

**ANOTHER LOOK EAST**  
**JOHN F. KENNEDY AND INDIA**

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.

—John F. Kennedy

The question is, did *he*? India and the United States have had a spectacularly tumultuous relationship ever since presidents began taking another look east. Ambassador Dennis Kux, who spent the better part of his 20 year career focused on South Asia, wrote that one of the things that most frustrated him was the “uneven pattern of US-India relations, the swings between periods of cooperation and antagonism, and the often emotional character of the relationship”.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, the Cold War corresponded with a period of antagonism between these two states; except for a particular thousand days. Those were the thousand days of the Kennedy Administration. What accounted for this bilateral change of heart? From its ephemeral nature, it is clear that a structural shift of the international system was not the main force behind this rapprochement. There was something more transient at work; there was charismatic leadership.

Although the idea that leadership—charismatic or otherwise—plays an essential role in processes of change is not generally accepted in the field of international relations, I believe that in the case of Indo-American rapprochement, John F. Kennedy’s leadership really did. Many studies, in a variety of contexts, have

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<sup>1</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*. xi.

established the efficacy of charismatic leadership.<sup>2</sup> In fact, at least twenty empirical investigations of charismatic leadership have been conducted. They have relied on case studies, longitudinal observational studies, field-surveys, observing behavior in management games, laboratory experiments, and interviews.<sup>3</sup> This body of research provides strong support for charismatic leadership theory in a diverse range of populations. With respect to American presidents, House *et al.* found that charismatic leadership by presidents was a particularly important determinant of their effectiveness. Further, they reported that the United States is especially responsive to the extraordinary effects charismatic leaders can have on social systems.<sup>4</sup>

In order to answer whether or not John F. Kennedy used charismatic leadership to engineer the United States' successful engagement with India in the early sixties, I will use a historical case study approach to analyze the relationship's development over time. I will begin with an overview of charismatic leadership theory then sketch the contours of diplomatic practice, development aid, and military partnership between India and the United States. Finally, I will examine the manifestations of charismatic leadership theory present in each thematic area to draw conclusions regarding the impact of Kennedy's leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Deluga, "American Presidential Proactivity", 268.

<sup>3</sup> Fiol *et al.*, "Charismatic Leadership", 365.

<sup>4</sup> Deluga, "American Presidential Proactivity", 287.

Leadership is defined as charismatic when people follow an individual because he or she is considered “extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities”.<sup>5</sup> Considered is the key word in this construction. It is of no consequence whether or not the leader really *is* an extraordinary person or actually possesses any exceptional powers or qualities, but whether or not the followers are convinced that this is the case and feel compelled to follow.<sup>6</sup> Certainly John F. Kennedy had many flaws and shortcomings. His self-destructive struggles with infidelity and health issues are testaments to his *unexceptional* human nature.

Although ordinary people, charismatic leaders *are* different from their peers. While visionary leaders are also able to accomplish great things, they do not elicit the same emotional response in their followers as their charismatic counterparts. The essence of charismatic leadership *is* the relationship between a leader and his or her followers. In this relationship, “by virtue of both the extraordinary qualities that followers attribute to the leader and the latter’s mission, the charismatic leader is regarded by his or her followers

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<sup>5</sup> Deluga, “American Presidential Proactivity”, 260.

<sup>6</sup> Deluga, “American Presidential Proactivity”, 261.

with...dedication and awe".<sup>7</sup> Unlike visionary leadership, charisma is "an attribution based on followers' perception of leader behavior".<sup>8</sup>

In Weber's seminal construction of charismatic leadership, he states that charismatic authority typically arises in times of crisis or distress.<sup>9</sup> This distress can be physical, economic, ethical, religious, political, and/or emotional. In the charismatic leader is the promise of deliverance from distress.<sup>10</sup> This explains the powerful emotional response to the leader.<sup>11</sup> The United States and India found themselves in various crises before and throughout Kennedy's presidency that would create the opportunity for him to act as a charismatic leader.

Broadly speaking, the Americans were facing a potentially existential threat throughout the Cold War. Their crisis was a noxious cocktail of physical and political distress. The French were defeated in Indochina and it went red in 1954. Then, "The American love affair with China had come to a crashing halt, leaving Americans stunned and bewildered".<sup>12</sup> China had become a communist state as well. The question of who had "lost" China became the object of so much tongue-wagging and finger-pointing that the incumbent Republicans lost the

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<sup>7</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 128.

<sup>8</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 128.

<sup>9</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 127.

<sup>10</sup> Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership", 744.

<sup>11</sup> Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership", 743.

<sup>12</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 50.

1960 presidential election. It was not long before Tibet was consumed by communist forces too.

At the same time, the Soviet Union became ever more threatening. On October 4, 1957, they launched a 184 pound satellite. By November, the Soviets had managed to launch an even larger satellite and explode a high-yield thermonuclear weapon. These actions demonstrated that they had the technology, throw-weight, and range to use an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). The response in the United States was public hysteria.<sup>13</sup>

India was burdened with the weight of economic hardship, ethical distress, and physical threat. Its crisis was an existential one indeed. Though India had won independence in 1947, it had not emerged from the battle for freedom unscathed. India needed to forge ahead in creating an independent, unified identity. However, it found itself lacking the financial resources to fulfill the promises of independence. Foreign exchange and even food crises ensued.

India had declared neutrality in the Cold War. However, this refusal to be drawn into any superpower's sphere of influence created an ethical minefield that required constant meticulous navigation. The neutrality that was supposed

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<sup>13</sup> Foyle, *Counting the Public In*, 114.

to keep India free created an atmosphere of continuous ethical crisis where India struggled to find neutral ground in a world that did not seem to have any.

To make matters worse, India felt threatened on two frontiers by both Pakistan and China. The scars of partition would take generations to heal. Moreover, after courting China with doctrines of neutrality and *pansheel*, India was not emotionally or militarily prepared for armed confrontation with its northern neighbor in 1962.

Charismatic leaders have a sense of mission with a deep belief in their movement and in themselves.<sup>14</sup> John F. Kennedy developed this sense of purpose during the Second World War, a time when the world painfully remembered what inaction by leaders can lead to.<sup>15</sup> In his Harvard senior thesis, "Why England Slept," he questioned how Britain could find itself unprepared for World War II. The paper later became a bestselling book. At its heart was the message, "in studying the reasons why England slept let us try to profit by them and save ourselves her anguish."<sup>16</sup> In a 1960 speech to the National Press Club, JFK stated that a president should do more than register the public view: he must inspire the public in the right direction. "It is not enough merely to represent prevailing

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<sup>14</sup> Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership", 749.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Adler ed., *The Uncommon Wisdom of JFK*, 8.

sentiment, to follow McKinley's<sup>17</sup> practice...of keeping his ear so close to the ground that he got it full of grasshoppers," He said; "We will need in the sixties a president who is willing and able to summon his national constituency to its finest hour – to alert the people to our dangers and our opportunities---to demand of them the sacrifices that will be necessary."<sup>18</sup>

In a situation ripe for the emergence of charismatic leaders, how does charismatic attribution come about? It begins with the leader identifying a deficiency in the status quo. Part of this initial step is accentuating the sense that an audience is in a desperate predicament, thereby priming them to be responsive to appeals for change.<sup>19</sup>

A charismatic leader must then formulate and articulate a vision that is a departure from the status quo. The vision provides inspiring strategic and organizational goals. It motivates their potential followers by articulating the importance of what they are doing and asks them to perform beyond previous expectations.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the vision evokes personal identification with a movement, helps create shared understandings, encourages creativity and

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<sup>17</sup> William McKinley was the 25<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. It was "Uncle Joe" Cannon, a Speaker of the House of Representatives who thus described McKinley's unfortunate practice.

<sup>18</sup> Foyle, *Counting the Public In*, 180.

<sup>19</sup> Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership", 753.

<sup>20</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 129.

reframes problems.<sup>21</sup> Bryman identified a number of possible characteristics of charismatic communication. They include: deliberate rhetorical devices, carefully premeditated gestures, eye contact, and stage-managed audience reaction.

