, 338.

<sup>61</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*.

(Boston, MA: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 222.

to conduct their own affairs.<sup>62</sup> A lifetime of colonialism informed Indian thinking to stay out of the private matters of other nations and if South Vietnam really wanted a Communist government, it would eventually have it. Johnson's upbeat attitude and history of supporting aid to India could only be so persuasive.

As positive as the meetings with Indian officials were, Johnson's interactions with Pakistani leaders, especially with Pakistani President Muhammad Ayub Khan, were even more successful and worried some Kennedy officials. The Vice-President struck an instant rapport with Ayub Khan and the Vice-President listened as Pakistani's head-of-state criticized India's Cold War nonalignment and its intransigence on Kashmir – despite its heavy reliance on U.S. aid. Ayub Khan charmed Johnson with his swagger and manly demeanor. Johnson, a product of the Texas hill country, judged Ayub to be, like himself, a hard-working fellow who had risen through the ranks by relying on grit and persistence. LBJ had trouble bonding with aristocratic men like Kennedy and to a lesser extent, Nehru. The Vice-President in return downplayed the strategic tilt back to India. He left his visits with Ayub Khan proclaiming Pakistan's president was “a very impressive fellow,” a “seasoned” and tough leader who would stand and fight with the United States, unlike India.<sup>63</sup>

Despite Johnson's optimistic appraisal, Pakistan grew tired of the Kennedy Administration's balancing act that they presumed favored India. Johnson's warm interactions with Ayub Khan could not reverse the pivot back to India. Ayub Khan grew closer to the People's Republic of China, whose increasingly heated Himalayan border dispute with India gave each nation a shared purpose. The PRC offered Pakistan closer

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<sup>62</sup> Dennis Merrill, 180.

<sup>63</sup> Robert McMahan, 278-279.

relations, as well as economic and military assistance, as the United States realigned back to India. A turning point in the realignment process came on October 20, 1962 when Chinese troops spilled over the border and occupied Indian territory, speedily shredding through India's defense forces. As spontaneous as the fighting started, China declared a ceasefire a month later and withdrew from the disputed area.

The surprise of China's invasion sent shock waves throughout the country. India had not fought a war in over a decade and Chinese forces proved a tougher adversary than their traditional enemy, Pakistan. After fifteen years at the helm, India's founding father faltered. Having advocated diplomatic recognition for the PRC since the days of the Korean War, he now appeared to have been duped by Beijing. He had to swallow his pride and reverse a long-standing tenant of nonalignment by accepting emergency U.S. military aid. After this decision, American officials believed U.S.-Indo relations had never been closer. In a 1964 memorandum, Chester Bowles, in his second tour as the U.S. Ambassador to India, wrote, "The U.S. has vast reservoir of goodwill in this country [India] . Huge amounts of economic assistance which we have poured into India are well known and appreciated. Indians have not forgotten that we promptly came to their assistance after Chinese attack..."<sup>64</sup> As India entered a new stage in their relationship with the United States, its longtime leader would not be around to shape India's closer ties to the West. At the age of seventy-three, Nehru exhibited signs of slowing down and after the war, his health quickly worsened. He spent

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<sup>64</sup> Bowles to Rusk, "Incoming Telegram from U.S. Ambassador to India to Secretary of State," May 16, 1964 National Security File, Country File, Middle East-India, box 128, LBJL.

much of 1963 recuperating in the land of his ancestors, Kashmir, but in early 1964 suffered a stroke and on May 27, 1964 died of a heart attack.

The early 1960s also proved momentous for the United States. As the Sino-Indian War erupted, the United States and the Soviet Union nearly waged an atomic war over the latter's placement of nuclear weapons in Cuba. Kennedy's support for a naval blockade and firm negotiations with the Soviet Union averted nuclear annihilation. As fears of atomic warfare subsided, 1963 offered hope of a better year, one where the world's two leading powers stared into the abyss but pulled back before the commencement of mutually assured destruction. The two superpowers agreed to install a hotline between capitals to avert a future mishap and more significantly signed onto the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that prohibited dangerous and provocative atmospheric testing. Yet the administration simultaneously displayed resolve in the ongoing conflict in Vietnam – increasing the level of aid to Saigon, raising the number of U.S. advisors embedded in the South Vietnamese Army, and backing a military coup in early November 1963 which instead of just removing Diem, murdered him and left South Vietnam no closer to political stability.

By month's end, the United States experienced a similar event: the assassination of John Kennedy by lone gunman Lee Harvey Oswald. Lyndon Baines Johnson – New Deal disciple, back-bench House member, master of the U.S. Senate, and Vice-President – now occupied his country's highest office. He inherited not only a thaw in Soviet-American tensions, but an escalating U.S. presence in an intractable war in a divided Vietnam. He also inherited an immense U.S. development aid program that promised to transform the former colonial world in America's image. India – in spite of its Cold War nonalignment and mixed economy – registered as a test case for non-Communist democratic economic growth – the

place where the American dream of prosperity and capitalist growth could be exported and replicated.

Johnson ranked second to none when it came to his faith in the redemptive qualities of American economic, military, and technical expertise. After all, he shepherded both Ike's and JFK's foreign aid programs through a contentious, budget-minded Congress. But he also found himself in agreement with Congressional colleagues who wanted more political bang for each buck. Indeed, through decades of service in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, he had honed his skills as a deft and effective political operative. In Lyndon Johnson's world, each favor granted warranted gratitude and a favor in return, strong men like Pakistan's Ayub Khan made the most steadfast allies, and recalcitrant partners could be persuaded – even coerced – to agree with what Johnson deemed to be their own best interest. What pundits and politicians later labeled the Johnson Treatment would soon reshape the Indo-American aid relationship.

## CHAPTER 2

### AMERICAN ASSISTANCE AND INDIAN 'INGRATITUDE'

*"India is a good and deserving friend. Let it never be said that "bread should be so dear, and flesh and blood so cheap" that we turned in indifference from her bitter need."*<sup>1</sup>

---Lyndon Baines Johnson

*"When I put my wheat down here, and it costs me a few hundred million, I want to see what you're putting on the other side."*<sup>2</sup>

---Lyndon Baines Johnson

### Introduction

"We stand today in Omaha, therefore, at the end of a very important lifeline." In June 1966, on a hot and humid afternoon, President Lyndon Baines Johnson and a presidential entourage including First Lady Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson, Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, and Nebraska Governor Frank Morrison trekked out to eastern Nebraska. Among the reasons for Johnson's excursion to Omaha was to watch the departure of a barge, loaded with wheat, set sail, and deliver an address on what he considered the greatest challenges to peace and prosperity. Johnson identified these challenges, as "First is the desire of most people to win a better way of life. Second is the design of some people to force their way of life on others."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 524.

<sup>2</sup> Nick Cullather, "LBJ's Third War: The War on Hunger," in *Beyond the Cold War: Lyndon Johnson and the New Global Challenges of the 1960s*, edited by Francis J. Gavin and Mark Atwood Lawrence. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 123.

<sup>3</sup> "Word of the United States Must Remain a Trust Men Can Live By," *Evening World Herald*, July 1, 1966, 4.

Summer temperatures climbed into the nineties, yet Johnson still donned a dark suit and tie. He remained resolute in both tone and message. The day before Johnson's Omaha speech, the United States conducted massive bombing raids on fuel deposits close to Hanoi and Haiphong in Vietnam. As a result, Johnson's Vietnam policies were coming under greater scrutiny. As he struggled to articulate a message of peace and prosperity, the growing rhythm of war drums threatened his ambitious domestic reforms. Budget conscious congressional conservatives cited the growing cost of the war to urge cuts to the President's highly trumpeted "War on Poverty" – a multi-faceted community-based program that infused federal dollars into America's urban ghettos and forgotten rural hamlets. Despite passage of the historic Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, racial tensions boiled over into race riots the previous two summers in New York's Harlem and Los Angeles' Watts neighborhoods. The domestic turmoil over poverty, racism, and injustice in many ways mirrored the unrest that swept the former colonial world over the previous two decades. Johnson understood the connections between the domestic and the foreign and sought to demonstrate to his Nebraska audience how economic well-being at home and abroad were interrelated. In Lyndon Johnson's administration, the belief that a nation's economic development and progress were intertwined with the nation's stability and security bordered on sacred.

While the speech's topical backdrop was the escalating military buildup in Vietnam, the physical backdrop reinforced the importance of American wheat to American diplomacy: a towering grain terminal located on the Missouri River. The wheat traveling to India was part of the United States' Food for Peace program – long championed by farm state liberals, like Minnesota Senator and Johnson's future Vice-President Hubert Humphrey – which sent surplus

U.S. grains to food deficient developing nations.<sup>4</sup> Humphrey and his allies in Congress had long considered the concept of making U.S. food surpluses available to recipient nations on a multi-year basis to be especially vital – since it would prevent an interventionist Congress, often unfriendly toward foreign aid, from tampering with America’s life line to the Third World. But by 1966, the Commander-in-Chief had already determined to use executive powers to ship the grain on his own schedule and on his own terms.

The President stressed to his Omaha crowd: “At the other end of that lifeline, eight thousand miles out yonder, is India – a nation of half a billion. The wheat here this morning is part of their shield against the catastrophe of drought and famine.”<sup>5</sup> The President’s message was clear: America’s supply of surplus wheat was a major resource saving fragile India from falling victim to a worsening famine. Without this wheat, India was doomed to drought and death. The people listening to the President’s speech, in particular, had many reasons to support American food aid to India. For a typical Midwestern farmer, wheat exports to India meant a monthly farm subsidy and higher wheat prices come harvest time. For ambitious politicians such as Democratic Governor Frank Morrison, Johnson’s continued popularity, even in the face of

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to state that the terms: Food for Peace, Food for Freedom, PL 480, Public Law 480 will be used interchangeably throughout this paper. The program had different names but the function remained the same: provide surplus American agriculture commodities, such as wheat, to hungry people who needed them.

<sup>5</sup> Nick Cullather, “LBJ’s Third War: The War on Hunger,” 123.

growing skepticism of his Vietnam policies, was sure to help Morrison's attempt to win a U. S. Senate seat in that fall's midterm election.<sup>6</sup>

Lyndon Johnson had his own reasons for flying halfway across the country to see a barge set sail. Some of his motives overlapped with his audience's: local politics, continuing New Deal agriculturally price controls, but Johnson was thinking bigger. Surplus wheat created leverage; it opened new avenues to influence nations to support policies or strategies they might not otherwise adopt – as in the case of India. India stood as a leading nation of the non-aligned movement, struggling to maintain independence from Western and Eastern superpowers following decolonization. For nearly two decades it had pursued a planned economy, based on a mix of public and privately owned firms and hundreds of millions of privately owned but government subsidized peasant farmers. India's dependence on American wheat to feed its starving population convinced American diplomats that India should show its appreciation for American aid by growing closer to Western nations, especially the United States, and submit to American recommendations on strengthening their economy through more free-market approaches such as privatizing state-run industries and trade liberalization. American wheat was quickly becoming another American Cold War weapon.

While American-Indo relations had always been rankled by Washington's expectation of overt gratitude for its economic aid and India's relatively modest appreciation, the tensions reached a crescendo during the Johnson years. By 1965 and 1966, India's third five-year plan, which emphasized the nation's need for increased food production and called for India to be self-sufficient on feeding its people by 1971, lay in shambles. The country experienced a difficult

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<sup>6</sup> It was not. Morrison lost to Republican incumbent Carl Curtis by a wide margin of 61.16% to 38.84%.

transition from the Nehru era, with the unexpected death of Nehru's successor Lal Bahadur Shastri in January 1966 and the appointment of Nehru's politically inexperienced daughter Indira Gandhi (no relation to Indian independence leader Mohandas Gandhi). Between April and September of 1965, India suddenly went to war, once more, with rival Pakistan – an engagement that drained financial resources from the economic and agricultural development the United States had been supporting since 1950.

