

U.S policy toward India, 1940-50: an Indian viewpoint

by Ramtanu Maitra

The story of India's relations with the United States in this century is a complex one, full of promise, betrayed promises, tragically missed opportunities, and endless manipulation by the British. This article analyzes the crucial period of the Indian struggle for independence, from the angry interchange between Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill over India policy in 1941, through the maneuvers and duplicity of the Anglophile faction in American diplomacy later on, which earned the wrath of Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, giving rise to Gandhi's "Quit India" movement of total civil disobedience against the British.

Although the framers of the Constitution of the Republic of India, drafted by the nationalist leaders and proclaimed in 1950, twenty-nine months after India obtained independence, had drawn their inspiration from America, and although the outlines of India's Constitution are based on the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, the first notable intervention by any American President vis-à-vis colonized India came about in 1942, after almost 185 years of British colonial rule over the country.

For the sake of historical accuracy, one must note that in 1792, the first American President, George Washington, had sent Benjamin Joy to Calcutta, then the capital of British India, as consul. However, there is no available evidence suggesting that any other American President from 1792 to 1942 was involved in any serious manner to question the continuity of the British colonial rule over India. Despite a surfeit of missionaries from America, the building of hospitals, an inflow of visiting educators, and the publication in 1927 of Katherine Mayo's book *Mother India*, which pictured Indian society as depraved, squalid, and without any redeeming virtue, little was heard about India from the seat of power in Washington.

During the period of little more than two decades that separated the two world wars, India's struggle for independence began to draw the interest of a cross-section of Americans who were mostly represented by the Civil Liberties Union, Socialist Party members, missionaries from the Unitarian Church, and such organizations as the League of Oppressed Peoples under Dudley Field Malone.

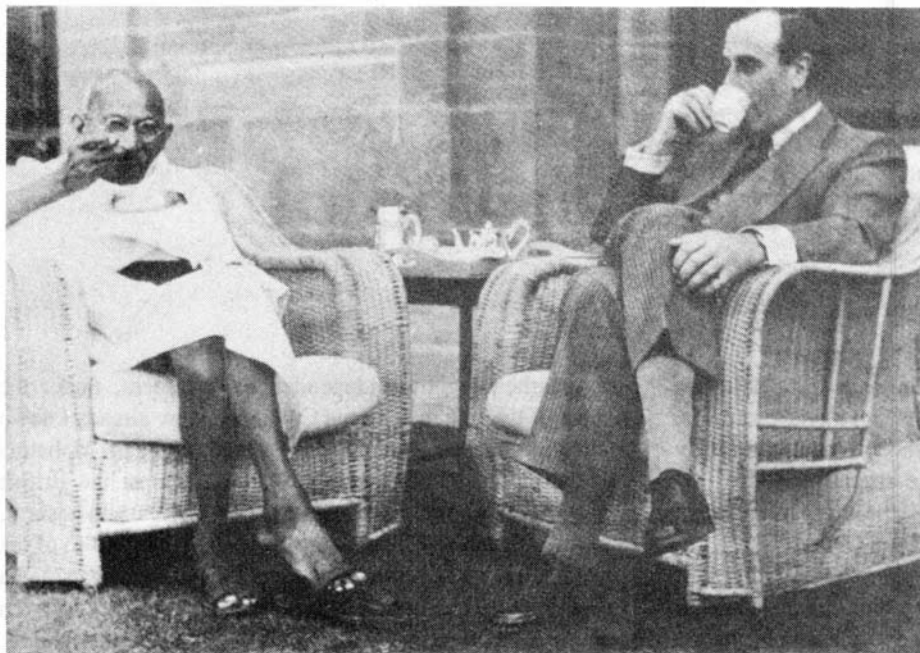
By the time President Franklin Delano Roosevelt entered the White House in the winter of 1932, India's political lead-

ers spearheading the independence movement, under the banner of the Indian National Congress, were already known at the highest echelon of America's establishment. Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience movement against the British Raj in 1930 had drawn the attention of Americans in general, and the defiance of Gandhiji (as he is known in India) of the British salt tax was compared by some in the American media to the Boston Tea Party. But the Indian leaders were far from being happy about America's policies. Jawaharlal Nehru, who, in 1927, had described the United States as not only racist but imperialist as well, criticized U. S. foreign policy toward Latin America at the Brussels International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism the same year. A year later, Nehru wrote: "It is the United States which offers us the best field for the study of economic imperialism."

A changed environment

However, the arrival of President Roosevelt on the scene changed the attitude of Nehru and other Indian National Congress leaders significantly. President Roosevelt's New Deal domestic reforms were widely acclaimed by the Indian National Congress. At the same time, the work done by J.J. Singh, an emigré-turned-businessman in America, played a key role in presenting the Indian realities to the American elite. Singh's India League of America, established in the 1930s, produced the monthly *India Today* and roped in such individuals as Albert Einstein, Henry Luce, Philip Murray, Richard Walsh, and Louis Fischer to serve on its board of advisers. Jawaharlal Nehru, who was then favorably impressed with FDR, wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1938, and another in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1940, articulating the Indian viewpoint in demanding home rule for the security of Asia in the wake of the growing Japanese imperialist threat.

Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement, centered around the salt tax, had already shaken up the British Empire. By the mid-1930s, the British rulers had begun to talk about impending reforms necessary for India. The British establishment was holding extensive negotiations with Gandhiji, Nehru, and other top-rung Indian leaders. Despite the bitter opposition of a Tory backbencher, Winston Churchill, the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed and the stage



Independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, known as "Gandhiji," with Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last British viceroy in India.

was set for the first provincial elections in 1937.

The Second World War broke out in 1939. The British viceroy in India, Lord Linlithgow, without even holding a formal discussion with the Indian National Congress leaders, promptly declared war against Germany on behalf of India. Although the Congress leaders were against the fascist regime in Germany, this ad hoc act by Linlithgow was rejected out of hand, and the Congress Party members in the provincial government resigned en masse, protesting Linlithgow's insensitive conduct.

As the Nazis swept through Europe in mid-1940, Winston Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister of Britain. The viciousness of the newly formed troika of Churchill, Secretary of State Leo Amery, and Linlithgow sowed the seed for the fateful partition of India and a never-ending bloodshed between the Hindus and Muslims. It is well known that both Linlithgow and Amery, mediocre individuals with a strong colonial streak, despised both Gandhiji and Nehru. With Churchill's ascension to power, the anti-India hate campaign was pushed a notch upward, with the fatal ending in mind. Churchill refused to listen to the Indian National Congress leaders, warned against "the slippery slope of concession," and welcomed Hindu-Muslim differences as a "bulwark against the British rule in India."

Growing demand for independence

It is in this context, and with the growing threat of Japanese Imperial Army marching right through Asia, that the question of Indian independence was presented to the American President in 1941. A year or so earlier, following a whirlwind tour of the globe, Wendell Wilkie, the Republican

candidate for the U.S. Presidency in 1940, reported to the American public that from Cairo eastward, the question of Indian independence confronted him at every turn. Wilkie wrote: "The wisest man in China said to me: "When the aspiration of India for freedom was put aside to some future date, it was not Great Britain that suffered in public esteem in the Far East. It was the United States."

In a memorandum prepared on May 5, 1941, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle observed that India of necessity exerted a vast influence upon the affairs of the Middle East, and that it was imperative to secure her active cooperation in the prosecution of the war, by bringing her into "the partnership of nations on terms equal to the other members of the British Commonwealth." It was at this time that British and Australian troops were being routed in North Africa, the Nazis had gotten control of Greece and Yugoslavia and were planning the invasion of Crete, and Churchill was pleading for American help.

According to the U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, he and President Roosevelt "were convinced that the Indians would cooperate better with the British if they were assured of independence, at least after the war." At the same time, however, Hull said that he and President Roosevelt accepted that it was "a delicate question" as to how far the United States could push for Indian independence, in view of London's sensitivities on this issue.

Churchill vs. Roosevelt

U.S. interest in India showed up in the most concrete form in August 1941, at the mid-Atlantic summit between FDR and Churchill. Prior to the meeting, John Winant, the

American ambassador to London, suggested urging the British to set a date for granting Indian “dominion” status. This proposal was welcomed by Assistant Secretary Berle, but was scuttled by Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, who conveyed to Winant that if the President wants to bring up the issue, he would wish to discuss it privately and confidentially with Churchill. Incidentally, Berle, generally described as a New Deal liberal, had always favored exerting pressure on London “to explore the possibility of making India the equal of other members of the British Commonwealth.” His argument was based on his observation that India has a vast pool of manpower and would be an asset in supplying certain strategic war materials if India “became an active rather than a passive partner.”

According to Elliott Roosevelt, the son of FDR, the President was ready to bring up the India issue when he met with Churchill in the mid-Atlantic Ocean. In an after-dinner discussion, FDR criticized British colonialism: British imperial policies, FDR said, represented eighteenth-, not twentieth-century views, taking resources out of colonies and giving nothing back to the people. When Roosevelt stressed the need to develop industry, to improve sanitation, and to raise educational levels and standards of living in the colonies, Churchill’s anger rose. “You mentioned India,” he growled.

“Yes,” President Roosevelt responded. “I can’t believe that we can fight a war against fascist slavery, and the same time not work to free people all over the world from a backward colonial policy.” According to Elliott Roosevelt, the two argued for long without reaching agreement. When the closing statement of the conference was issued on Aug. 14, known as the Atlantic Charter, India was not mentioned. Article 3 of the document read: “They respect the right of the peoples to choose the form of Government under which they will live: and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”

While the President and Secretary of State Hull maintained that India came within the purview of the Atlantic Charter, Churchill said categorically that it did not. Despite opposition from Ambassador Winant, Churchill told the House of Commons on Sept. 9 that Article 3 applied only to European nations under Nazi occupation. Churchill’s interpretation of Article 3 caused bitter disappointment in India and frustration in Washington. In Washington, however, Britain had an ally in Sumner Welles, who agreed the Atlantic Charter should apply to India, but insisted that the U.S. government must not press Churchill during that difficult time to take a step on India which he consistently opposed.