Much of the vision communication performed by presidents is through speeches. Although one might question how much any president contributes to their own presidential addresses, there is substantial evidence that presidents have a strong influence on the language and motive imagery in their speeches.<sup>22</sup> Presidents' ability to control their messages would change with the advent of new, decentralized media technologies. However, for Kennedy, television was the apex of media technology. It gave him the unprecedented ability to reach audiences with a controlled broadcast of his own words, facial expressions, and gestures to the comfort of people's homes. Historian Robert Bothwell said that it was Kennedy's ability to master the camera that had won him the presidency.<sup>23</sup> But it is probable that this technology did much more than that. Television would have amplified Kennedy's ability to exercise charismatic leadership.

An extension of vision communication, in which both leaders and their followers take part, is the creation of legends and myths about the projected image of the

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<sup>21</sup> Deluga, "American Presidential Proactivity", 269.

<sup>22</sup> Fiol *et al*, "Charismatic Leadership", 464.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Bothwell, Lecture at University Toronto, 2008.

leader.<sup>24</sup> This highlights the essential partnership between leaders and followers. The small, inner group of followers is integral to the attribution of charisma to an aspiring leader. While it is the leader who gains initial recognition by their vision and behavior, members of their inner circle help spread the message and promote a leader's charismatic image. For Kennedy, this included White House staff, his ambassadors, and especially his beautiful wife Jacqueline.

The next stage of charismatic leadership development is that of action. A potential charismatic leader must "walk the walk" as well as "talk the talk". The leader's actions must contribute to achieving the vision through personal influence and unconventional means.<sup>25</sup> The methods employed by a charismatic leader often surprise other members of their movement.<sup>26</sup> This behavior must involve sensitivity to followers' needs and abilities and often involves personal risk.

The reaction to the leader's actions is the final determinant of charismatic leadership. Followers do not need to be unquestioningly obedient to a charismatic leader. In fact, charismatic leaders' visions are highly contested on many points by virtue of being innovative. The demonstration of charisma is a

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<sup>24</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 128.

<sup>25</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 129.

<sup>26</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 129.

leader's ability to both break with established norms and overcome the dissent that accompanies innovation.<sup>27</sup>

However, charismatic leadership is an unstable social force. It only endures as long as a leader can provide progress toward their vision and well-being to their followers. Charismatic leadership and its accompanying movement for change end as successes cease or upon death of the leader.<sup>28</sup> I will demonstrate that this is precisely what happened in the case of Indo-American rapprochement.

The area in which India and the United States came together the most was in diplomatic practice. Improvements in this area would be the foundation for the overall rapprochement of these states.

Before India's independence, the United States did not have a long history of direct engagement with the subcontinent and generally acquiesced to British interests.<sup>29</sup> It was only in 1941 that the United States and India established bilateral diplomatic relations.<sup>30</sup> During World War II, President Roosevelt asked Mohandas Gandhi to unite in the "common cause against a common enemy" rather than antagonize British Prime Minister Winston Churchill with the

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<sup>27</sup> Tucker, "The Theory of Charismatic Leadership", 736.

<sup>28</sup> Levay, "Charismatic leadership in resistance to change", 129.

<sup>29</sup> Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, xxi.

question that so weighed upon the Indian psyche; independence.<sup>31</sup> When Churchill threw the leaders of India's Congress Party in jail, President Roosevelt did not protest.<sup>32</sup> In turn, the Indian population felt let down by a historically revolutionary power and advocate of anti-colonialism.<sup>33</sup> To India, the legacy of Woodrow Wilson seemed short-lived.

Upon independence, Prime Minister Nehru made it clear that he had no intentions of aligning with the democratic (read: American) side. He said, "We propose, as 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." At the Asian Relations Conference of March 1947, Nehru further stated, "the countries of Asia can no longer be used as pawns by others; they are bound to have their own politics in world affairs".<sup>34</sup> Americans across the political spectrum had believed that democratic India would naturally join the fight against Communism. It is no surprise that Nehru's position on the matter did not sit well with them. John Foster Dulles, President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, was said to have hated non-alignment almost as much as he hated communism.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hahn and Heiss eds. *Empire and Revolution*, 141.

<sup>32</sup> Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Heimsath. "United States-Indian Relations", 469.

<sup>34</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 44.

Prime Minister Nehru's state visit to Washington in 1949 was privately deemed a disaster, despite its surrounding positive press. Dean Acheson, then Secretary of State, wrote that Nehru was, "one of the most difficult men with whom I have ever had to deal".<sup>36</sup> The sentiment was mutual. CIA sources near the Prime Minister reported that Nehru thought President Truman "was a mediocre man whom luck – the world's bad luck – had placed in circumstances far superior to his capacities", and that Acheson was "equally mediocre".<sup>37</sup>

By the 1950s, Jawaharlal Nehru's voice "carried loud and far". No one else was such a symbol of the third world. The other most visible leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement were Tito and Nasser. Tito's European origins limited his constituency and Nasser would only ever represent a subset of the Arab world. Even Winston Churchill, so close to the Head of the Commonwealth, was hardly representative of this multiracial community that was home to only a minority of Europeans.<sup>38</sup> Nehru was a new, powerful voice in the international community. It was important for the Americans to be able to cooperate with him and his country.

This did not seem likely though. When the North Koreans stormed into South Korea, the Americans tried to rally international support for peace enforcement

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<sup>36</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace* 50.

<sup>37</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 71.

action. Nehru's response to the American Ambassador to India at the time was that the attitude of the Americans toward Indochina, Taiwan, and now South Korea was evidence of imperialism.<sup>39</sup> The incident would so sour relations that President Eisenhower excluded India from the 1954 Geneva Conference even though Nehru had been an active player throughout the peace process. By 1956, the tension between India and the United States was palpable.<sup>40</sup>

The diplomatic situation between India and the United States was still tense when Kennedy took office in 1961. However, the young president was determined to cultivate friends among non-aligned countries, especially India. He planned to reverse the trend of antagonism between the United States and India by demonstrating a more tolerant attitude toward neutralism.<sup>41</sup> This friendship was an integral part of his broader vision of a more peaceful future. However, Kennedy needed to foster support within the Democratic Party and the broader American population for a policy direction that was such a departure from the established norm. After all, it had only been President Eisenhower who had considered friendship with India before Kennedy, and that president's idea of the relationship was not real friendship at all.

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<sup>39</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 53.

<sup>40</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> McMahan, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 273.

President Kennedy articulated his vision for the world through speeches and his diplomatic machinery. Perhaps its most potent articulation was his inaugural address. It employed all the tools of a charismatic leader's strategic communication. Kennedy announced that his inauguration signified renewal and change. He called upon the young Americans and the people of the world to work toward a peaceful future. "The trumpet summons us again – not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are – but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle".

Kennedy described the "new generation of Americans" as "tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of [their] ancient heritage and unwilling to witness the slow undoing of human rights to which this Nation [the United States] has always been committed". This engaged young Americans' ideas of themselves. Certainly they did not want the idealized reflection of themselves in the president's eyes to fade. And thus Kennedy had managed to sow the seeds of cognitive dissonance among his potential followers. For them not to contribute to the fulfillment of his vision, would cause them to experience the psychological discomfort of dissonance; the mismatch between an individual's behavior and their concept of self. Moreover, Kennedy asked for higher performance from his audience and expressed confidence in their ability to meet those expectations.

The inaugural address spoke to India (among others) directly as well. Kennedy said, "To those new States whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom." The desire to work together was made clear by, "My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

Throughout the speech, Kennedy broke down conventional thinking of "us versus them" and promoted a new, more inclusive, and more multilateral approach to international relations. He also fanned the flames of fear to make sure that his audience would be receptive to change. Kennedy stated, "In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger." It was a speech littered with rhetorical devices (such as metaphors and cultural symbols) executed with flare, and well-managed audience reactions. The roaring applause of the crowd and enduring memory of Kennedy's inaugural address demonstrate that it had successfully imparted his vision.

From the very start of his time in office, Kennedy took action to fulfill his vision of peace, and more specifically, friendship with India. Even his choice of cabinet-

level advisors was part of this. He appointed Chester Bowles to Undersecretary of State. “Chet” had been a well-liked Ambassador to India.<sup>42</sup> Kennedy asked his National Security Adviser, former Harvard Dean, McGeorge Bundy to put together a team of foreign affairs rather than security experts, to formulate, coordinate, and implement the White House’ policies.<sup>43</sup> This brought South Asia specialist, Robert Komer to the NSC Strategy Team. Kennedy also appointed John Kenneth Galbraith as Ambassador to India. Galbraith, a development economist who had served as an economic advisor to the Government of India, was another appointment that would promote closer ties.