The year 1965 also saw India suffer through a devastating drought, which further diminished its agricultural output and spurred an inflationary spike in food prices. While India's economic plight worsened, New Delhi's faith in Cold War nonalignment remained firm. Both Shastri and Gandhi spoke out against the escalating U.S. war in Vietnam which infuriated LBJ and his top lieutenants. In June 1965, shortly after the outbreak of fighting between India and Pakistan, Johnson ordered a review of U.S. food aid policy. For the next three years, until the end of his presidency, President Johnson placed Public Law 480 grain shipments to India on what came to be called a "short tether" – the food would be authorized on a month-to-month basis, only after personal approval by the President, and the arrangement was subject to changes in India's agricultural policies. The new approach ran directly counter to the Food for Peace ethos of multi-year commitments.

The President had multiple reasons for the shift in policy. Congressional critics of foreign aid, Democrats and Republicans, decried the growing cost of the program. Johnson and Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman felt strongly that India's agricultural sector suffered from inefficiency due to excessive bureaucracy, government subsidies meant to keep food prices for politically vital urban populations low, and a general lack of market incentives to make Indian farmers increase their rate of production. This chapter will explore how additional

culturally-influenced factors, particularly gratitude and gender, helped shape Johnson's attitude toward India, its outspoken female Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and food aid. In Lyndon Johnson's world, regarding the longstanding matter of gratitude, the expectation existed that when a great power bestowed its support upon a weaker supplicant repayment was due, not in kind but in the form of political partnership and support, or at least muted criticism of the dominant power's ambitious foreign policy objectives. As for gender, LBJ, a believer and practitioner of Western-influenced gender roles, struggled in his dealings with India's female head-of-state. Johnson experienced firsthand that a rejection of expected gender stereotypes influence more than the interpersonal relationships between leaders, they can have a profound impact on nation's foreign policies.

In her classic portrait of America's thirty-sixth president, written shortly after he left office, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin elaborated on how Lyndon Johnson saw the act of gifting and the importance of gratitude. Unlike the Dharmic religions' practice of *dāna* or "royal giving" – where a stronger power should not expect praise from its less powerful beneficiary– Johnson believed his gifts warranted recognition and appreciation. "For most Presidents, the distribution of gifts is a routine function handled mechanically by the staff," she wrote, but for Johnson, "the giving of gifts was a personal task" ...he saw it as "a great opportunity for engraving my spirit on the minds and hearts of my people."<sup>7</sup> She described one moment in particular where she had apparently failed to exhibit proper gratitude for Johnson's gift and his reaction – the President glowered and said, "Why the hell should I give anything to anyone who

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<sup>7</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1976), IX-XI.

is not grateful for my gift?”<sup>8</sup> “The giving and receiving meant something more than a simple token of feeling or gratitude,” Kearns Goodwin wrote, but “the exchange somehow created a magic bond that linked the recipient to the giver, a bond compounded in Johnson’s mind, of dependence, interest, even love...”<sup>9</sup>

In 1965, India’s growing criticism of the United States’ escalating military objectives in Southeast Asia, in addition to years of perceived insufficient Indian gratitude toward American assistance, reached its breaking point. Complicating matters more for the President were his expectations of traditional gender roles in international relations, best demonstrated in his complicated relationship with Indira Gandhi. The influences of gender and gratitude collided as India and Pakistan went to war, for the second time, over disputed territories along the border between the two archrivals.<sup>10</sup> This chapter analyzes how cultural notions of gratitude, thanks, and gender intersected with U.S. geopolitical and economic priorities to reshape the Indo-American aid relationship. While diplomacy is often assumed to be determined by reasoned analysis based solely, or at least primarily, on international power realities, Lyndon Johnson’s

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. This particular gift was the second of the twelve electric toothbrushes she received from Lyndon Johnson.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State. Office of the Historian. Bureau of Public Affairs. *Foreign Relations of the United States: Milestones: 1961-1968, The Presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, The Indian-Pakistan War of 1965*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2013.

treatment of India shows how global power relationships can also be significantly shaped by cultural beliefs and the emotions they unleash.<sup>11</sup>

### **America and India in Transition**

1964 was an important year for the world's two largest democracies. In the United States, President Lyndon won a landslide victory against his Republican challenger, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. Having come to the presidency upon John F. Kennedy's tragic assassination, LBJ struggled to legitimize his authority to a nation that mourned the charismatic and youthful fallen leader. His sweeping victory over Goldwater fueled Johnson's hopes that he had thrown off the JFK albatross for good and would finally be recognized as America's overwhelmingly choice for the nation's highest office.<sup>12</sup> 1964 was not the year of a presidential election in India, but the year did bring about a monumental change in the office of India's Prime Minister. By the end of May, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's only ruler since its 1947 independence, was dead. Just six days after Nehru's death, Lal Bahadur Shastri was chosen by India's Congress Party to serve as the second Prime Minister of India.<sup>13</sup>

In between Shastri's appointment and Johnson's re-election, yet another climatic event unfolded. On August 2, 1964, the *USS Maddox*, on patrol in the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin, engaged in torpedo attacks with North Vietnamese forces. The sea skirmish quickly escalated with American fighter jets returning fire on North Vietnamese torpedo boats. U.S. forces

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<sup>11</sup> Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliance: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 12-20.

<sup>12</sup> Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 540.

<sup>13</sup> Chester Bowles, 497.

experienced damaged aircraft but no casualties; North Vietnamese forces were not as fortunate as four sailors perished and another six wounded.<sup>14</sup> In the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, top Pentagon brass urged the Commander-in-Chief to act decisively and get the necessary authorization to respond militarily to North Vietnamese aggression. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in an October 1964 report, stressed: “Unless we move now to alter the present evolution of events, there is a great likelihood of a VC [Vietcong] victory.”<sup>15</sup>

On August 4 Johnson ordered retaliatory air strikes on North Vietnamese targets and three days later, both houses of Congress overwhelmingly passed a joint resolution granting President Johnson the power to take “all measures necessary” to deter aggression against U.S. forces in the area. The swift and nearly unanimous support for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution allowed the President to legally escalate the U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, especially between 1965 and 1967, without a formal congressional declaration of war.

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<sup>14</sup> Nearly fifty years have passed since the Gulf of Tonkin incident and there is still a debate over whether there were one or two North Vietnamese attacks on the USS Maddox in August 1964. A second attack allegedly occurred on August 4. The Maddox detected sonar, radar, and radio signals from what they believed were North Vietnamese forces readying a second attack. The Maddox proceeded to fire on radar targets but the captain of the Maddox, John Herrick, radioed Washington with the news that after two hours of the Maddox firing into the gulf waters, no wreckage, supplies, or dead North Vietnamese soldiers turned up. Captain Herrick sent a cable to Pentagon officials stating he was unsure if an attack actually occurred or whether North Vietnamese forces were even in the area.

<sup>15</sup> Randall B. Woods, 547.

The Gulf of Tonkin resolution permitted Johnson to go to war, a war that would severely test U.S. relations with nonaligned India, but that summer, with an election still to win, he presented himself as the peace candidate, in contrast to the bellicose Senator Goldwater.<sup>16</sup> In numerous stump speeches, the conservative iconoclast “constantly implied that the Johnson administration was soft on communism and that the United States must carry the war into North Vietnam.”<sup>17</sup> He even suggested that the United States consider deploying tactical nuclear weapons to resolve the conflict. Historian Robert Dean, in his profile of how concepts of masculinity affected American cold warriors, examined how Johnson, like Goldwater, possessed the deep conviction that the United States (and by extension his political fortunes) could not afford the “loss” if South Vietnam to communism.<sup>18</sup> But in the heat of a presidential contest, Johnson sought the right balance between firmness and flexibility. Each passing day of the campaign, the image of Goldwater as the reckless warmonger (a popular Johnson campaign response to Goldwater’s “In Your Heart You Know He’s Right” was “In Your Gut You Know

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<sup>16</sup> For a more complete understanding of Lyndon Johnson’s thinking on Vietnam and ultimately the United States’ decision to escalate their involvement in the Vietnam War, consult Fredrick Logevall’s *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*. Logevall articulated the idea of “The Long 1964,” the period from August 1963 to February 1965, where Lyndon Johnson - his mind already set on pushing American further into the Vietnam conflict - waited for the election to pass, and shortly after his 1965 inauguration, finally declared his intentions to widen the U.S.’s war in Southeast Asia.

<sup>17</sup> Randall Woods, 547.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*. (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 210.

He's Nuts") crystallized in the minds of the American voters. Johnson, 1964s de facto peace candidate, needed to project strength and steely resolve but not fall into the trap that ensnared Woodrow Wilson in 1916 and Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940 when each overstated his ability to steer clear of war.<sup>19</sup> But the Lyndon Johnson that the nation of India would first encounter was not the peace candidate, but the liberal reformer.

Johnson's lopsided landslide, both in the popular vote and Electoral College, in the 1964 presidential election remains the largest victory ever secured by the Democratic Party's nominee for president. In the afterglow of his incredible victory, Johnson articulated a vision of what he hoped his domestic agenda, the Great Society, could accomplish. There would be Medicare for the elderly, Medicaid for the poor, government funding for public education, and a visionary "War on Poverty" to empower the poor and reinvigorate the American Dream for all Americans. Johnson's 1965 State of the Union pronounced: "A President does not shape a new and personal vision of America; he collects it from the scattered hopes of the American past. It existed when the first settlers saw the coast of a new world. And when the first pioneers moved westward...It shall lead us as we enter the third century of the search for 'a more perfect union.'"<sup>20</sup> But Lyndon Johnson was not content to remake the United States, he was again thinking bigger. Johnson imagined a global crusade of uplift and reform, one that might apply to India as well as to Indiana. On more than one occasion, he remarked, "My foreign policy is the Great Society."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Randall Woods, 547.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 558.

<sup>21</sup> Kristin L. Ahlberg, *Transplanting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and Food for Peace*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 44.

He reasoned, if the United States had determined leaders and ambitious policies that could feed the starving or heal the sick, why not lend a helping hand to the millions of people struggling to achieve peace and prosperity in their own countries. In his memoir, *The Vantage Point*, Johnson recounted his 1961 visit to India, as JFK's Vice-President, and remembered teems of people in "worn and shabby clothing" and his visions of seeing many "children with fat stomachs, bloated not from eating too much but from eating too little." Hungry children in India made LBJ think back to his earlier days as a teacher in Southern Texas, working almost exclusively with Mexican children. There he saw his students arrive to class without enough food in their stomachs. Both experiences, according to him, gave him insight on "what hunger meant."<sup>22</sup>

The boy from the Texas hill country knew that whether it was Mexicans or Indians he helped, his assistance would be returned with gratitude from the recipient. And Johnson believed grateful people are more likely, in the future, to help or at least think kindly of those willing to share their resources or expertise. Johnson, like many Americans, believed the United States' own development stood as a strong model for the rest of the world and American concerns such as financial solvency, greater access to affordable healthcare, better schools, and political stability were universal values that the world's poor should receive.<sup>23</sup> American leaders would not just be helping millions of needy people but also instructing them on how capitalist nations

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<sup>22</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*. (Boston, MA: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 222-223.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid; Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 6.

progress and become modern industrial states. And nations on the receiving end of American generosity would be eternally grateful.

Development historian David Ekbladh has traced the origins of American economic development ideology during the New Deal and the Keynesian revolutions of the 1930s and demonstrated the importance of U.S. development assistance programs to American relations with former colonial areas during the Cold War. Like other scholars of developmental diplomacy, he has especially highlighted Washington's acceptance of the modernization theory popularized by the MIT professor Walter W. Rostow in his *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960).<sup>24</sup> Rostow, who served on President Kennedy's national security team and as U.S. National Security Advisor under Johnson, wrote that all nations went through a five-stage process as they evolved from pre-modern to modern economic status: the traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption. Countries would start as traditional agrarian societies but over time the introduction of new technological advancements and investment capital would spur growth and set into motion the preconditions needed for full economic modernization.