President Kennedy restructured the National Security Council [NSC] as well. Rather than maintain Eisenhower’s system of formal papers, weekly meetings, and detailed *modus operandi* for staff activities, Kennedy opted for a smaller, informal, and collegial NSC. The way that the young president interacted with the NSC broke with tradition. According to Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Phillips Talbot and his Deputy James P. Grant, Kennedy was personally involved in his NSC and frequently bypassed the formal organizational structure to discuss current issues with them directly.<sup>44</sup> He was actively engaged in the US relationship with India in particular. Before Galbraith was deployed to New Delhi, the President had asked the ambassador to write to

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<sup>42</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*. p.183

him directly to keep him abreast of his activities.<sup>45</sup> In Galbraith's memoir of the period before and during his time as ambassador to India, he wrote, "A good diplomat is an articulate man who articulates only what he is told".<sup>46</sup> While an opinionated personality like his made this a difficult task, Galbraith had access to and took into account a great deal of direct guidance on how to shape the Indo-American relationship.

President Kennedy was not only more deeply involved in his foreign policy toward India through the NSC and his ambassador, but also through personal engagement with India's Chief of Government. From the first to his last days as president, Kennedy exchanged a series of friendly letters with Prime Minister Nehru. The increasing warmth of the exchange is clear when looking at the progression of the correspondence over time.

The first crisis of Kennedy's presidency was a bitter war in the Congo. Being a major troop contributing country to UN peace operations, India had an important role to play. Kennedy rightly saw this as an opportunity for cooperation. He broke with Eisenhower's established path in foreign affairs to place more emphasis on using UN machinery to address conflict. Kennedy sent a long telegram to Nehru saying, "If we and those who share our view move

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<sup>45</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, xiv.

<sup>46</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 2.

forward in the support of the United Nations in the Congo, it will succeed – and with it the opportunity for every nation, even the smallest, to work out its destiny”.<sup>47</sup> He was so intent on cooperation between India and the United States that he took even more unconventional action. He called in the Indian Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, D.N. Chatterjee to reiterate his desire that their two countries work together to solve the Congo crisis.<sup>48</sup> Prime Minister Nehru responded favorably and in the end, Indian troops were ferried to the Congo on American aircraft.

The next crisis would come before even a month had passed since the Congo erupted in violence. In Laos, the balance of power between Western, Communist, and Neutral factions had collapsed and the Communist faction was vying for complete control of the country. President Kennedy thought that India could be helpful in the situation because of its role as Chair of the International Control Commission and relationship with the Soviet Union.

Once again, he used direct communication with the prime minister to build upon a maturing diplomatic partnership. On March 23, 1961 Kennedy wrote, “...we are deeply concerned about the dangerous deterioration of the situation in Laos and I should like to take advantage of Ambassador Harriman’s presence in New

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<sup>47</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, p.184.

<sup>48</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, p.184.

Delhi to consult with you about it".<sup>49</sup> The tone of the letter was respectful and honest. This was a positive contrast to past interactions of Americans with India. The Indian impression of the United States was colored by their perception of racism and disrespect on the part of Americans. The perception was once so negative that Kanhaya Lal Bauba's 1930 book *Uncle Sham: Being the Strange tale of a Civilization Run Amok* was a runaway hit. Nehru responded favorably to the letter. On April 16, 1961 he wrote, "I was happy to receive your letter and to discuss frankly various matters with Mr. Harriman".<sup>50</sup>

By July 1961, India had started to take seriously the need to ensure a neutral Laos would emerge from the conflict.<sup>51</sup> The Geneva Conference on Laos was slow going. That said, eventually, Prime Minister Nehru agreed to take on a stronger position for neutrality and approached Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev to help bring hostilities to an end.<sup>52</sup> On May 8, 1961, Kennedy wrote to Nehru, "I was you to know how much I appreciate your continuing efforts to create a peaceful world community". Further in the letter, he highlighted the shared concerns of India and the United States and referred to the prime minister as a "good friend".<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> John F. Kennedy telegram to Jawaharlal Nehru. March 23, 1961. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 118

<sup>50</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru letter to John F. Kennedy. April 16, 1961. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 118

<sup>51</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 126.

<sup>52</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 173.

<sup>53</sup> John F. Kennedy letter to Jawaharlal Nehru. May 8, 1961. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 118

Cooperation to address these crises had been a positive, if intense, introduction for President Kennedy and Prime Minister Nehru. However, crisis management would not constitute the only contact between these world leaders. After the United States had successfully launched a manned space flight, Nehru sent warm congratulations. Kennedy replied on May 18, 1961, "I was extremely pleased to receive your warm letter of congratulations on the success of the space flight by Commander Shepard. Americans are understandably proud of this achievement, and I am especially happy to know that you and the people of India share our pleasure".<sup>54</sup> In the span of a few months, the increasing warmth of the exchange between the president and the prime minister was evident.

Although many look at the first summit between the president and the prime minister as a disaster, it was not so. Although their meeting in the president's office on November 7, 1961, left the Kennedy utterly discouraged, the rest of the exchange had been positive. While keeping American goals in mind, Kennedy endeavored to develop a jovial relationship with his Indian counterpart. During their first meeting on November 6, 1961, the president turned to Nehru and said, "Mr. Prime Minister, my wife does not believe in a free press – and she is right".<sup>55</sup> Kennedy's charm was better received than historians have given him credit for. And the feeling was mutual. After a private meeting with the prime

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<sup>54</sup> John F. Kennedy telegram to Jawaharlal Nehru. May 18, 1961. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 118

<sup>55</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 214.

minister on November 8, 1961, Kennedy said to Galbraith that he had “caught some of the Nehru magic”.<sup>56</sup>

A charismatic leader is highly dependent on members of their inner circle to help advance the charismatic phenomenon. There are few members of John F. Kennedy’s inner circle who were more essential to this than his wife, Jacqueline. Jackie’s ability to echo Kennedy’s vision with poise and grace promoted his image and reinforced her husband’s charismatic attribution. Foreign dignitaries liked her too. In a letter to the president before Jackie’s trip to India, Galbraith wrote of Nehru’s regard for Jackie. “...she can count on a warm and agreeable welcome. Nehru, who is deeply in love and has a picture of himself strolling with J.B.K [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] displayed all by itself in the main entrance hall of his house was entirely agreeable.”<sup>57</sup> Her visit to India attracted great crowds and evoked affection by many throughout the country. Afterward, Nehru wrote to Kennedy, “It was a great pleasure to us to have her [Jacqueline Kennedy] here and it is not surprising that our people welcomed her with affection.”<sup>58</sup> As an extension of the president, Jackie was able to contribute to her husband’s charismatic attribution and the Indo-American rapprochement as well.

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<sup>56</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 217.

<sup>57</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith letter to John F. Kennedy. March 2, 1962. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 108

<sup>58</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru letter to John F. Kennedy. March 25, 1962. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 108

In December 1961, Ambassador Galbraith noticed that the Indian press was “making a fuss” over Goa.<sup>59</sup> Within days, the papers had painted a picture that would have readers thinking the Portuguese were about to storm Bombay. The American government had not yet reached consensus on how to handle the situation before it escalated. The American ambassador to Portugal wanted the Kennedy Administration to stand by its ally while Galbraith wanted them to stop supporting Portuguese colonialism. It soon became clear that India was going to use force to seize the colony. Ambassador Galbraith and UN Secretary-General U Thant asked India and Portugal to resolve the issue without the use of force, however their voices went unheard. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1961, India used force to bring Goa into the Indian union.

The American populace was deeply disturbed by the Goa operation and the Kennedy Administration dismayed that it had not been mentioned when Nehru had come to Washington only a month prior. The American Ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson made a stern and emotional speech in the General Assembly condemning the action. He took the opportunity to warn against possible death of the entire UN system.<sup>60</sup> Stevenson declared, “If the United Nations is not to die as ignoble a death as the League of Nations, we cannot

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<sup>59</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 239.

<sup>60</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 249.

condone the use of force in this instance and thus pave the way for forceful solutions of other disputes".<sup>61</sup> The backlash in India from the speech threatened a rupture in the positive trend of Indo-American relations. The President's handling of the situation would determine what happened next.