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<sup>24</sup> For an in-depth analysis of modernization theory, consult Michael Latham, especially his work, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era*. Latham, on page four of his introduction, claimed modernization theory "centered on several overlapping assumptions: (1) "traditional" and "modern" societies are separated by a sharp dichotomy; (2) economic, political, and social changes are integrated and interdependent; (3) development tends to proceed toward the modern state along a common, linear path; and (4) *the progress of developing societies can be dramatically accelerated through contact with developed ones* (my emphasis).

A multi-faceted national economy attracts more capital for future investment and banks show a greater willingness to lend more and larger amounts of start-up funds. Take-off occurs when economic growth becomes a nation's normal condition. During this period, citizens save much of their new earnings and sustained economic growth leads to the development of unused natural resources, growth of urban populations, and new methods of farming revitalize stale agricultural sectors where increased production contributes to even greater economic growth. As productivity increases, so does the need for new and larger markets as economies export more goods into the international markets. The drive to economic maturity generates greater revenue for the state, increased profits for businesses, and larger take-home wages for workers. With disposable income growing, Rostow argued the fifth and final stage, the age of high mass-consumption, permits businesses and workers to enjoy the benefits of a mature and diverse economy by purchasing items beyond the necessities of food and shelter including also gadgets for entertainment and leisure.<sup>25</sup>

President John Kennedy, who appointed Rostow to be his Deputy National Security Advisor, won General Assembly adoption of a United Nations resolution that formally designated the 1960s to be the "Decade of Development." But it was President Lyndon Johnson who actually led the crusade against global poverty.<sup>26</sup> Ekbladh observed that many "individuals

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<sup>25</sup> Walter W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto Third Edition* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson himself saw the benefits of New Deal programs up close. In 1935, then a close aide to Texas Congressman Richard M. Kleberg, Johnson was appointed to run the Texas National Youth Administration. The program's aim was to provide work and educational opportunities for Texans between the ages of 16 and 25. After two years of leading the program, Johnson

at the high tide of domestic liberal developmentalism flowing from the New Deal were themselves immersed in concepts that had driven international modernization efforts. The universe of reformers behind the Great Society also accepted a consensus view that the state should be the central force behind a broad transformation of society.”<sup>27</sup> And in the 1960s, especially during the Johnson administration, American foreign policymakers set their sights on how to transform the developing nation of India. Among President Johnson’s advisors, Walter W. Rostow, emerged as a chief proponent for greater Indian development, and in particular, more assistance to bolster and strengthen India’s agricultural sector.

### **India: A Problematic Model for Democratic Development**

Development, of course, was not an invention of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. From the Korean War era forward American diplomats viewed India as providing a non-communist model for development in the Third World and an Asian counterweight to the People’s Republic of China. By early 1965, armed with the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and American aircraft, Lyndon Johnson began to confront Chinese influence in Southeast Asia militarily with the launching of “Operation Rolling Thunder.” For the next three years, with only occasional interruptions, U.S. B-52s undertook the massive bombardment of North Vietnam in an effort to force Hanoi to halt its support for the Communist insurgency that threatened the non-Communist government of South Vietnam. But while Washington

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resigned to run for a special congressional election. He would win this race, kicking off his long tenure of public office, running as a champion of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs.

<sup>27</sup> David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 228.

increasingly relied on military might to contain communism in Vietnam, India's development programs maintained their strategic significance as well.

In an April 1965 memorandum, Robert Komer, President Johnson's favorite South Asia expert, wrote

We see a free, democratic and viable India as essential counterweight – with Japan – to Communist China. We're banking on a natural conflict of interest between the two giants of Asia (and Peiping's 1962 attack went a long way to prove our point). Once India has conquered its internal problems, we count on it as well as Japan to shoulder the main burden of containing Chicom expansion. So what we win in Vietnam today will partly be up to India to preserve tomorrow. *Loss of India would make the loss of Southeast Asia pale by comparison* (italics mine) and mean loss of Pakistan too.<sup>28</sup>

Komer was not the only presidential advisor concerned with India's economic development. Presidential advisor John P. Lewis, who in 1964 President Johnson named to head the United States Agency for International Development (US AID) efforts in India, also emphasized India's importance to the Cold War. Lewis took on what had always been a thorny issue in Indo-American relations: India's long-standing policy of Cold War nonalignment. Some critics of U.S. aid to India decried Washington's support for a nation that steadfastly refused to stand up and be counted as a member of the "free world." Lewis countered that bolstering the government in New Delhi had become a matter of urgency precisely because the nonaligned movement had gained widespread support throughout the former colonial world and India carried the distinction of being the most prominent voice of the world's poor, nonaligned countries. Americans, he wrote in his influential book *Quiet Crisis in India* (1964), should recognize that the United States has a major strategic stake in the economic fortunes of those

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<sup>28</sup> Komer to LBJ, "Memorandum for the President," April 22, 1965, National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 25, LBJL.

economically underdeveloped countries that declared neutrality in the geopolitical conflict between Eastern and Western powers.<sup>29</sup>

The principal problem for Indian aid advocates in Washington arose from the fact that New Delhi's economic management increasingly came into question – at a time when U.S. officials touted the 1960s as the development decade. India's food grain production, assisted by an infusion of U.S. aid for New Delhi's rural-based "community development" had increased from fifty-five million metric tons in 1950-1951 to eighty-two million metric tons in 1960-1961. During the same period per capita food grain production increased from 164 to 193 kilograms. Convinced that they had licked the food output challenge, Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Nehru, determined at the outset of the 1960s that the nation was now ready to refocus its development efforts on industrialization.<sup>30</sup> The nation's Third Five-Year Plan (1961-1966) reduced investments in the agricultural sector and allotted more of the government's scarce financial and technical resources into the state-owned and managed industrial sector. The Soviet-financed steel plant at the industrial city of Bhilai stood as a shining symbol of India's own modernization aspirations. Indeed, leaders throughout the former colonial world, where economies had historically been relegated to subservient status in the global order as suppliers of raw materials and foodstuffs, often shared the Indian perspective about the need to play catch-up with more industrialized powers. To pay for greater industrial investment, Indian leaders even suggested a "sharp cut in the relative allocations of investment in social services, including

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<sup>29</sup> John P. Lewis, *Quiet Crisis in India: Economic Development and American Policy*. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1964), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Orville Freeman, *World Without Hunger*. (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1968), 146.

housing.”<sup>31</sup> India was placing its faith in modernization by way of manufacturing output, even as the nation could not guarantee that it could feed and house its rapidly increasing population.

Even India’s most stalwart supporters in Washington questioned the new strategy. In fact, U.S. development diplomats, and more so, foreign aid critics in Congress, had long expressed frustration with India’s government-planning process. U.S. consultants emphasized the centrality of agricultural modernization to economic development, and had long maintained that to spur growth in essential food grains production, India’s army of peasant farmers – most of whom farmed small plots of land – needed greater market incentives. The Government of India, instead, regulated food prices and kept them artificially low in order to win favor with large blocks of urban voters. The issue remained a mainstay of Indo-American relations throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, but as long as New Delhi had at least focused on “community development,” including the introduction of modern inputs such as irrigation and fertilizers, Washington remained supportive. Liberal fans of India, moreover, including Chester Bowles, Hubert Humphrey, and others, worried that overt efforts to guide Indian agricultural policies would stir nationalist sensitivities in India and sour bilateral relations. And, of course from 1954 on, with the passage and extensions of the PL 480 program that sent surplus U.S. grains to India in the form of food aid, Washington had been a co-conspirator with New Delhi in keeping Indian food prices low. The food aid program benefitted low income Indian consumers, but arguably provided India with a disincentive to increase food production. It nonetheless boosted the incomes of Midwest farmers by ridding them of troublesome, price-deflating surplus grains.

Lyndon Johnson had always stood as a supporter of foreign aid, including PL 480, but he also stood with others in Congress, as a skeptic of giveaways. Nor did he lose sleep at night over

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<sup>31</sup> John P. Lewis, 86.

the possibility that a harder U.S. line on market reforms might be viewed as a cultural slight on the subcontinent. The president in fact took an inordinate interest in India's farm problem, perhaps a remnant of his own populist roots in the Texas hill country. The Ford Foundation's experimental Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP), launched in 1960 to supplement the U.S.-funded community development program, provided technical assistance to farmers in seven different districts, located in seven different Indian states. The IADP pursued a strategy of providing village farmers with a "package program" of inputs: fertilizer, seed, and irrigation facilities.<sup>32</sup> The IADP was Johnson's kind of self-help program.

Johnson found a kindred spirit in his Secretary of Agriculture, the former Minnesota governor Orville Freeman. He sent Freeman to India in 1964 to survey the activities of the IADP, and the secretary came away convinced that "a successful national food policy would further one of our political objectives for India – binding together...[India's] states with ties of interdependence and strengthening the national government." He had been especially impressed by the work of India's agricultural minister Chidambaram Subramaniam who had been waging a campaign in New Delhi for a more market-oriented approach to food production. In line with the advice dished out by the Ford Foundation and the U.S. agricultural technicians, Subramaniam championed the reduction or elimination of government price controls that kept food prices in India's cities depressed. Absent price controls, Indian farmers would embrace the use of modern fertilizers and irrigation in order to maximize production and profits. The obstacle to these policy changes was of course embedded in the Congress Party itself – whose leftist and left-leaning members stood ideologically as well as politically opposed to market-based solutions. The approach, however, made perfect sense to the Texan in the White House. When Freeman

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<sup>32</sup> Nick Cullather, 207.

returned from his trip to the subcontinent, he was surprised at how well informed the president was on matters of Indian agriculture. “That Suber Mainyam of yours,” LBJ confided, “he’s a good feller.”<sup>33</sup>

It was the development theorist, W.W. Rostow, who most forcefully connected U.S. strategic interests in India’s food production. Rostow, believed that if India was going to achieve “take-off” as a modernized state, it needed faster and greater economic growth. He identified India’s agricultural sector as the key bottleneck. A “good deal of the early growth process,” he argued in *Stages of Economic Growth*, “hinges on the food supply” and a more robust agricultural sector “means higher productivity in food production.” It took “more than industry to industrialize,” he warned. The rise of industries coincided with an increased urban population to feed and if traditional societies were to successfully transition toward the take-off stage of development and place themselves on the path toward self-sustaining growth, farmers needed to supply more food. Food self-sufficiency not only kept growing urbanities fed, it also freed foreign exchange for the purchase of expensive, imported capital equipment vital to the eventual – and subsequent – development of modern societies.<sup>34</sup>

In the first three years of the 1960s, total Indian food grain production remained more or less constant and “favorable weather conditions brought the production up from eighty million metric tons in 1963-1964 to eighty-nine million metric tons in 1964-1965.”<sup>35</sup> But India’s reliance on good weather conditions spelled disaster in 1965 and 1966 when drought conditions struck

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<sup>33</sup> Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 211.

<sup>34</sup> Walter W. Rostow, 22-24.

<sup>35</sup> Orville Freeman, 147.

much of the nation and food grain production dropped to seventy-six million metric tons. The lack of adequate food supplies produced panic over food shortages which “led quickly to soaring prices, inflation, food hoarding, and food riots.”<sup>36</sup> The nation faced the prospect of famine.