Prime Minister Nehru wrote to Kennedy on December 29, 1961, to explain the Goa operation. In the letter, he expressed his disappointment that an action that had so thrilled his countrymen had been so condemned by the United States. "So far the last thing we wanted, or want, is to do anything which would affect our friendly and cooperative relations with the United States. ...I confess that I have been deeply hurt by the rather extraordinary and bitter attitude of Mr. Adlai Stevenson and some others. This appears to ignore completely the fact that vast number of people in India also had feelings in this matter and strong feelings which they have repressed for years".<sup>62</sup>

In response, Kennedy broke with the established position of past presidents. Unlike President Eisenhower, who in 1955 endorsed the Portuguese position that Goa was an integral part of Portugal and therefore exempt from anti-colonial action, President Kennedy expressed empathy for India's position. On January 16, 1962, he replied, "I appreciate you writing to me in length and in personal

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<sup>61</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 282.

<sup>62</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru letter to John F. Kennedy. December 29, 1961. JFK Presidential Library Archives, Box 118

vein on the Goan matter...You have my sympathy on the colonial aspects of this issue". Kennedy even referred to his own ancestry to demonstrate his understanding of India's perspective. "But, like many others, I grew up in a community where the people were barely a generation away from colonial rule". Kennedy acknowledged that the incident had had a negative effect on Indo-American relations but proposed a way forward. "You and I stand for cooperation and understanding, but not all our countrymen agree with us---and some of them would like nothing better than to see our hopes disappointed...you can count on me to do all that I can to ensure that any damage to our common interests is temporary. Good and fruitful relations with India have been a matter of great concern to me for many years".<sup>63</sup>

The lengthy letters exchanged in response to the Goa situation were a sign of determination on both sides to continue building positive diplomatic relations. Moreover, the unorthodoxy of President Kennedy's stance, his sympathy with the needs of the Indian leadership and people, better understanding of Indian anti-colonialism than his predecessors, and the personal tone of his communication displayed traits of charismatic leadership.

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<sup>63</sup> John F. Kennedy letter to Jawaharlal Nehru. January 16, 1962. JFK Presidential Library Archives Box 108

Of course the final determinants of charismatic leadership are followers' reactions and results achieved. The President's actions toward closer diplomatic relations between India and the United States elicited a variety of positive and negative reactions that demonstrated that they were achieving results. When Ambassador-at-large Averell Harriman visited New Delhi in 1961 he reported that Kennedy's early speeches had had "an enormous effect in India" and that Nehru thought that "there was a new sympathetic understanding of India's problems".<sup>64</sup> Indian officials were happy with Kennedy's appointments of Chester Bowles, Philips Talbot, and John Kenneth Galbraith to his cabinet. Moreover, John Sherman Cooper, a former senate colleague and close personal friend of Kennedy wrote to the president after a private talk with Prime Minister Nehru, "The relations of India and the United States are the best I have known".<sup>65</sup> The concern on behalf of Pakistan is further evidence that there was a true Indo-American rapprochement. President Ayub Khan told the Pakistani press, "Can it be that the United States is abandoning its good friends for the people who may not prove to be such good friends"?<sup>66</sup>

The tangible signs of cooperation further speak to the evidence of John F. Kennedy's charismatic leadership. He and Jawaharlal Nehru had worked together to strengthen the UN's mandate in the Congo. Kennedy had fruitfully

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<sup>64</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 275.

<sup>65</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 276.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 191.

de-emphasized Cold War considerations, and Nehru rebuffed pressure from radical non-aligned states and the Soviet Union to be obstructive.<sup>67</sup> The increasingly friendly letters between the president and the prime minister are further support for the positive changes that occurred in the relationship. One of the clearer indications of Indo-American diplomatic rapprochement was a private letter between Nehru and his chief ministers, “They have helped us greatly in the past and we should be thankful for it. I would earnestly hope that we...continue to have friendly feelings with these great countries [United States and United Kingdom] even though they might not fall in with our wishes occasionally”.<sup>68</sup> Charismatic leadership can only continue as long as the leader produces results. At least with regard to diplomatic relations, this was most certainly the case.

Another area of Indo-American relations that underwent great changes during the Kennedy Administration was that of development aid. India had been given various forms of development aid before Kennedy took office in 1961. However, in the wake of World War II, a damaged Europe took precedence over newly independent India.

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<sup>67</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 184.

<sup>68</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 201.

In 1950, India faced a food crisis and appealed to the Americans for aid. Many within the United States were opposed to responding to India's call for assistance. Tom Connally, then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thought that Indian officials were inflating the number of people at risk from the food shortage. He said, "Of course they are going to say that there are a lot of people going to starve if you don't hurry up and give them some wheat. If you are going to sit down and accept what they say and what they ask, we won't have anything to eat ourselves in a little while".<sup>69</sup>

The motivation behind development assistance between 1952 and 1961 was primarily security. The expansion of American aid programs during that period paralleled an increase in the perceived security threat of spreading Communism.<sup>70</sup> A January 1957 NSC paper stated, "Over the longer run, the risks to US security from a weak and vulnerable India would be greater than the risks of a stable and influential India. A weak India might well lead to the loss of South and Southeast Asia to Communism".<sup>71</sup> It went on to say that if India fell substantially short of its development goals, the Congress Party would lose support and the country would be at risk of civil unrest. President Eisenhower approved the NSC paper and the recommendation within it for a development loan fund became policy.

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<sup>69</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Hagen and Ruttan, "Development Policy under Eisenhower and Kennedy", 3.

<sup>71</sup> Hagen and Ruttan, "Development Policy under Eisenhower and Kennedy", 4.

That said, this development aid was dispensed poorly and begrudgingly. By 1957, the Democrats had recaptured the House of Representatives from the Republicans. Although they were generally more amenable to giving development aid than Republicans, the Democrats insisted that aid be approved on an annual basis and reduced Eisenhower's requested amount by 30%.<sup>72</sup> Development assistance on a short-term basis is known to be sub-optimal for recipient states as compared to multi-year funding. In 1957, India found itself in trouble once more as the monsoon failed to deliver the water required for adequate crop production. Prime Minister Nehru resisted asking the United States for assistance until there was no other choice. He asked for half a billion dollars in emergency funding and received \$225 million.<sup>73</sup>

India's First Five-Year Plan for development was successful in building Indian confidence in its own economic possibilities. However, it also exposed weaknesses in the Indian economy. While there were increases in production, irrigation, and power generation, there were acute shortages of steel, cement, and fertilizers.<sup>74</sup> India adjusted its basic commodities production goals for its Second Five-Year Plan. However, many within the government were worried

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<sup>72</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 94.

<sup>73</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 96.

<sup>74</sup> For more details refer to the following works: *Cement Industry of India* by Kumar B. Das; "Some Notes on Balanced and Unbalanced Growth" by V.V. Bhatt which appears in *The Economic Journal*; "Alternative Patterns of Growth under Conditions of Stagnant Export Earnings" by K.N.Raj and A.K. Sen which appears in *Oxford Economic Papers*.

about the future. At a 1959 conference on India in Washington, B.K. Nehru said, "The fact that techniques of production have developed so much that poverty and misery can be eradicated in a very short period of time, and the fact that this is being done in countries which have no inherent advantages over us, leads to impatience and discontent with an admittedly just but incredibly slow process; and both impatience and discontent are capable of weakening, if not wholly destroying the social fabric".<sup>75</sup> This concern would be reflected in John F. Kennedy's understanding of India's development challenge.

Kennedy had a different understanding of instability in the world than his predecessors. He thought that developing countries were more susceptible to internal than external threats.<sup>76</sup> Such being the case, economic stability would bring the political stability required to stave off communism. Kennedy said, "The fundamental task of our foreign aid program in the 1960s is not negatively to fight communism: its fundamental task is to help make a historical demonstration that, in the twentieth century, as in the nineteenth...economic growth and political democracy can develop hand in hand."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cited in Harrison, Selig G. ed. *India and the United State*.

<sup>76</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 66.

<sup>77</sup> Adler ed., *The Uncommon Wisdom of JFK*, 57.