As the new Shastri government wrestled with the worsening famine, other stresses and strains heightened the sense of crisis. “Language riots” broke out in the southern city of Madras over the central government’s adoption of a new national lingua franca – Hindi. While Hindi was widely spoken in the country’s northern region, its greater acceptance threatened to displace the beloved Tamil language – and other local and regional languages – in the south. Language was a passionate affair in India, so volatile in fact, that some in Washington feared for India’s future as a united country. Adding to the national sense of discontent was a series of border disputes. In April 1965, Pakistani forces moved into the Indian territory of Jammu and Kashmir, in addition to the disputed Rann of Kutch. After an early cease-fire failed to stop the fighting, by June Indian troops crossed over into Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and occupied three military installations. Adding to India’s security woes were increased tensions on its northern border with recent foe and fellow Asian power, the People’s Republic of China (PRC). India, still reeling from the surprise attack it suffered at the hands of Chinese forces in 1962, sought revenge on the PRC’s newly made friend, Pakistan.<sup>37</sup>

By mid-1965, internal and external turmoil engulfed India and the agricultural outlook further dimmed when the main monsoon failed. American officials stood dumbfounded as they confronted the possibility that years of economic and agricultural assistance might ultimately fail to build and modernize India. Rostow, Freeman, and Johnson now appeared to be vindicated in

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<sup>36</sup> Mitchel B. Wallerstein, 186.

<sup>37</sup> H.W. Brands, 110-111.

their insistence that India's agricultural strategy lacked market incentives and left the country under-producing the amount of food grains needed to feed its expanding nation, further shaking Washington's faith in the management of Indian economic and agricultural affairs.

Even as fighting in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 turned in India's favor and the outcome of the war pointed to an Indian victory, this moment coincided with another important event: the renewal of Public Law 480 legislation. President Johnson and Secretary Freeman, who both wished to see India increase its food production and ease off U.S. food assistance, saw their opening to push India to implement more self-help agricultural methods. As India started its second war, in as many decades with archrival Pakistan, it was about to experience a new set of strings attached to American foreign aid.

### **Wars, Hot and Hotter, in Asia**

The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 and the American response to it initially dampened the prospects for U.S.-Indo cooperation. Having long sought a resolution to the on-going Indo-Pakistani tensions, Washington responded to the new round of fighting by halting military aid shipments to both countries and postponing the future visits to the United States by Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani President Mohammad Ayub Khan. Pakistan claimed to have taken up arms to secure the remaining areas of the disputed state of Kashmir as well as protect Kashmiri Muslims in rebellion against Indian rule. India claimed Pakistan was orchestrating and supplying the Kashmiri Muslim revolt and complained that Washington's decade-long policy of providing Pakistan with arms, ostensibly to contain Soviet expansionism,

had emboldened the latter to wage war.<sup>38</sup> The danger appeared particularly grave to U.S. officials in light of Pakistan's increasingly warm relations with the People's Republic of China.

Leading India's war effort was Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. Shastri, who served in numerous cabinet posts before ascending to prime minister, was a close and trusted ally of India's first head-of-state Jawaharlal Nehru. After Nehru's death in June 1964, Shastri was the choice of Congress Party officials because of his promise to continue Nehru's socialist-leaning economic policies, to navigate foreign affairs through the policy of nonalignment, and to promote third world nationalism. Less than a year after taking office, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 would prove to be Shastri's greatest challenge as India's head of state. Facing war and famine simultaneously, and fearing that cessation of U.S. military aid might be followed by an embargo of U.S. economic aid, Shastri popularized the slogan *Jai Jawan Jai Kisan* ("Hail the Soldier and Hail the Farmer").<sup>39</sup> The slogan elevated the prestige of two groups: soldiers who defended the nation in its moment of need and proud Indian farmers who kept the nation fed. Shastri's call for farmers to grow more food meant a more secure food situation and less dependence on American food aid, including surplus wheat. President Johnson enjoyed hearing the Indian head-of-state call for measures to produce more food in India, but he had heard those pronouncements many times before, especially by Shastri's predecessor. After ten years of American food aid assistance to India, Johnson was frustrated with Indian soldiers and farmers.

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<sup>38</sup> Gary R. Hess, "Global Expansion and Regional Balances: The Emerging Scholarship on United States with India and Pakistan," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 56, No.2 (May, 1987): 269.

<sup>39</sup> Nick Cullather, 215.

As the fighting between India and Pakistan dragged on into the summer of 1965, the conflict coincided with a crucial Johnson administration decision: how to achieve congressional reauthorization of the Food for Peace program. The debate over reauthorization came at the same time that the global agricultural outlook was changing as carry-over stocks of wheat and feed grains in the United States declined. Meanwhile the global demand for U.S. food commodities, in the form of both sales and aid, climbed steadily, driven by rapidly expanding populations and rising incomes in the Third World.<sup>40</sup>

Food for Peace legislation expired on June 30, 1965 and without Congressional action, the program, which earned the United States years of goodwill around the world, would immediately end. Making matters worse, the monsoon season failed to generate a healthy enough harvest and India feared its worse famine since the Bengal famine of 1943, in which between three and four million Indians died of starvation. Secretary of State Dean Rusk described Congress' reaction to India and Pakistan going to war yet again as "volcanic" and Senator Wayne Morse, Democrat of Oregon, one of only two U.S. Senators who had voted against Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and stood as a staunch critic of the Vietnam War, challenged the administration further when he asked "how you expect that you can maintain public support for aid if we yield to Pakistan and India" and demonstrate that are no consequences to using American economic assistance for military purposes instead of peaceful purposes and blowing up nations instead of building them up. India and Pakistan's status as the two largest recipients of American foreign aid compounded the administration's problems. Their actions might compel Congress to pull the plug on other nations requesting and receiving U.S. help.

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<sup>40</sup> Mitchel B. Wallerstein, 9.

The Indian Government's request for a multi-year extension of its food aid agreement, made while the country was fighting Pakistan, thus initiated a U.S. Department of Agriculture review of American food aid to India. After all, a multi-year agreement would have assured India of its wheat – without annual Congressional or White House review. President Johnson and his White House staff also brainstormed to develop a plan to use surplus wheat shipments as both a carrot and stick to stop the fighting between the two nations. Secretary Freeman, along with the President, wanted any new PL 480 agreements for India to include strong self-help measures to boost overall Indian food production. Short-term agreements on American food aid became LBJ and Freeman's preferred methods to making India accept measures they might not propose or adopt on their own accord.<sup>41</sup> Freeman explicitly spelled out what self-help measures recipient nations could undertake. Actions included the use of “more fertilizer, improved seeds, pesticides, better irrigation methods and soil management practices, and credit at reasonable interest rates and on terms better suited to investments in agricultural production.”<sup>42</sup> If all of these recommendations were embraced by the recipient nation, it represented a significant overhaul of the nation's agricultural sector.

While Freeman approached the matter from a technical, agricultural policy perspective, Johnson's top national security advisors also weighed in on the matter. In a June 1965 memorandum to Secretaries of State and Defense, Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara – as well as the President - national security advisor McGeorge Bundy asked “whether the United States should be spending such large sums in either country [India and Pakistan], and how to achieve

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>42</sup> Orville Freeman, 154.

more leverage for our money in terms of more effective self-help and our political purposes.”<sup>43</sup>

Advocates for continued aid to India believed India’s worsening famine was proof enough of that country’s need and counseled that it was an inappropriate time for political bargains or deal-making. Johnson, a creature of Washington deal-making, however rejected the view that aid was a long-term and apolitical investment. Instead, the president pursued a new course of action, one that provided India with vital food aid, but in exchange India would have to take steps to demonstrate, to its American benefactors, that it would work to resolve its long-term agricultural problems. The short tether policy, developed and implemented by the Johnson administration, placed PL 480 food shipments on a month-to-month basis, rather than annual or multi-year agreements, in order to force immediate changes in India’s food policies. Although U.S. diplomatic records do not identify the creator of the phrase, “short tether,” many Johnson administration officials, including the President, felt comfortable using the phrase, or variations of it like “short rein” or “short leash.” All of these connotations evoke images of restraint or limits placed on freedom of movement and bring to mind restraints for unruly animals or disobedient children who need greater supervision. A short tether in particular signified especially tight constraints placed on a poorer and weaker recipient of U.S. beneficence.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bundy to Rusk and McNamara, “Presidential Decisions on Aid to India/Pakistan,” June 9, 1965, National Security File National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 26 [2 of 2], LBJL.

<sup>44</sup> Metaphors of “leashes” and “tethers” were not unique to India. In his essay, *LBJ, Germany, and “the End of the Cold War,”* historian Frank Costigliola recounted the Johnson Administration’s desire to limit the military power and regional importance of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In a 1965 State Department analysis, Undersecretary of State

Johnson's tactic of continuing food aid, but with a healthy dose of self-help measures, sought to please two diverse audiences. Advocates of continued aid to India could claim victory but skeptics and critics of foreign assistance could share in the final result too as Johnson's short-tether policy demanded instant reforms and greater accountability of India's agricultural sector. In justifying his new short-tether approach to his staff, LBJ elaborated further on the greater use of food as political leverage when he stated, "When I put my wheat down here, and it costs me a few hundred million, I want to see what you're putting on the other side."<sup>45</sup> The president's new approach resembled a typical congressional quid pro quo. Johnson's promise of aid now implied that India would owe Washington a favor or support in a future endeavor.

Johnson not only thought the short tether made horse sense, he also grew irritated by the scores of memos, by "Indophiles" such as U.S. Ambassador to India Chester Bowles and his predecessor in New Delhi, John Kenneth Galbraith, who argued the United States must continue to make magnanimous long-term aid commitments to India with no-strings attached. As Johnson deliberated and realized the possible benefits of the short-tether policy, America's representative in New Delhi advised to keep the wheat coming. Bowles expressed his fears that journalists, such as syndicated columnist and growing Vietnam critic Walter Lippmann, viewed the adoption of the short-tether policy as a punishment to India for criticizing America's escalation in

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George Ball, who replaced Chester Bowles as the third-highest official in the U.S. State Department, argued it was vital to U.S. interests to keep the West Germans "from getting off the reservation" - retain the FRG under the NATO umbrella and prevent demagogic nationalists from controlling the state or military - and that the country had to remain "on a leash." Again, countries that challenged U.S. hegemony are described as problem children or wild animals.

<sup>45</sup> Nick Cullather, "LBJ's Third War: The War on Hunger," 123.

Vietnam. The critics read LBJ correctly. In February 1966, President Johnson vented to Secretary Freeman:

I get fourteen memos from everybody in the government – it starts with Bowles and then it goes to State and then it goes to every Indian lover in town and then it goes to all the do-good columnists...I feel kind've like they are getting ready to rob my bank, I have to put up the bars and close the doors...Now what I am going to tell [Indian Ambassador B.K.] Nehru is very simple. I am not going to make any big commitments and I am not going to underwrite anything. I am going to say to him today...I am waiting to see what kind of foreign policy we can have with your people...I am not just going to underwrite the perpetuation of the government of India and the people of India to have them spend all their goddamn time dedicating themselves to the destruction of the people of the United States.<sup>46</sup>

Incredibly, in one statement, the President compared Indian aid advocates to bank robbers, threatened to withhold aid to India during its worsening famine, and claimed India had “dedicated” itself to the “destruction of the people of the United States.” In this environment, the push began for greater American aid leverage over India and Pakistan, the Johnson Administration’s new short-tether approach also answered an immediate concern: India’s pending request for food aid. In April 1965, India requested six million tons of wheat for 1966 and by summer, the President heard enough from his advisors to chart a new direction in the aid relationship between America and India. At this juncture, Johnson finally implemented his short tether initiative. On July 26, 1965, Bundy reported to associates McNamara and Rusk, that LBJ’s approval of “only one million tons” of food to meet India’s most immediate needs, was the first step in what administration officials came to identify as the “short-tether,” a policy of

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<sup>46</sup> Randall B. Woods, 706-707.

short-term agreements which permitted re-examination of India's performance in agricultural production at frequent intervals prior to the negotiation of each new agreement."<sup>47</sup>

Ambassador Bowles defined the new policy as "a foot-dragging performance" where Johnson assumed "personal charge of the program" and could hold up "authorization for new shipments until the very last moment."<sup>48</sup> With Johnson now personally overseeing when shipments left American shores for Indian ports, Food for Peace officials feared angering the President. The level of fear and intimidation at the Food for Peace offices grew so bad that Food for Peace personnel delayed or refused to make decisions for fear of upsetting the Commander-in-Chief. But delaying or failing to make timely decisions exacerbated India's food problems further. With India's food status designated as an emergency, the nation instituted a food rationing system to ensure as many citizens as possible received adequate food sustenance but the system was strained to the limit and famine wracked regions faced dire consequences.

India was not the only tethered nation. Brazil, Columbia, Egypt, and Ghana also received the Johnson treatment. By assuming greater responsibility of the Food for Peace program, Johnson managed to bypass the foreign-policy establishment of the State Department and centralize control of a significant portion of American foreign assistance in the White House. Historian H.W. Brands theorized that Johnson further flexed his power over aid recipient nations by writing into the short-term PL 480 extension an explicit demand requiring "each recipient [of aid] to formulate a program putting American aid to best use..." and it decreed termination of aid

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<sup>47</sup> Bundy to Rusk and McNamara, "Presidential Decisions on Aid to India/Pakistan," box 26 [2 of 2], LBJL.

<sup>48</sup> Chester Bowles, 525.

“whenever the President finds that such program is not being adequately developed.”<sup>49</sup> If India did not reverse course, and pursue economic policies, especially regarding agriculture, more preferable to the United States, the next request for American aid might be rejected outright and the aid spigot would run dry. Johnson advisor, Robert Komer, stressed the urgency to his boss that India’s economy, particularly its agricultural sector, needed immediate and more liberalized economic reforms. In a memorandum to the president, shortly before Gandhi’s March 1966 visit, Komer directly tied aid to reforms. In addition, he acknowledged the pain inflicted by LBJ’s self-help measures but still recommended staying the course.

If India doesn’t liberalize to our taste, it just doesn’t get the dough. Similarly, you [the president] have already proved how our holding back on PL-480 can force India into revolutionizing its agriculture. Once the famine is licked, I’m for continuing to ride PL-480 with a short rein – it will be painful but productive. If these points don’t add up to requiring self-help, I’ll eat them.<sup>50</sup>

The message became clearer to Indian officials – American aid came with stronger and more significant strings attached. Johnson’s short-tether policy marked the beginning of a new era in the U.S.-Indo aid relationship.

The new short-tether policy achieved three objectives that Johnson had determined were necessary. First, it allowed him to push aid recipient countries to adopt more self-help measures that would eventually wean nations off of American assistance. Secretary Freeman, in a memorandum to the president, urged using “food aid as a ‘lever’ in economic development, not only in India, but in Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], Brazil, and Pakistan as well.”<sup>51</sup> Second, it left

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<sup>49</sup> H.W. Brands, 117.

<sup>50</sup> Komer to LBJ, “Memorandum for the President,” March 27, 1966, National Security File Agency File, box 4, LBJL.

<sup>51</sup> Mitchel B. Wallerstein, 186.

nations with the concrete impression that U.S. aid could not be taken for granted. Third it quieted the critics of foreign aid on Capitol Hill who increasingly complained that American aid to India was being taken for granted. In fact, while charges of Indian ingratitude for U.S. aid had been a long-standing feature of the Indo-American aid relationship – dating all the way back to the Emergency Food Aid Bill of 1951 and the earliest days of the Community Development Program – the discussion and implementation of the short tether policy brought the issue once more out into the open within the Johnson administration.

National security aide Harold H. Saunders, in a 1969 report detailing the history of the Johnson Administration's National Security Council, stated the President and his advisors "all acknowledged the increasing reluctance of the Congress to go on aiding Indians, whose behavior toward the U.S. was downright irritating and yet who seemed to take massive U.S. aid for granted."<sup>52</sup> Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Komer confided to McGeorge Bundy as early as May 1965: "The Indians have also come to take U.S. aid for granted and use a double standard for the USSR and the U.S."<sup>53</sup> Komer's complaint to Bundy signified more than fears of American aid being taken for granted. At the core of his grievances was the belief that Washington's expectations for gratitude were not reciprocated by aid recipient nations. Making matters worse, leaders in Washington worried Indian rulers now viewed the Soviet Union more favorably, even after years of American economic assistance.

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<sup>52</sup> Harold H. Saunders, "Preface to the President and Indian Famine Report," January 1, 1969, National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 25, LBJL.

<sup>53</sup> Komer to Bundy, "Our Pakistani and Indian Affairs, May 30, 1965, National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 25, LBJL.

Komer relayed his growing belief that the Indians took American aid for granted in a July 19<sup>th</sup> memorandum to the president, just one week before LBJ first approved food aid to India on a limited and performance-based method. Recounting a long talk he conducted with Ambassador Bowles, Komer stressed to Johnson “I made it clear to him [Bowles] such matters as your deep concern over the Congressional pressures on aid programs generally and India/Pakistan specifically, and how you intended to change the aid program cycle.” Komer instructed Bowles to explain to the Indian government that the short-tether policy was to last as long as Lyndon Johnson thought it was necessary to achieve greater Indian agricultural output. Komer went on to recommend a reversal in posture in the current U.S.-Indo relationship where the Indians responded to the actions of the United States, rather than the other way around. “If we let the Indians come to us a bit more,” he counseled, “they wouldn’t take us so much for granted; this would also increase their incentive (and our leverage) toward improvements in India’s own [agriculture] performance.”<sup>54</sup>

While Washington’s frustration over the Indo-Pakistan war and India’s laggardly approach to agricultural modernization loomed in the background, Komer also introduced the notion that future levels of American agricultural assistance to India might hinge on New Delhi’s willingness to be supportive of U.S. military policies in Vietnam. While the South Asia advisor did not specifically mention India’s unbending commitment to Cold War alignment or specific criticisms of the escalating U.S. military presence in Vietnam, the issue surely shaped his thinking. U.S. aid would “have to be earned,” he observed. U.S. officials saw their fight in Vietnam as a way to defend India from communist aggression, an effort that paralleled India’s

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<sup>54</sup> Komer to LBJ, “Memorandum for the President,” July 19, 1965, National Security File Country File India, box 135 [1 of 2], LBJL.

own 1962 military showdown with the People's Republic of China. Thus, "the understandable irritation at all levels here when the very people whose battles we were fighting in Vietnam were gratuitously critical of our efforts."<sup>55</sup> The convergence of the U.S. military escalation in Vietnam and America's Cold War development aid programs was occurring now in an increasingly emotional, political context. By the summer of 1965, as the stresses and strains of war engulfed official Washington, the Johnson administration determined that it made perfect sense to demand that America's allies and its beneficiaries show greater deference to Washington. LBJ's determination to hold the line against communist expansionism in Vietnam aligned symmetrically with his no-holds-barred approach to Indian agriculture – the short tether policy.

### **Gender, Food Aid, and the Politics of Gratitude**

The politics of gratitude took on additional force when cultural constructions of gender became part of the equation. By September 1965, India and Pakistan reached a cease-fire and, like the outcome of their previous skirmish, India controlled the most populous and fertile areas of the disputed state of Kashmir. In January of 1966, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Indian and Pakistani officials signed a peace agreement that formally ended the 1965 war, restored economic and diplomatic relations, and India and Pakistan's leaders pledged a new era of cooperation between the two nations. Then, tragically just one day after the signing of the Tashkent Agreement; Prime Minister Shastri suffered a heart attack and died. India lost its second leader in as many years. Stunned Congress Party officials turned to a woman, the daughter of the nation's founder, to take over the helm.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

After the death of father, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi declined the offer of being nominated to succeed him as India's prime minister. But after the death of Shastri, Gandhi believed she was ready to occupy India's highest office and on January 19, 1966 beat out challenger and former Finance Minister Morarji Desai for the opportunity to serve as India's third prime minister. Gandhi grew up in a political household and assisted her father in numerous domestic and international dealings, but she had only served in the Indian Parliament since 1964. Her experience in running government affairs consisted of a two year stint as Minister of Information and Broadcasting.

On the same day she was elected head of India's ruling Congress Party, Gandhi held her first press conference. Two hundred reporters descended upon her New Delhi residence, and as they trampled her garden's flower beds and hedges, the assembled journalists peppered her with questions about her future Cabinet, relations with Pakistan, possible peace talks with the Chinese, and the American mission in Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> As India's first female ruler and only the second woman during that era to lead a government – the other being Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Ceylon – the first question at the press conference was predictably: “How does it feel to be the first woman Prime Minister of India?” Prime Minister Gandhi, with a noticeable edge to her voice, did not cast her victory as a victory for all Indian women and instead remarked, “In the Indian Constitution, all citizens are equal regardless of sex, religion, language, state or any other division.” Downplaying the significance of her election, Gandhi replied, “I am just an Indian citizen and the first servant of my country.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Gandhi, Nehru's Daughter, Is Chosen India's Third Prime Minister,” *New York Times*, January 20, 1966, 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

“Heartless,” “domineering,” and “emasculating:” in his work, *Comrades at Odds*, diplomatic historian Andrew Rotter claimed these words were the most common Western descriptions of Indian women.<sup>58</sup> And for much of her tenure, U.S. officials often used these same terms to describe Prime Minister Gandhi. Interestingly, however, the Johnson White House initially held a very different view of India’s new leader – one that assigned to her traits commonly associated with the “weaker sex” in U.S. culture. In a 1964 U.S. State Department memorandum for National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, U.S. officials observed that “Mrs. Gandhi’s greatest asset in politics has been her relationship to Nehru [her father].” While the State Department authors recognized her intelligence and sterling credentials, they also reasoned that emotional stability was “not one of her strong characteristics.” They even speculated that lacking her own independent political base, she might eventually be “relegated to political obscurity.”<sup>59</sup> Within months, the Johnson White House decided to come to her aid – with a timely release of surplus wheat to stanch the threat of famine. But even more than in his dealings with male foreign leaders, the man’s man who occupied the White House would expect gracious thanks from Gandhi.

Male critics in India entertained some of the same patriarchal doubts about the new prime minister’s abilities as did Washington officialdom. Upon taking over as India’s chief executive, she learned that India’s food shortage problems were worse than under her father, Jawaharlal Nehru and her predecessor Shastri. Large parts of India suffered from severe droughts which

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<sup>58</sup> Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 201.