At the start of John F. Kennedy's political career, he had seized upon increased and more effective aid to India as an important goal.<sup>78</sup> In 1957, he co-sponsored the Kennedy-Cooper Resolution to increase development aid to the country. While advocating for this bill, he outlined his vision for the Indo-American relationship within the area of development aid. Kennedy further elucidated his vision during his inaugural address. It expressed an American duty to help underdeveloped states, "because it is right."<sup>79</sup> In Kennedy's eyes, given its size, wealth, and power, the United States had an obligation to promote peace and prosperity.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, he thought that peace and prosperity at home depended on peace and prosperity in the world.<sup>81</sup>

Kennedy's first communication of this vision was a speech delivered on the US Senate Floor on February 19, 1959. He began by explaining that the economic gap between the developed and underdeveloped states was not being given adequate attention. Like all charismatic leader communication, the speech expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo. "And it is this economic challenge to which we have responded most sporadically, most timidly and most inadequately". He pointed out the flaws in the existing pattern of aid to India by stating, "More short term credit cannot do the job. As long as our efforts are aimed only at assuring short-term solvency, they only leave plans for an effective

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<sup>78</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 99.

<sup>79</sup> Kennedy, "Inaugural Address".

<sup>80</sup> Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, 13

Indian development program suspended in mid-air – bringing still closer the hour of disaster”. Kennedy heightened the sense of urgency to deal with the problem. He said, “It is this [economic] gap which presents us with our most critical challenge today. It is this gap which is altering the face of the globe, our strategy, our security and our alliances, more than any current military challenge...it should have been obvious that if India were to fall...then no amount of missiles, no amount of space satellites or nuclear-powered planes or atomic submarines could ever save us”.

The speech also outlined a plan of action. It included increasing the lending limits of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, achieving a better balance between military and economic assistance, reorienting military assistance to constructive civilian tasks, using surplus foodstuffs to ease food crises, and improving the Development Loan Fund. Throughout the speech, Kennedy outlined what the United States can and should do to further international development. The speech then went on to specifically make a case for focusing on India. “One nation in particular stands out as the primary example of what I am urging...That nation is India”.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, the broad development thinking he espoused was not new, but it was being presented as needing renewal to improve efficacy and was focused on India with new alacrity.

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<sup>82</sup> John F. Kennedy memorandum to United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. February 19, 1959. JFK Presidential Library Archives. Box 11.

The content and call to arms of Kennedy's speech were characteristic of charismatic leader communication.

Now Kennedy needed to deliver on his ambitious vision. His first actions toward it were while garnering support for the Kennedy-Cooper Resolution. Senator Kennedy campaigned hard for the resolution personally addressing opposition along the way. Both Republicans and Democrats questioned the constitutionality, economic foundation, ideological leaning, and necessity of the resolution.<sup>83</sup> The American Constitution does not allow for one Congress to bind future Congresses to a particular course of action. Moreover, the debate among development economists on the right balance of state versus market for creating economic growth was already alive and well in the 1950s. Despite these obstacles, the Senate eventually passed the bill in 1959.<sup>84</sup>

Upon becoming President-elect, John F. Kennedy appointed a special, pre-inaugural task force for India that endorsed the proposals he had made while a senator.<sup>85</sup> Walt W. Rostow wrote that "he launched doctrines and policies outside the structure of military pacts and (based) on economic and social development. This not only blunted communist efforts, but also ran with the feelings and

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<sup>83</sup> John Davenport letter to John F. Kennedy May 19, 1958. JFK Presidential Library Archives. Box 11

<sup>84</sup> Toye and Toye, "From Multilateralism to Modernisation," 138.

<sup>85</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 273.

ambitions of more than a billion human beings involved.”<sup>86</sup> This sensitivity to the normative environment and needs of followers is characteristic of charismatic leadership.

As with diplomatic relations, Kennedy’s choice of staff reflected the vision he had for the future of the Indo-American development partnership. He appointed Walt W. Rostow, the economic historian from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as head of the State Department’s policy planning staff.<sup>87</sup> Rostow was known for his “economic takeoff” argument and was favourable toward aid for developing countries. Chet Bowles and John Kenneth Galbraith were also known for their sympathy toward international development and openness to a mix of public and private mechanisms for economic growth.

The amount of money (non-repayable loans, grants, loans) and in-kind aid (e.g. foodstuffs, basic commodities) to India surged under the Kennedy Administration. At the time, development aid to India became one of the United States’ largest assistance programs to any country.<sup>88</sup> Kennedy’s task-force for India recommended a contribution of \$500 million to India’s Third Five-Year Plan and another \$500 million per annum in commodity assistance under the PL

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<sup>86</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 100.

<sup>88</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 78.

480 Program.<sup>89</sup> The President earmarked \$500 million in development aid for India for the 1962 fiscal year. This more than tripled American development expenditures from \$135 million the Eisenhower administration provided in 1960.<sup>90</sup> The fact that he only earmarked \$400 million for the rest of the world for the same period is illustrative of Kennedy's particular focus on India.<sup>91</sup> During the 1960s there had been a general American foreign policy shift toward the Third World and so it is to be expected that India would have experienced greater interest from the Americans.<sup>92</sup> However, the scale of support for Indian development was unprecedented. Moreover, supporting India at the expense and displeasure of Pakistan was a departure from President Eisenhower's policies.

It was not only the quantity of development aid that changed during the Kennedy Administration. The quality of aid changed as well. Before Kennedy's changes to American development aid programming, it was highly fragmented. This erodes the impact and efficacy of donor funding. Aid fragmentation's negative outcomes include: lack of transparency, increased administrative costs, overburdening the governance capacity of recipient states, and poaching the best qualified local bureaucratic staff for an overabundance of separate programs.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 273.

<sup>90</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, p.186.

<sup>91</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 177.

<sup>92</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Knack and Rahman. "Donor Fragmentation and Bureaucratic Quality"

Kennedy reduced fragmentation by channeling more American development aid through multilateral avenues such as the World Bank, and increasing the amount and the term of funding. New aid machinery was born domestically as well. In 1961, President Kennedy created the Agency for International Development to centralize the management of American development aid. Streamlining and relinquishing unilateral control of development aid was a great departure from how American development programming had always been done.

Later in 1961, President Kennedy founded the Peace Corps to attract the allegiance of newly independent countries and genuinely respond to the needs of Third World countries on their own terms. Although the Peace Corps did provide Cold War benefits, it was not designed or publicized as a tool to wage Cold War. In fact, within a month of its creation, the American Ambassador to the United Nations moved forward an initiative to appoint volunteers to UN programs directly and give over those volunteers to international control.<sup>94</sup> The first 24 Peace Corps volunteers reached India at the end of 1961. Before long there were several hundred more in the country.<sup>95</sup>

The Peace Corps was different from other volunteer programs in that it sought to encourage all First World countries to adopt similar initiatives.<sup>96</sup> This was

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<sup>94</sup> Hahn and Heiss eds. *Empire and Revolution*, 126.

<sup>95</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 187.

<sup>96</sup> Hahn and Heiss eds. *Empire and Revolution*, 125.

leadership on a global scale that inspired private American spin-off organizations and similar programs elsewhere. By May 1963, the Peace Corps Secretariat was able to host a workshop in Washington, DC on “Peace Corps development” with attendance by 13 countries.<sup>97</sup>

An indicator of Kennedy’s charismatic leadership was the sensitivity of his initiatives to his followers’ needs. In order to improve the relationship between India and the United States, he had to appeal to the leaders and populations of both countries. Such being the case, Indians were an important part of his overall base of followers. Kennedy was conscious of India’s need for flexible development aid. As a result, he endeavored to reduce the conditionality of American development dollars. In a lecture before the Cleveland Council on World Affairs, John Kenneth Galbraith observed,

Until recent times a good deal of capitalist enterprise in India was an extension of the arm of the imperial power – indeed in part its confessed *raison d’être*. As a result, free enterprise in Asia bears the added stigmata of colonialism...it is very doubtful if free enterprise is either functionally or socially applicable in India.<sup>98</sup>

Galbraith had rightly concluded that economic aid that was bound to *laissez-faire* economics was not only culturally inappropriate for India, but would be rejected.

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<sup>97</sup> Hahn and Heiss eds. *Empire and Revolution*, 131.

<sup>98</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, “India and the economic impact of East and West”. JFK Presidential Library Archives. Box 11.

He understood that since capitalism was a “system of manifest inequality”<sup>99</sup> its implementation in India would be challenging. It was thought to have “grave and even revolutionary implications” in a country where “nearly everyone is poor and many are hungry” bearing in mind that “anyone who is familiar with the subcontinent will also be aware of the talent of its people for the most conspicuous of consumption.”<sup>100</sup> Kennedy took his ambassador’s counsel and did not insist on free-market capitalism as a condition for aid. As a result, India was more open to increasing its development relationship with the United States.