<sup>59</sup> Rusk to Bundy, “Memorandum For Mr. McGeorge Bundy,” January 15, 1964, National Security File, Country File, Middle East-India, box 128, LBJL.

worsened famine conditions. In the southwestern Indian state of Kerala, unrest and frustration over famine conditions led to rice riots. A nationwide famine threatened not only the lives of millions of starving people but once again the life of a united India. Indian states like Nagaland, located on India's eastern border with Burma, threatened secession due to the central government's ineptness in combatting the latest agricultural setback.<sup>60</sup> Yet Gandhi seemed bewildered by the crisis. She stumbled in parliamentary debates on agricultural policy and other matters by remaining silent and not forcefully defending herself and her policies from political opponents. She frightened supporters as she struggled to think quickly on her feet. She even received the unflattering and sexist nickname of "goongi gudiya" (the dumb doll) and well after she transformed into a strong leader the term stuck around and dogged her as a reminder of her earlier political stumbles.<sup>61</sup>

Even as Prime Minister Gandhi cautioned that her election did not fundamentally alter Indian gender relations, it was clear that matters and concepts of gender were on the minds of diplomats and politicians, Indian and American. In February 1966, India's Ambassador to the United States, Braj Kumar Nehru, met with President Johnson to discuss the succession from Shastri to Gandhi. Nehru, who was also Gandhi's cousin, informed the President that Madame Prime Minister was touched by the President's warm wishes of support and congratulations after her election. Johnson responded that her election caught the attention of American women – no doubt a reference to the gathering momentum of the women's rights movement in the United States. Robert Komer, in his record of the meeting, reported, "The President commented

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<sup>60</sup> Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi*. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 295.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 296.

jocularly that with a woman Prime Minister in India, the pressure was now on us. We would have to do something more for our women.” In a scene out of the 1960s-set series *Mad Men*, Nehru warned his fellow men that “the women of India were impossible now.”<sup>62</sup>

LBJ’s comment about needing to do more for America’s women was delivered in jest but even a good old boy like Johnson noticed new developments regarding gender equality occurring in American culture. Just three years earlier, Betty Friedan chronicled “the problem that has no name” documenting the drudgery of household work and the containment of women’s aspirations in her bestselling book *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>63</sup> The success of *The Feminine Mystique* strengthened Friedan’s activism and by 1966, the same year of Gandhi’s visit, she and twenty-seven other women met in Washington, D.C. to organize and found the National Organization for Women (NOW). The new organization’s earliest objectives included lobbying the Justice Department to enforce the ban on discrimination on the basis of sex that had been written into Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, championing women’s reproductive rights, and launching a campaign for an equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

LBJ never spoke as passionately about women’s rights as he did on matters of African American civil and voting rights, but at least since FDR’s New Deal coalition, the Democratic Party made a concentrated effort to win the support of women voters. President Kennedy

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<sup>62</sup> Komer to LBJ, “Memorandum for Record,” February 3, 1966, National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 25, LBJL.

<sup>63</sup> Friedan was especially interested in Gandhi’s recent election and even traveled to India in 1966 to write a long profile about India’s new prime minister. The article, which appeared in the American publication *Ladies Home Journal*, was entitled, “Mrs. Gandhi Shattered the Feminine Mystique.” Katherine Frank, 293.

notably established the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 that documented workplace discrimination against women and recommended equal employment opportunities for women, affordable childcare, and paid paternity leave. In the mid-1960s, however, there was no well-defined, partisan gender gap. For instance, many mainstream Republicans, including the Texas congressman and future president George H.W. Bush, were outspoken backers of Planned Parenthood. Under pressure from groups like NOW, and always an expert vote counter, Johnson belatedly issued an executive order in 1967 to extend Affirmative Action protection to women.

In these rapidly changing cultural and political contexts Gandhi embarked in the spring of 1966 on her first state visit as prime minister – to the United States to meet face to face with Johnson. Although gender relations would indeed color the Gandhi-Johnson encounter, the issue of women’s rights was not on the Indian leader’s agenda. Before the visit, Gandhi insisted – much like her father had often done – that the purpose of her visit was to promote better ties with the United States and not begging for food. Privately, however, she told the Indian journalist Inder Malhotra that her “main mission” was to get both food and foreign exchange without appearing to ask for them.”<sup>64</sup> She could not have known that the Johnson administration had already determined that no country, least of all nonaligned India, would be allowed to take U.S. aid for granted. Washington would demand gratitude, while New Delhi demanded dignity.

Gandhi’s March 1966 Washington visit possessed the hallmarks of a major event. She was met at Andrews Air Force Base by President Johnson and Ambassador Bowles, and by helicopter, was whisked to the White House. The next three days were packed with meetings and private discussions between her and members of her staff and their American counterparts

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 296.

on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from India's relations with Pakistan, the likely intentions of People's Republic of China in Southeast Asia, to the all-important issue of food aid. Equally important, the president and the prime minister worked to forge a personal bond, a deeper connection between the leaders of the world's two largest democracies. Ambassador Bowles, in his memoir, recalled that President Johnson found Prime Minister Gandhi a warm and affectionate leader. After a long private conversation in the Oval Office, the President told Bowles "he was particularly impressed by the political astuteness she [Gandhi] displayed."<sup>65</sup>

The Indira Gandhi that arrived in America was different from the one last seen struggling to rule India. LBJ took immediate notice. In her travels and public and private appearances she sported a stylish new bouffant hairstyle, applied more make-up, and wore jewelry. Indians familiar with Gandhi's "tousled hair" and her typical "plain cotton saris" wondered who this new Indira Gandhi was and why did she look so different? But she wowed the Johnson White House with her formal dress, charm, and grace. Johnson, in new territory as an American leader dealing with a female head of state, displayed a level of charm and graciousness of which few had thought him capable. The Johnson family from Texas wanted to know more about the Gandhi family from Allahabad. First daughters Lynda Bird and Luci Baines were also involved in this exercise of family diplomacy. The family patriarch instructed his female progeny to express interest and ask questions about the Prime Minister's sons, including future prime minister Rajiv. LBJ demonstrated a special level of male chivalry by personally escorting Gandhi "from the executive mansion to Blair House, where she was staying and remaining there to attend a cocktail reception hosted by the Indian ambassador Nehru. His growing approval of

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<sup>65</sup> Chester Bowles, 513.

the prime minister even led him to break diplomatic protocol and remain for a dinner, in Prime Minister Gandhi's honor, hosted by Vice President Humphrey.<sup>66</sup>

The most culturally-charged moment, and arguably the most sexually-charged moment, came when the President asked the Indian head of state to dance. Public displays of physical affection between the sexes, even a casual dance shared by friends, were not generally accepted in Indian popular culture at the time. And any ritual suggesting subservience to a U.S. president was equally frowned upon in the rough and tumble world of Indian politics. Fearing that photos of the spectacle might end up splashed across Indian mass media, Gandhi politely declined. But a gallant president took no offense. I want to see that "no harm comes to this girl," he told aides.<sup>67</sup> In 1966, Indira Gandhi was forty-eight years old. But to Lyndon Johnson, this accomplished woman in her late forties was still a "girl." While LBJ publically supported the growing women's rights movement, the remark revealed the true sentiments of the nation's most powerful white male.

The episode amounted to more than a socially awkward moment. As the short tether policy demonstrated, and American modernization theory implied, developing states were deemed by many U.S. officials to be incapable of fending for themselves – be it in matters of agricultural policy or foreign affairs. Indira Gandhi registered in Lyndon Johnson's imagination as especially weak and vulnerable. She not only led a starving nation that could not feed its own people or under the banner of nonalignment – she was also a "girl." It is difficult to imagine the Texan in the White House asking British Prime Minister Harold Wilson or French President Charles de Gaulle to two-step and strut on the White House dance floor. It is equally mind-

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<sup>66</sup> H.W. Brands, 120-121; Randall B. Woods, 706-707.

<sup>67</sup> Katherine Frank, 297.

boggling to imagine LBJ taking to the dance floor to waltz or fox-trot with Gamel Abdul Nasser or Chiang Kai-shek. The dance invitation signified more about confirming traditional Western gender roles alongside establishing the correct political pecking order. In Lyndon Johnson's world, when a man asked a woman to dance, it became the woman's duty to honor the man's request – although he chivalrously made an exception for the politically vulnerable Indian Prime Minister. In the same way aid recipients should submit to the requests of their stronger benefactors.

Johnson's later description of Gandhi as a "cross between Lady Bird and Barbara Ward [the British development expert]," which he shared with aides, sheds additional light on the dynamics of gendered geo-politics.<sup>68</sup> Since Gandhi visited the United States seeking American assistance, the comparison to Ward is plausible. But comparing Gandhi to his wife requires discussion. Why did Indira Gandhi remind Lyndon Johnson of his wife? Did it have to do with Gandhi being in a submissive position and seeking American [i.e. male] assistance and protection? Or did her lobbying for Johnson's support remind him of his wife's own advocacy programs such as her campaign to beautify American cities and highways? Johnson never revealed why the prime minister reminded him of his wife, but he did inadvertently reveal that a female leader was more acceptable to him when she did not assert herself and stuck closely to familiar, Western gender roles. For Lyndon Johnson, a woman or in the case, a "girl" needed protection, specifically his protection. Her role in these diplomatic processions was akin to that of a damsel in distress needing a heroic protector.

The carefully choreographed state visit, with its strong gendered overtones, in some ways paid off for Gandhi. On March 30, in a special message to Congress, Johnson pronounced: "The

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<sup>68</sup> Nick Cullather, *The Hungary World*, 225.

facts are simple; their implications grave. India faces an unprecedented drought. Unless the world responds, India faces famine.” LBJ, who valued consensus on issues minor and major, described a coalition that included Pope Paul VI, the World Council of Churches, the United Nations, the Food and Agricultural Organization, and now the President of the United States that would work together to alleviate India’s worsening famine. It was against “our nature to drive hard mathematical bargain where hunger is involved,” he preached. Starving people, on the other side of the world, would not know or possibly care that an international network of diverse countries and organizations was working to help them. What mattered was delivering sufficient results that prevented another death due to famine. Johnson reminded his audience of how integral the United States was to India’s fate when he remarked, “India is a good and deserving friend.” “Let it never be said,” he lectured, that “bread should be so dear, and flesh and blood so cheap that we turned in indifference from her bitter need.”<sup>69</sup>

The devil nonetheless lay in the details. Johnson promised to deliver three million tons of food, as part of the next short-term food shipment, and \$9 million in development loans and grants. But American aid came with strings attached – even if the recipient did not come to Washington with cup in hand. To loosen the aid spigot, Gandhi agreed to World Bank and International Monetary Fund demands that she devalue the Indian rupee. The devaluation, which lessened the value of India’s currency by fifty-seven percent over the next two years, raised prices of imported goods – much to the chagrin of many Indian consumers. The devaluation did not need to affect the price of domestic goods but that did not stop Indian merchants from capitalizing on the disapproval of the devaluation by raising their prices on locally-produced goods. Once consumer prices jumped past fifteen percent, Indian workers walked off jobs and

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<sup>69</sup> Chester Bowles, 523-524.

took to the streets to protest higher prices for consumers, stagnant wages, and the optics that this new level of national discontent was the result of India adopting Western-backed economic reforms in exchange for wheat.<sup>70</sup> But the Bretton Wood institutions aimed to make India's exports more affordable and to deepen the country's integration into international markets. The devaluation was accompanied by the liberalization of India's complex foreign exchange controls and trade restrictions.

On the agricultural front, for 1966-1967, the Prime Minister subsequently increased fertilizer procurement from 350,000 tons to 650,000 tons. The government also set aside thirty-two million acres of the country's most productive farm land for an experimental crash program based on the use of newly engineered hybrid wheat and rice seeds and intensive irrigation. In short, Indira Gandhi returned home from Lyndon Johnson's America with new pledges of economic and food assistance. Upon her return she set her country on a new course of economic liberalization that featured a new agricultural policy that produced what has become known as India's "Green Revolution." The initiative prioritized food production over egalitarian distribution – and over the next decade helped India triple its annual output of food grains. The president from the Texas hill country, cheered on by both his national security team and his agricultural chief Orville Freeman had reason to believe that big brother had put little sister on a responsible path toward modernization.