There is no case more illustrative of Kennedy’s sensitivity to India’s development needs than the Bokaro Steel Mill episode. The United States had given India copper and non-ferrous metals as part of its aid program. The Americans had even given assistance to private sector plants. However, these actions had evoked the sentiment among the Indian people that, “The Americans help the Tatas and the Birlas who are already rich. By contrast, the Soviets or British build plants that belong to the people”.<sup>101</sup> Ambassador Galbraith and President Kennedy believed that building a steel mill at Bokaro would have been a needed, useful, and symbolic gesture. That it would become part of the West Bengal-Orissa-Bihar steel and coal production center would have made it an even more

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<sup>99</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, “India and the economic impact of East and West”. JFK Presidential Library Archives. Box 11

<sup>100</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, “India and the economic impact of East and West”. JFK Presidential Library Archives. Box 11

<sup>101</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 188.

meaningful development effort. After all, the area was on its way to becoming one of the top industrial production centers of Asia.<sup>102</sup> The discussions in Washington, DC spanned months. On February 7, 1962, General Lucius Clay had decided that no assistance should be given to the Bokaro Steel Mill project as long as it was in the public sector.<sup>103</sup> In May, President Kennedy made a public statement that the project should not only be funded, but also remain in the public sector.

John F. Kennedy's reorientation of American policy toward development elicited an assortment of varied reactions. The American populace was invigorated by the new sense of purpose that their president, a charismatic leader, had given them. The First Lady had dubbed her husband's administration "Camelot" to capture the hope and optimism of the time and the moniker lives on today. Young men and women rushed to answer the President's call to serve their country and the world through the Peace Corps. Even children were captivated by the spirit of the administration. In 1961, nine-year-old Harry Davis Jr. wrote to the President urging him to send food to India. His letter and the response he received from George McGovern, Special Assistant to the President and Director of the Food for Peace program, can be found in Annex A.

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<sup>102</sup> R "India and the Cold War", 261.

<sup>103</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 201.

However, a charismatic leader's initiatives are often met with opposition. President Kennedy's desire to raise the level of development aid to India was highly contested. Senator Stuart Symington, a Missouri democrat and former Secretary of the Air Force tried to slash aid to India by 25% in May 1962. In a memo to the president, he said, "the policies of no other non-communist nation have been more critical of, and therefore more embarrassing to, the United States than the policies consistently espoused by India. We cannot expect recipients of aid to always support us in international discussions and disputes. But especially because it is giving us increasing difficulties with our true friends, why should we continue to give billions to India despite the steady opposition and criticism, often bordering on contempt which we have received from the principal leaders of that country?" Kennedy was able to stymie Symington's challenge in the Senate, but only after extensive lobbying.<sup>104</sup>

Kennedy's effort to untie American aid dollars from ideology ultimately failed in Bokaro. However, the effort to fund the steel mill by the president and Ambassador Galbraith were appreciated by the Indian Administration. On a 1962 tour of aid projects, Ambassador Galbraith observed that, despite what might have been happening in the news American development aid was well-received where it counts; on the ground.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 200.

<sup>105</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 368.

Flourishing American development aid to India predictably disconcerted Pakistan. During his 1961 visit to Washington, President Ayub Khan urged President Kennedy to use American development aid to force India to break the deadlock of the Kashmir imbroglio. The president refused on the grounds that “American aid was intended to keep India free, not to force it to follow Washington’s direction”.<sup>106</sup> Pakistan’s reservations about the new direction of American development aid were indicative of its reflection on the Indo-American relationship.

The Peace Corps was a hit. Prime Minister Nehru received the first head of the Peace Corps, Sargent Shriver, on an eight-country tour of Asian and African countries where the organization was active. To Ambassador Galbraith’s surprise, the prime minister was enthusiastic about the program. Most of the world was too. The original program spread rapidly and the birth of similar non-American initiatives followed.

John F. Kennedy had achieved real results toward his new vision for international development. It was a vision that would begin a “development decade” for the entire world and bring the United States and India closer. Under Kennedy’s presidency, development aid to India increased in quantity and

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<sup>106</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 280.

quality, aid fragmentation was reduced, new development innovations (such as the Peace Corps) were introduced, and efforts were made to un-tie aid from ideology. John F. Kennedy's charismatic leadership is evidenced by these achievements. The effect of these developments is summarized well by a letter from Prime Minister Nehru to President Kennedy from May 13 1961. "Our task, great as it is, has been made light by the goodwill and generous assistance that has come to us from the United States. To the people of the United States and more especially to you, Mr. President, we feel deeply grateful".<sup>107</sup>

As a young senator, John F. Kennedy was willing to look beyond NATO as an instrument for American security even though Congress was not yet open to new frontiers.<sup>108</sup> It was only when Kennedy came to office that non-aligned countries would receive full consideration for military aid.<sup>109</sup> On September 4, 1961, he signed the Foreign Assistance Act that allowed military support to Non-Aligned states. This was fortuitous, as history would present the President with an opportunity to come to India's aid only a year after the bill had passed.

India and China had charted a course for friendship in the early 1950s. Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai flew to New Delhi for a state visit in June 1954. During the visit, Prime Minister Nehru proposed the five

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<sup>107</sup>Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 186.

<sup>108</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 43.

<sup>109</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 44.

principles of *panchsheel*. These were principles of peaceful coexistence. When Zhou Enlai accepted the principles, Nehru declared “an area of peace” between India and China.<sup>110</sup> The *panchsheel* idea became a cornerstone of Indian foreign policy and the Prime Minister lobbied the world to accept its principles. He even proposed that *panchsheel* be implemented to end the Sino-American conflict in the Taiwan Strait at the 1955 Bandung Conference of Asian and African Nations.

Nehru had explained to President Eisenhower that India could not sufficiently maintain the weapons of war to defend against aggressors and so must depend upon the weapons of peace. It followed that for India to join a military alliance would create a burden on its allies and make it a target in a way that it would not have been otherwise.<sup>111</sup> And so, India kept its distance from any one superpower and courted its neighbors. Part of this involved building up a relationship with China. India did so partly through knowledge sharing on development. Prime Minister Nehru applauded the Chinese ability to produce enough food without the technology intensive methods of the West and encouraged similar agricultural models at home.<sup>112</sup> The relationship was a warm one that inspired the saying “*hindi-chini bhai-bhai*”. This captured the sentiment that Indian and Chinese people were brothers.

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<sup>110</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 79.

<sup>111</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 92.

<sup>112</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 50.

However, all siblings fight. The British Government of India had recognized Chinese suzerainty over Tibet in the early years of the century. That had not caused problems between the two states until China had decided to “liberate” the mountain kingdom. China’s confidence in the North led it to collect grazing taxes in areas New Delhi believed were on its side of the border. This was only the first indication of a border dispute. The situation in Tibet worsened. It was not long before Tibetan resistance to Chinese power had become a revolt and full-scale war. As Tibet fell, the Dalai Lama fled the country along with thousands of followers. They found refuge in India.<sup>113</sup> At the 1959 Conference on India and the United States in Washington DC, newspaper editor Frank Moraes commented, “I think we have suddenly been awakened to the danger along our northern border...for the first time we realize that colonialism need not necessarily mean, as we always thought, the domination by a white race of the black, the brown, or the yellow...I think now, though we may have realized it also during the Sino-Japanese war, we realize sharply that an Asian race can dominate another Asian race.”<sup>114</sup> The relationship described by *hindi-chini bhai-bhai* had gone *hindi-chini* bye-bye.

The McMahon Line, which demarcated the Sino-Indian border, did not correspond to the natural geography of the area making it an unstable frontier.

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<sup>113</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 98.

<sup>114</sup> Harrison, Selig G. ed. *India and the United States*

Moreover, the Chinese Nationalist Government did not accept it. Since 1945, they protested the gradually expanding British presence in the area that was moving ever closer to the disputed frontier.<sup>115</sup> India continued, and even intensified the British policy direction in the north. However, fledgling India did not have the economic and military resources of the British required to make the policy a success.<sup>116</sup>

Certainly, India's desire to maintain its interpretation of territorial integrity is understandable. As Gunnar Myrdal said, "What the colonial power had ruled, the new state must rule".<sup>117</sup> If only China shared India's perspective. That was not the case. Territorial questions arose time and again between these Asian giants until 1962. Each time that territorial discussions were opened, India refused to discuss the McMahon Line. The relationship between the China and India depreciated.

China started to build a road across the Aksai Chin region. Of the 750 mile road, 112 miles of it lay in territory claimed by India.<sup>118</sup> India proceeded with its doomed "forward policy" of appointing outposts that could not defend the territory where they stood. In 1954, China complained to India that its outposts in Aksai chin violated the principles of *panchsheel*. In 1960, Prime Minister Nehru

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<sup>115</sup> Maxwell, *India's China War*, 69.

<sup>116</sup> Maxwell, *India's China War*, 69.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in Maxwell, *India's China War*, 74.

<sup>118</sup> Maxwell, *India's China War*, 87.

invited Premier Zhou Enlai to New Delhi to try and salvage the situation. They appointed a boundary commission that failed to solve anything.<sup>119</sup>

By October 1962, as a response to Indian border policy, there was a major Chinese offensive in the area. The Chinese were superior to the Indian forces in both arms and number and India's troops were quickly overwhelmed.<sup>120</sup> The Chinese forces advanced ever southward. India appealed to the Soviet Union for assistance and received only pressure to settle on Chinese terms. The Soviet Union would not restrain China. India then turned to the Canadians, a fellow member of the Commonwealth, for arms.<sup>121</sup> However, it was the United States who would ultimately respond to India's appeal for military aid.

At the time, the Kennedy Administration was in the midst of dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis. On October 28, 1962, General Kaul formally requested arms from Ambassador Galbraith.<sup>122</sup> Requests from the Prime Minister to the President followed in November. For Kennedy this presented both a challenge and an opportunity.

Kennedy and his advisers had agreed that their predecessors had placed too much emphasis on the establishment of formal alliances to the exclusion of non-

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<sup>119</sup> Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, 98.

<sup>120</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 373.

<sup>121</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 378.

<sup>122</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 284.

aligned states. As a result, the United States had failed to cultivate relationships outside of these structures.<sup>123</sup> The president and his advisers recognized the Sino-Indian conflict as an opportunity to both cement the United States' growing friendship with India and exacerbate the Sino-Soviet rift.<sup>124</sup> At a bilateral summit in Nassau, British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan and President Kennedy discussed India's situation. The Prime Minister was not terribly concerned by the crisis and only wanted to provide a minimum of assistance. Kennedy on the other hand, wanted to build a military partnership with India.<sup>125</sup>

Fulfilling this vision would be tough given the historical trajectory of the United States' policies on military assistance and its relationship with Pakistan.

Kennedy's communication of his vision of military partnership with India is linked to his messages regarding the Foreign Assistance Act. Kennedy's remarks at the White House upon signing the Foreign Assistance Act asked his followers to recognize the vital importance of protecting countries which were near communist areas and under direct attack. In line with charismatic leader communication patterns, the President pointed out the flaw with the status quo of the military policy in the United States; providing military assistance to countries that were not formally part of American alliances had not been discussed before. Kennedy went on to applaud his followers' ability to recognize

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<sup>123</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 273.

<sup>124</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 287.

<sup>125</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 455.

that such military assistance was not only an obligation but also in the national interest. The President's remarks described a clear course of action for his followers and a justification of the related expenses. Kennedy said that this military assistance would be "a fraction of what we spend on our national defense every year... and is as important dollar for dollar as any expenditure for national defense itself".<sup>126</sup>

Communicating the vision effectively to bring Pakistan into agreement was its own challenge. Kennedy and his advisers discussed the matter in depth before finally settling upon personal correspondence between the president and Ayub Khan. Kennedy tried to assure Pakistan's president that military assistance to India would remain firmly in the realm of defensive capabilities. He also tried to call upon Pakistan to actively support American action to reinforce India's defenses against the Chinese. Kennedy wrote, "Certainly the United States as a leader of the Free World must take alarm at any aggressive expansion of Communist power, and you as the leader of the other great nation in the subcontinent will share this alarm".<sup>127</sup> Appealing to Pakistan's sense of duty as a non-communist state to overcome its checkered past with India to support American military aid is an unmistakable act of charismatic communication. Though it may have seemed an unrealistic request of Pakistan, Kennedy *did*

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<sup>126</sup> Kennedy, "Remarks upon signing the Foreign Assistance Act," August 1, 1962.

<sup>127</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 289.

manage to acquire Ayub Khan's consent to American military aid and agreement to issue a unilateral pledge of non-aggression toward India. In a conversation with the American Ambassador to Pakistan on October 26, 1962, Ayub Khan said that his government would not take any action to hamper India's ability to fight the Chinese.<sup>128</sup> Achieving what conventional wisdom would assume unachievable, is evidence of Kennedy's charismatic leadership.

Although preoccupied with one of the most explosive crises in history, Kennedy moved swiftly to assist his Indian friends. In a letter to Prime Minister Nehru on October 28, 1962, he wrote "I want to give you support as well as sympathy", and that is exactly what he did.<sup>129</sup> Despite Pakistan's objections, Kennedy pushed through to pursue his vision of military partnership with India.<sup>130</sup> He dispatched Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Averell Harriman to the subcontinent. Harriman had been President Roosevelt's envoy to Josef Stalin during World War II and had the diplomatic gumption for the job. He was accompanied by Great Britain's Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Duncan Sandys and a crew of military and diplomatic experts.<sup>131</sup> Repeated Chinese military success lent urgency to the Harriman-Sandys Mission.

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<sup>128</sup> Walter McConaughy telegram to the Department of State. October 27, 1962. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian.

<sup>129</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 288.

<sup>130</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 291.

<sup>131</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 291.

However, the crisis ended as soon as it had started. On November 20, 1962, China declared a unilateral ceasefire. In the period following the ceasefire, President Kennedy had painful choices to make about India. Seeing the strong domestic concerns about taking on a new and significant burden, Kennedy decided to employ a joint American-British approach to India's military challenges.<sup>132</sup> This sensitivity to his followers' concerns while still innovating is evidence of Kennedy's charismatic leadership. On December 10, 1962, the President authorized increased military, financial, and diplomatic involvement in the subcontinent. This included an emergency military aid program for India of up to \$60 million. It also approved in principle, an air defense pact that had been suggested by M.J. Desai.<sup>133</sup> This air defense pact had the potential to have an enormous effect on the course of the American relationship with India in the long term.

However, the resistance to such innovation in the Indo-American relationship was strong. Kennedy would not let that stop him. At a White House meeting on April 25, 1963, he said that "the United States should go forward with a program of substantial military assistance for India, regardless of the state of Indo-Pakistani relations".<sup>134</sup> India requested \$1.6 billion in American defense support over the next three years. Members of the Administration, especially Bob

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<sup>132</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 295.

<sup>133</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 439.

<sup>134</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 297.

McNamara, found this request grossly inflated. Kennedy told his advisers, “Let’s not be pennywise about India, let’s not let them get into a position where they feel that they can’t cope with the Chicom and Paks on top of their other problems”, and instructed Defense Department officials to engage their Indian counterparts to come up with a more realistic plan. The president further instructed his officials to regard Bob McNamara’s \$300 million proposal as a “floor rather than a ceiling” for military assistance.<sup>135</sup>

The reaction to these actions toward American military partnership with India was initially mixed but eventually positive. Through charismatic leadership, President Kennedy had managed to lay the groundwork for an entirely new relationship with India. The Sino-Indian War was the first threat to Indian security since Independence and the President Kennedy used this as an opportunity to cement its friendship with India. Ambassador B.K. Nehru saw this new military partnership as “a revolutionary development with far-reaching effects”.<sup>136</sup> Had it continued beyond the Kennedy years, he would have been right.

At first, President Ayub Khan did not have much sympathy for India’s plight. He downplayed the Chinese threat and vehemently claimed that any weapons

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<sup>135</sup> McMahan, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 298.