### **Vietnam, Food Aid, and the Politics of Gratitude**

As the leader of the Congress Party, Prime Minister Gandhi had to negotiate with different factions of her diverse party. Conservatives, led by Deputy Prime Minister Morarji Desai, wanted India to turn away from Nehru's and Shastri's embrace of socialism and pursue

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<sup>70</sup> Nick Cullather, *The Hungary World*, 225.

more free-market driven economic reforms – along the same lines as Agricultural Minister Subramaniam. They generally applauded India’s new economic direction and welcomed closer collaboration with Washington. Gandhi’s left leaning critics, however, clung to their ethos of socialist or quasi-socialist planning and closer ties to the Soviet Union and its allies. While some political opponents critiqued the Prime Minister’s glitzy style and Western-approved makeover as an undignified sop to official Washington, it was her acceptance of U.S., World Bank, and International Monetary Fund recommended economic reforms that opened her up to harsh criticism from the left. Communist members of the Indian Parliament went so far to charge that by “accepting U.S. wheat she [Gandhi] had “sold out” to the American imperialists.”<sup>71</sup>

Indira Gandhi nonetheless proved more politically adept than either the Johnson administration or her Indian critics predicted. Her moves to the right on economic and domestic issues meant she needed to move left on other matters. With her own election coming soon in 1967 and having rejected her predecessor’s versions of socialism, foreign affairs registered as the logical domain where she could define herself, please the left-wing faction of her party, and continue India’ leadership position in the Third World. Most important, she could stand up to charges that she had been LBJ’s patsy. Despite the aid deals and Gandhi’s concessions on economic policy, Washington’s demands for gratitude and Gandhi’s politics of non-aligned nationalism were about to collide head on.

Prime Minister Gandhi’s path back to Cold War nonalignment began with relatively small gestures. She sent warm birthday wishes and praised the wisdom and leadership of the Vietnamese communist revolutionary leader, Ho Chi Minh. She and her government also accelerated their calls for the United States to stop its bombing of North Vietnam. Her

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<sup>71</sup> Chester Bowles, 526.

predecessor Shastri had occasionally voiced criticisms of the U.S. policy in Vietnam, especially the gradual U.S. military escalation that followed in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin incident. But prior to his death, he had publically praised “LBJ’s determined effort...to bring about a peace in Vietnam.”<sup>72</sup> American officials hoped that Indian leaders now understood that the U.S. had stepped up military activity in Vietnam, including the massive aerial bombardment of North Vietnam, in order to protect its South Vietnamese ally from Hanoi’s aggression and make the world a more peaceful and prosperous place. They also assumed that by providing India with its latest installment of economic and food aid, they had bought – indeed perhaps even won – India’s loyalty. American leaders were therefore blindsided by Prime Minister Gandhi’s critique, publically issued at a Soviet-Indo summit in July 1966.

Just four months after her successful Washington trip, Gandhi headed to Moscow to balance her earlier visit to the United States. The summit resulted in a Soviet commitment to provide India with a billion dollar aid package to build up India’s state-run steel and oil industries. But the joint press statement issued by Prime Minister Gandhi and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin overshadowed news of the large gift. Their joint communiqué called for the United States to immediately stop its bombing of North Vietnam and framed the war as a case of imperialists meddling in Southeast Asia.<sup>73</sup> In her previous public statements on the subject, the

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<sup>72</sup> James Warner Bjorkman, “Public Law 480 and the Policies of Self-Help and Short-Tether: Indo-American Relations, 1965-1968,” in *The Regional Imperative: The Administration of U.S. Foreign Policy Towards South Asian States Under Presidents Johnson and Nixon*, edited by Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, Inc., 1980, 231.

<sup>73</sup> Chester Bowles, 515; Bjorkman, 231.

Prime Minister adopted a less belligerent posture, merely calling for the bombing to stop so peace talks could proceed toward an amicable solution. Now she was on the record declaring a major aid donor to her struggling country as a “nefarious imperialistic power.”<sup>74</sup>

In a July 19, 1966 memorandum to the President – fittingly entitled *An appropriate U.S. reaction to Mrs. Gandhi’s action in Moscow* – National Security Advisor Walter W. Rostow wrote, “All hands are agreed that it was a great mistake for her to appear to agree with the substance of Moscow’s line against us.” But Rostow counseled a nuanced response. “While our response has been very strong in private, we have correctly avoided expressing any serious annoyance in public. Any public criticism by leaders of the [Johnson] Administration will only strengthen the hand of her Leftist critics who charge her with being subservient to the United States. It will make it harder for her to climb back off her limb.”<sup>75</sup> Even Ambassador Bowles, generally regarded by President Johnson as the biggest “India-lover” in his administration, had been taken aback by Gandhi’s public bombast. But he chose to write privately to the Prime Minister and level his displeasure about her agreement with “Kosygin’s violent attacks on my country in your presence.”<sup>76</sup>

Most administration officials nonetheless adopted an outwardly belligerent tone toward Gandhi. Indeed, Bowles claimed that following the Moscow communiqué “Cables from Washington burned with comments about “those ungrateful Indians.” As for President Johnson,

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<sup>74</sup> Chester Bowles, 515.

<sup>75</sup> Rostow to LBJ, “An Appropriate U.S. Reaction to Mrs. Gandhi’s Action in Moscow,” July 19, 1966, National Security File, Country File Middle East-India, box 131 [1 of 2], LBJL.

<sup>76</sup> Bowles to Gandhi, “Private Letter from U.S. Ambassador to India to Prime Minister of India,” July 18, 1966, National Security File Country File India, box 133, LBJL.

Bowles later remembered that his reaction ranged “from the violent to the obscene.”<sup>77</sup> Johnson found comfort in Gandhi’s previous statements when she pledged not to take sides in the Vietnam conflict. By not vocalizing a strong stand against American involvement in Vietnam, Gandhi’s silence was an implicit agreement with the late Prime Minister Shastri’s belief that the United States’ objectives in Southeast Asia represented efforts to stop communist aggression and promote a more peaceful world. The Commander-in-Chief refused to accept the demands of feckless critics who questioned his judgment at every turn of the Vietnam War. As a politician well-versed in the art of negotiating and striking political deals, when a colleague gave Lyndon Johnson his word, they honored their agreement and delivered on their end of a bargain. Now, it seemed, Gandhi could not be trusted. She made a promise to him and now had gone back on her word. Lyndon Baines Johnson took this as a double-cross, a betrayal by someone, indeed a girl, with whom he thought he had forged a personal, even emotional connection.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson often sympathized with many of the complaints leveled at the foreign aid program by angry critics on Capitol Hill. He saw no reason why the process of striking deals and trading political favors in the Senate cloak room could not be replicated in international affairs. The boy from Stonewall, Texas had achieved a monumental amount of success in the battle royal of domestic politics in part by adhering to the simple political philosophy that favors must be always be repaid in kind; if not, the recipient could hardly expect additional assistance from the benefactor.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Chester Bowles, 526; James Warner Bjorkman 231; Katherine Frank, 299.

<sup>78</sup> H.W. Brands, 116-121.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Gandhi's public disagreement with the president's foreign policy priority only reinforced his inclination to believe economic aid yielded limited benefits.<sup>80</sup> In the months that followed, even as the Indian government adopted agricultural policies largely in conformity with U.S. demands, LBJ kept wheat deliveries on the short tether. In an undated communication to the White House Ambassador to Pakistan Eugene Locke, a longtime Texas ally of Johnson's, pressed the case for increased sales of military supplies to Pakistan. The envoy to Islamabad acknowledged that administration supporters of India, and certainly the embassy staff in New Delhi, might oppose additional sales on the grounds that the Indians might view the initiative as a punishment for Prime Minister Gandhi's comments in Moscow. The notion did not deter Locke. "I am not sure that it is bad for the Indians to get the idea they cannot act against our interests with impunity and get away with it," he offered.<sup>81</sup> Lack of gratitude could not be forgiven.

While LBJ did not publically demand an Indian quid pro quo – food aid for support in Vietnam – others clearly saw the connection. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, in a November 1966 telegram to Bowles, sounded much like his colleague Robert Komer when he declared, "we should not let the Indian Government take it for granted that we can be a source for such food in advance of any decision actually made." He too harped on the matter of gratitude: "I am sure

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<sup>80</sup> Robert J. McMahon, "Toward Disillusionment and Disengagement in South Asia," in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968* edited by Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147.

<sup>81</sup> Locke to LBJ, "Ambassador Locke's Comments on the Memorandum to the President," National Security File Memos to the President Walt Rostow, box 9 [1 of 2], LBJL.

you realize that the gratuitous departure of India from a position of nonalignment in Viet-Nam does not help at all” in convincing Congress to continue to fund large Indian aid packages.<sup>82</sup>

The animosity toward India and its perceived ingratitude carried on into 1967. Chief White House speechwriter, Harry C. McPherson Jr., alerted the president: “You have to wait a long time before you come to what you’re looking for, that is, how much we’re going to make available to India...I wish it were possible to rap the Indians a little harder, but I know it gives State problems.”<sup>83</sup> McPherson’s colleague in the White House Communications Department, press secretary George Christian, demonstrated even less tact in a 1967 memorandum to the President. In his assessment of food aid proposals submitted by US AID director Bill Gaud and State Department Under Secretary for Political Affairs Eugene Rostow, Christian opined, “I realize the Indians are an ungrateful lot...Despite all their shortcomings, they constitute the nearest thing to a democracy in Asia, and they are not going to succeed without help. We inherited them, and I don’t think there is much we can do about it.”<sup>84</sup> The President’s spokesman was not just articulating his own opinion about “ungrateful” Indians and their continued dependence on American aid. This mindset pervaded the entire Johnson White House

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<sup>82</sup> Rusk to Bowles, “For Ambassador From Secretary,” November 7, 1966, National Security File National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 26 [1 of 2], LBJL.

<sup>83</sup> McPherson to Johnson, “Memorandum to the President,” January 30, 1967, National Security File Nation Security File Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 26 [2 of 2], LBJL.

<sup>84</sup> Christian to Johnson, “Memorandum to the President,” August 11, 1967, National Security File Country File India, box 135 [2 of 2], LBJL.

as American diplomats, from the President down, saw India as taking U.S. aid for granted, squandering vital assistance on other non-economic objectives, and not practicing proper gratitude for American generosity.

A National Security Council (NSC) dossier chronicling India's food crisis from 1965 to 1967, compiled two years later as Johnson prepared to leave the presidency, recalled that the Moscow communiqué "contained statements about U.S. policy in Vietnam and the bombing of North Vietnam that seriously antagonized top U.S. officials dealing with foreign affairs and undoubtedly had a part in the U.S. delay regarding the PL-480 agreement."<sup>85</sup> Johnson's national security aides, in the preparation of this report, put on the page their frustrations and complaints about Indian cooperation and gratitude for American aid. In doing so, they also identified the Moscow communiqué, and the fallout it generated, as a reason behind the continuation and embrace by the Johnson administration of the short-tether policy. In 1968, the same year the NSC compiled the dossier on India's food crisis, President Johnson delivered an address in which he proclaimed, "We know that a grain of wheat is potent weapon in the arsenal of freedom."<sup>86</sup> Weaponizing food might or might not promote freedom, but it did register as a manifestation of U.S. power and global ambition – as did the deployment of a half million troops to Vietnam.

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<sup>85</sup> "India Food Crisis, 1965-1967," National Security File National Security Council Histories Indian Famine August 1966-February 1967, box 26 [2 of 2], LBJL.

<sup>86</sup>James Warner Bjorkman, 201.

## CONCLUSION

*“To those people in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required – not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”<sup>1</sup>*

---John Fitzgerald Kennedy,

1961

*“To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds.”<sup>2</sup>*

Barack Hussein Obama, 2009

When Lyndon Johnson traveled to Omaha in the summer of 1966, a number of complicated issues were about to collide. Johnson’s short-tether policy for India – which made food aid to the starving nation contingent on market-based reforms – had been implemented nearly a year before. Johnson wagered that India, led by its first and only female ruler, Indira Gandhi, would implement U.S.-backed economic and agricultural reforms to continue receiving vital U.S. assistance, even if these reforms cost her ruling Congress Party a considerable loss of popular support. LBJ made his power play as the prospect of a widespread famine loomed on the subcontinent. Johnson undoubtedly believed that market reforms would revitalize India’s sagging agricultural sector, but from New Delhi the initiative smacked of hegemonic domination.