<sup>136</sup> McMahan, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 288.

given to India would be turned against Pakistan.<sup>137</sup> In a letter to President Kennedy he wrote, “ ...It would, therefore, appear as if what the Indians were interested in was to continue to maintain the bulk of their forces, equipped with modern arms and in greater strength, against Pakistan. ”<sup>138</sup> Ayub Khan was so adamant that the United States not give India military assistance that he threatened to withdraw Pakistan from the SENTO and CEATO alliances. However, President Kennedy used his personal influence and that of his inner circle of followers to convince Pakistan’s President that limited military aid to India was both understandable and desirable. Prime Minister MacMillan endorsed the American approach to the situation as well. In India, the reaction was overwhelmingly positive. *Blitz* the anti-American magazine of Bombay did a feature in praise of President Kennedy and Ambassador Galbraith.<sup>139</sup> Opinion polls of the Indian attitude toward the United States reflected the changed perspective the episode had brought about. In October 1957, a USIS poll on attitudes toward the United States where respondents reported “very good” was only 2.5%. By December 1962, that percentage had risen to 62%.<sup>140</sup>

Through charismatic leadership, the President had created a *de facto* alliance with India that been beyond the realm of the possible before. On November 2, 1962,

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<sup>137</sup> McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery*, 290.

<sup>138</sup> Ayub Khan letter to John F. Kennedy, December 17, 1962. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian.

<sup>139</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 394.

<sup>140</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador’s Journal*, 446.

only 4 days after they had been requested, American shipments of artillery and light weapons arrived in Calcutta. They made headlines the next day. In June 1962, President Kennedy and Prime Minister MacMillan issued the Birch-Grove Communiqué pledging Anglo-American military assistance to India.<sup>141</sup>

On January 5, 1962, M.J. Desai had told Ambassador Galbraith that India was willing to work with the United States both politically and militarily throughout Asia to contain the Chinese.<sup>142</sup> This had been a long sought after American goal. Moreover, by November 1962, members of the Congress Party were considering a complete change in the course of Indian foreign policy, aligning with the United States.<sup>143</sup> After John Kenneth Galbraith left India, Chester Bowles assumed his post as ambassador. He worked with Indian Defense Minister Krishnamachari to develop a proposal of \$375 million in military aid over 5 years. The president had called a meeting to finalize the plan on November 26, 1963.<sup>144</sup> The result of Kennedy's actions during and after the Sino-Indian war was tangible progress toward a completely new area of Indo-American relations. For the first time in history, the United States had both the opportunity and ability to begin a military partnership with India. To be sure, Prime Minister Nehru was not ready for a military alliance. However, his readiness to accept military reliance on the Americans was an unprecedented outcome that was

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<sup>141</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 212.

<sup>142</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 458.

<sup>143</sup> Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal*, 458.

<sup>144</sup> Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 217.

fostered by John F. Kennedy's charismatic leadership.

## **Epilogue**

While John F. Kennedy's charismatic attribution gave him the influence required to achieve extraordinary outcomes, it is important to bear in mind the interconnectedness between him and the context in which he lived. This period within the Cold War was ripe for the appearance of a charismatic leader. As much as Kennedy as a young man had confidence in his ability to make a difference and all the qualities required to do so, his initiatives were subject to how much change the system could bear.

Impressive strides were made in the areas of diplomatic practice, development assistance, and military partnership between India and the United States. However, within each of these areas, the bilateral relationship did not progress along a straight path. There were obstacles to be cleared, opposition to be faced, and even laws to be changed. A commonality between each of these areas is the pairing of historical opportunity and charismatic leadership. John F. Kennedy recognized watershed moments within these areas and took full advantage of them.

Within the domain of diplomatic practice, the crises of Laos, the Congo, and Goa provided Kennedy with opportunities to bring India and the United States together. His policy choices to better tolerate neutrality, adopt a respectful tone, and be sympathetic to the colonial sensitivity of newly independent states effectively produced short-term cooperation and laid the foundation for long-term cooperation as well. Had it not been for charismatic attribution and its amplification of Kennedy's influence during these moments of transformation, the progress made toward closer diplomatic ties may not have been possible.

At a time when the development discourse was so full of discord, President Kennedy was able to chart a course to greater, more effective aid to India. He overcame the resistance to increasing development aid allocations, created the Peace Corps, and decreased aid fragmentation. Unfortunately, his efforts to completely un-tie aid from ideological considerations failed. Even so, Kennedy's aid policy was largely effective in the short-term. Seeing as it was so highly dependent on charismatic leadership, many of the advances made in this sphere would not survive past Kennedy's time in office. However, the high level of innovation within the development sphere was made possible by the tremendous effect of charismatic leadership in overcoming the opposition Kennedy faced.

The most striking area in which India and the United States advanced ties was in military affairs. Before Kennedy's time, there had been no real opportunity for a military partnership. That said, without his charismatic leadership none would have developed when war broke out in 1962. It took enormous personal influence to overcome the opposition within the United States and its ally Pakistan to helping India fight the Chinese. John F. Kennedy took full advantage of India's China war to change the course of Indo-American relations in a completely unforeseen way. In this area, charismatic leadership was incredibly effective in the short-term at building a partnership where none existed before.

The great strides made by India and the United States to build a robust relationship of greater depth and breadth are illustrative of the power of charismatic leadership. The importance of context in determining the trajectory of history has always been recognized. However, the ability of charismatic leadership to take advantage of that context to produce outcomes that seemed beyond the realm of the possible has been viewed with an unhealthy dose of skepticism. The surprising power of charismatic leaders is borne out by my exploration of John F. Kennedy's influence on the Indo-American relationship and has applicability beyond this one historical case.

Unfortunately, the positive relationship carefully nurtured by President Kennedy would soon be undone by his successor, Lyndon Johnson. Kennedy's death just four days before the National Security Council meeting that would discuss the military assistance package to India meant that his joint plans with the British for a new era of cooperation with India came to naught. In turn, the Indians turned to the Soviets and got all they asked for, and more.<sup>145</sup> This was only one aspect of the relationship that would wither and die after the sun had set on Camelot.

Lyndon Johnson and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi would have no meeting of minds. Johnson's opinion of India under Mrs. Gandhi's rule was highly negative. He disapproved of India's 1965 war with Pakistan, saw India as over-reliant on food imports, and grumbled at India's lack of support for American policies in Southeast Asia.<sup>146</sup> What followed was a "short-tether" policy that had disastrous results. During the 1965 war, the United States failed to condemn Pakistan for using American weapons against India.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, President Johnson forced a devaluation of the rupee that a developing India was able to endure only with extreme difficulty, and refused to come to the country's aid when it experienced a food crisis. The food aid that had been so readily given for decades was cruelly withheld at the very moment when it was most desperately needed. Of course India was not blameless. In an attempt to

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<sup>145</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 59.

<sup>146</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 9.

<sup>147</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 60.

demonstrate its sovereignty, India increased its criticism of American bombing in North Vietnam. As a result, an ever-angrier president slowed wheat shipments. This left scars.<sup>148</sup>

President Nixon, who succeeded Johnson in 1969, favored Pakistan since he misunderstood India as a Soviet client.<sup>149</sup> The ongoing US- funded militarization of the region would cause great discord between the Indians and their one-time American friends. Stabilization of relations would not occur until the tone and structure of the entire Cold War had changed. This was during Reagan's presidency when the American and the Indians found that their individual approaches to their own regions had independently become more aligned.

Even in the present day, so full of opportunities, individuals are often told that they cannot change the world. In examining John F. Kennedy's charismatic leadership in creating a broader and closer relationship with India, the possibilities and limitations for an individual's influence on the course of history are clear. The strides made, temporary though they were, in the areas of diplomatic practice, development aid, and military partnership, are a lesson for all. With imagination, dogged persistence, courage, and help along the way, John F. Kennedy recognized the opportunities history presented him to make a

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<sup>148</sup> Bowles. "U.S. and Russia in India", 646.

<sup>149</sup> Gould and Ganguly eds., *The Hope and the Reality*, 10.

difference. As a person, he may not have been that extraordinary, but what he accomplished through charismatic leadership *was*. When all of the variables necessary for charismatic attribution come together, results that were previously beyond the realm of the possible can be achieved. I hope that my research will serve as encouragement for the next generation of charismatic leaders. As John F. Kennedy said in his inaugural address, “Let us begin”.

Appendix A

Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Davis 3/6  
17 Southwood Rd.  
Thompsonville, Conn. *Dear Henry*

Dear President Kennedy:

My name is Harry Davis. I am 9 years old. I've been studying about Indians. I like to know if you could send the food that the country doesn't need over to Indians.

Please

You are doing good as president.

Yours truly,  
Harry Davis Jr.

17 Southwood Rd. Thompsonville, Conn.

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