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<sup>1</sup> Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy, Washington D.C. 20 January 1961. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres56.html> (5 April 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address, *The New York Times*, January 20, 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

Domestically, Johnson's implementation of the short-tether policy risked a liberal backlash from members of his own party who had long championed generous, multi-year commitments of food aid for the world's poorest nations. But by continuing aid to India, a long-time national irritant due to its advocacy of nonalignment, the President was sure to receive continued criticism from conservative opponents of foreign aid. Johnson's foreign aid budget was not the only challenge facing the administration. As LBJ made his visit to Nebraska, support for his agenda of domestic reforms was eroding as fiscal conservatives in both parties decried the growing cost of making America a "Great Society" and inner city black youth lashed at symbols of white authority and control. Complicating matters for the nation's chief executive was the continued escalation of the Vietnam War. On June 18, General William Westmoreland requested an additional 111,588 troops. By years end the total deployment of U.S. soldiers in Southeast Asia reached nearly 400,000.<sup>3</sup>

Much like the presidents that both preceded and followed him, Lyndon Johnson employed soaring rhetoric as he stood beside a towering grain elevator on the Nebraska plains, rhetoric that extolled the power of the United States' foreign aid programs and stressed to his audience America's actions in the world were forces only for good. The Johnson gospel proclaimed that "If the strong and the wealthy turn from the needs of the weak and the poor, frustration is sure to be followed by force. No peace and no power is strong enough to stand for long against the restless discontent of millions of human beings who are without any hope."<sup>4</sup> In short, America acted not in pursuit of glory or popularity but because it was

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*. (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1983), 696.

<sup>4</sup> "President Vows to Press Punishing of Aggressors; Hanoi Area Bombed Again," *New York Times*, July 1, 1966, 1.

the right thing to do. LBJ's lofty platitudes reassured his audience, as U.S. politicians are prone to do, that America was an exceptional nation in world history as a uniquely benevolent yet commanding superpower.

Standing beneath the grain elevator, the president promised "This single load of grain will provide the margin of life for 25 hundred Indian families through the end of the year."<sup>5</sup> But the power of American wheat only took up half of his address. The second half of his speech centered on a theme that would become a hallmark for much of the rest of his presidency: a strong argument for the continued use of force in Vietnam. Thousands of Omaha citizens braved the sweltering summer heat to hear their leader declare, "What happens in South Vietnam will determine whether ambitious and aggressive nations can use guerilla warfare to take over their weaker neighbors." To hammer the message home, LBJ exclaimed, "I do not know of a single more important reason for our presence in South Vietnam than this."<sup>6</sup> In LBJ's mind, whether it was fought with guns or wheat, the Cold War was a selfless cause and the United States was an indispensable nation of immense charity and goodwill.

This study of U.S. Cold War food aid and the politics of gratitude challenges the conventional wisdom regarding American exceptionalism. It clearly demonstrates that U.S. food aid was not simply charity extended to India. Instead, by attaching food deliveries to a short tether and requiring market-orientated agriculture reforms, the Johnson Administration, strong-armed Indian policymakers. Some critics of this perspective could argue that the

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<sup>5</sup> "Word of the United States Must Remain a Trust Men Can Live By," *Evening World Herald*, July 1, 1966, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Western-influenced reforms – demanded by the U.S. government, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund – realigned and positioned India for its historic “Green Revolution” and eventual self-sufficiency in food production. Others might argue that India’s on-going commitment to Cold War nonalignment and its reluctance to bow to Washington’s demands for gratitude stands as proof that no level of American aid could buy the loyalty of Third World nationalists. To the first point, the timing of the short-tether policy, which coincided with near famine conditions in India, bespoke a level of insensitivity, even cruelty, towards India’s poor and starving population. The same Indian children that tore at LBJ’s heartstrings during his Vice-Presidential visit to India just a few years earlier, the ones he knew suffered from a lack of food, were the ones that would suffer under his short-tether policy. The policy also soured U.S.-Indo diplomatic relations, arguably at the expense of U.S. national security interests in South Asia, where India stood as a shining example of democratic rather than authoritarian development. As for the second point, gratitude, like other culturally-constructed concepts like race and class, means something different to everyone. Ingratitude, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder and men like Lyndon Johnson, who attached such deep emotions to the act of gifting, clearly used thanks and praise to alleviate their own personal insecurities and desires for appreciation, affection, even love.

Moreover, the evidence presented in this thesis documents that the timing of Johnson’s diplomatic machinations was not accidental. They followed public criticisms of the administration’s Vietnam War policies advanced by India’s newly-installed Prime Minister and disappointment with both New Delhi’s and Islamabad’s descent into war over Kashmir and the Rann of Kutch. Johnson White House memoranda, official reports, and a

flurry of correspondences reveal widespread impatience and irritation with India's nonaligned foreign policy – a frustration that at the very least compounded the president's dissatisfaction with Indian agriculture policies.

Lyndon Johnson was by no means the only U.S. official to trumpet America's Food for Peace program as testimony to American exceptionalism. Nor was he the first to puzzle over what he perceived to be India's ingratitude. What historian Andrew Rotter characterized as “comrades at odds,” the clash between U.S. notions of gratitude, anti-communist containment, and market-based economics and the Indian concepts of *dāna*, nonalignment, and democratic socialism shaped the U.S.-Indian aid relationship from its beginning in the early 1950s. It persisted across three presidential administrations prior to LBJ's coming to power and his deployment of the short-tether strategy. At numerous, strategic moments –during the Indian famine of 1951, again in the late 1950s when the Eisenhower Administration increased the level of U.S. aid to India, and in October 1962 when the Kennedy Administration rushed military aid to assist India's defense along its border with China – U.S. policymakers held out hope that New Delhi would eventually see the light, express its gratefulness, and abandon or at least modify its policy of Cold War nonalignment in favor of support for U.S. policies. LBJ in many ways carried the U.S. approach to its logical conclusion.

Furthermore, as the scholar Frantz Fanon argued, the transnational history of colonialism is replete with great powers demanding explicit thanks and appreciation in return for their exercises of authority and control. In U.S. diplomatic history, Louis A. Pérez explained how metaphorical depictions of imperial relations – including those that portray hegemony as generous benefactors and the colonized as grateful wards – serve as self-

justifying narratives of empire. Thus, when Johnson Administration officials carped over India's take-it-for-granted attitude toward U.S. food aid – and extracted admittedly painful policy concessions from New Delhi in return for additional aid – it acted not in a tradition of American exceptionalism but in the long and familiar tradition of European power politics.

This does not mean that Lyndon Johnson and his circle of advisors acted as detached foreign policy realists when they tied food aid to geo-politics. The Government of India's nonaligned foreign policy, its independent agricultural policies with heavy investments by the state, and Prime Minister Gandhi's outspoken criticism of the President's war in Vietnam provoked considerable emotion and anguish in the Johnson White House. From the President down, the expectation that India should show gratitude to the United States was both a political demand and a cultural assumption. It was a powerful combination of U.S. Cold War hegemony and Western cultural concepts of gratitude and appreciation drove one of the most complex, and emotionally-laden conflicts in the history of the U.S.-Indo relations. In short, Lyndon Johnson's short-tether policy was simultaneously a national security strategy and an outburst of frustration and anger.

Adding to the emotional stew of the American-Indo relationship was the fact that India's new Prime Minister was a woman, with whom LBJ sought to forge an emotional bond. Published memoirs, biographies, and White House memos depict Johnson's personal affection for Indira Gandhi as having been sincere. Yet as was the case with the President's desire to help the less fortunate, both in the Third World and on the domestic front, his attempted personal diplomacy with the Indian Prime Minister belied a strong paternalistic streak. As president and leader of his party he backed popular reforms promoted by NOW and other women's rights groups. But his clumsy dance invitation and his sincerely stated

hope that no harm would come to that “girl” reflected in no small part cultural constructions of gender that relegated the female leader – and by extension her country – to a passive and subordinate role in a male-led relationship.

In an August 1966 memorandum briefing the President on a letter received from Gandhi after the Indian-Soviet summit, Harold Saunders, a member of the National Security Council’s senior staff, wrote that the prime minister’s letter represented “a dignified, poised effort to resume the dialogue which she must feel was impeded by her slip in the Moscow communiqué.” Saunders went so far as to suppose that the prime minister “regrets any misunderstanding there may have been over the Moscow communiqué and hopes her subsequent statements clarified our doubts.”<sup>7</sup> But apologies aside, the damage was already done; the gender dynamic and cultural misunderstandings proved both baffling and offensive to LBJ. How could an exceptional nation, a gentleman among the pantheons of nations, ever be likened to the brutish imperialists of the past? How could Indira Gandhi and her nation have been so disloyal to the Texan in the White House and his country that only wanted to help and lift up the poor and downtrodden? Was why this woman so ungrateful? Lyndon Johnson, in his post-presidency years back on his Texas ranch, once mused to Doris Kearns Goodwin, “How is it possible that all these people could be so ungrateful to me after I had given them so much?”<sup>8</sup> Kearns Goodwin added that the ungrateful people LBJ spoke of were the American people: the poor whose poverty he had battled, the elderly to whom he had delivered Medicare, and African Americans whose civil rights he had protected through

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<sup>7</sup> Saunders to LBJ, “Memorandum for the President: Mrs. Gandhi’s Letter in Brief,” National Security File Files of Harold H. Saunders, box 12, LBJL.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the most comprehensive legislation in U.S. history. Yet in light of this study of U.S. food aid to India, it seems likely that Lyndon Johnson not only lamented his own nation's ingratitude – he believed deep in his heart that the world at large had failed to appreciate masterful exercises of political power and his many humanitarian gifts.

Once the President completed his speech, the fanfare of that hot Omaha afternoon died down and a sense of normalcy returned. Johnson, his wife, and Secretary Freeman headed back to Washington, Governor Morrison returned to campaign trail, and the river barges began loading their stock of wheat. Ready for their long voyage, the wheat would depart Omaha, sail down the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, and ship from the wharves of New Orleans to India and its hungry people. But they would do so on LBJ's terms, under LBJ's close supervision, and on LBJ's strict month-to-month instructions. By the time America's wheat arrived in India, Indira Gandhi and her proud, developing nation had surely come to understand the Johnson Treatment.

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## VITA

Marc Anthony Reyes received his undergraduate degree in history at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2006. After graduation he returned to his hometown of Kansas City and for the next five years, worked in the private sector as an audit supervisor for a number of local casino establishments. As a supervisor, he was responsible for performing daily audits, completing weekly invoices, and closing the month end books for the business' controller and general manager. Some additional office responsibilities involved training new hires and coaching auditors struggling with new procedures or software. The experience of training and helping others master new concepts inspired Marc to return to school but not in accounting or business management, but his favorite subject throughout school – history.

Marc left his position at the casino and began graduate work at UMKC in the fall of 2011, under the direction of Dr. Dennis Merrill. In Marc's time as a history graduate student, he has worked as a graduate student assistant and a Supplemental Instruction Mentor for UMKC's Supplemental Instruction program. In 2012, he served as the inaugural graduate research assistant for UMKC's Latino/Latina Studies program and is currently working on an article about the importance of mentoring programs with the program's director, Dr. Miguel Carranza. The spring of 2013 brought Marc great news on two fronts: Marc received the prestigious UMKC School of Graduate Studies Minority Master's Student Fellowship and the history department hired him as a graduate teaching assistant for the 2013-2014 academic years.

Recently, Marc contributed two essays to the Kansas City Public Library's *Civil War on the Western Border: The Missouri-Kansas Conflict, 1854-1865* online encyclopedia and won the Carla Klausner Best Paper Prize at the 2014 UMKC History/Humanities Graduate

Student Conference. At the end of the school year, Marc finished his term as Vice-President of the history department's graduate student association. Marc will graduate from UMKC in August 2014 with a Master of Arts degree and that same month will move east and begin a doctoral program at the University of Connecticut. At UCONN, Marc will work under the mentorship of Dr. Frank Costigliola.