Churchill’s bark

In December 1941, the United States entered the war and Churchill came to visit Washington during Christmas. FDR again brought up the India issue, although there is no U.S. record of the incident. Churchill, however, wrote: “I reacted

so strongly and at such length that he never raised it [India] verbally again.” FDR’s closest confidant, the liberal Anglophile Harry Hopkins, whom Churchill dubbed “Lord Root of the Matter,” said no American suggestions during the war were “so wrathfully received as those relating to the solution of the Indian problem.” Robert Sherwood, in his book *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, wrote: “It was indeed one subject on which the normally broadminded, good-humored, give-and-take attitude which prevailed between the two statesmen was stopped cold. It may be said that Churchill would see the Empire in ruins and himself buried under them before he would concede the right of any American, however great and illustrious a friend, to make any suggestions as to what he should do about India.”

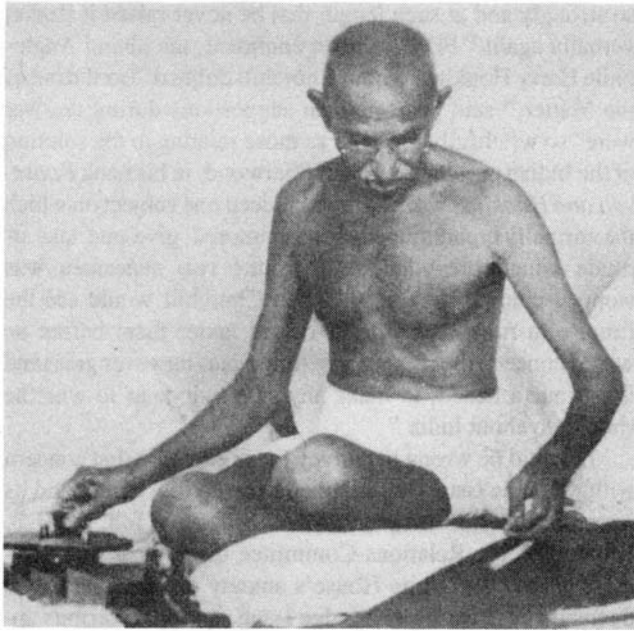
It would be wrong to convey the impression that concern with the India issue was confined to the White House and its immediate circle. In early 1942, as Singapore fell, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee made clear that Congress shared the White House’s anxiety on Asia. Assistant Secretary of State Breckenridge Long, noting a “serious undercurrent of anti-British feelings,” reported to Secretary Hull that the senators demanded that “India be given a status of autonomy. . . . The only way to get the people of India to fight was to get them to fight for India.” The senators declared, “Gandhi’s leadership became part of America’s military equipment.”

The activities around the United States and the continuing weakening of the Allied position in Asia prompted FDR to send Averell Harriman as his emissary to Churchill, to sound out the idea of “a new relationship between Britain and India.” Harriman, following his talks with Churchill, sent back the message that the British leaders remained strongly opposed to “stirring the pot.” Incredibly, Harriman reported that the United States was misreading the Indian situation, and the war effort was tied to the support of the Muslims, not the Congress Party and the Hindus. Harriman accepted and retailed Churchill’s lie that 75% of the Indian Army were Muslims and largely opposed to the Indian Congress Party. Harriman noted that Churchill claimed that making a gesture toward the Congress would only offend the Muslims and not aid the war effort.

While Harriman was sending back a sackful of lies to FDR from Churchill, an interesting development was taking place in India—an incident whose significance, had Washington had the capacity to grasp it, could have changed post-war history completely.

Indian leaders look to China

One of the reasons Churchill was particularly ill-disposed to the Congress Party, was that it consisted of such individuals as Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, and C.R. Das, who had a worldview which was in direct conflict with that of the British Empire. At its annual session in 1927 in Madras, the Congress Party



Gandhi at the spinning wheel, symbol of his resistance to British imperial rule. "If India becomes free, the rest must follow," he wrote to President Roosevelt, with reference to Britain's exploitation of Africa and to the "Negro problem" in America.

had protested against "the dispatch of Indian soldiers by the Government of India to suppress the Chinese nationalist movement of freedom." The Congress Party demanded the recall of Indian troops from China and called upon Indians never to go as soldiers to China. The party was responding to the British policy of sending two contingents of Indian troops to China in 1927 and 1937, under the guise of protecting Indian interests. The Congress leaders claimed that the troops were sent to protect British interests, not Indian interests.

The 1942 Indian Annual Register, a party register, observed: "We know that under Sun Yat-sen's leadership the politically conscious among the Chinese showed their awareness of the many events that were demonstrating the nationalist movement in India. From the side of India the establishment of a Republic in China had been welcomed as paving the way to an 'Asiatic Federation,' a topic on which C.R. Das and S. Srinivasa Iyengar as Presidents of Congress had expatiated in their inaugural speeches in 1922 and 1926."

The Congress Party was again in the forefront when Britain, France, and the United States retreated in the face of Japan's aggression against their vested interests, and Churchill spoke of closing down the Burma Road. The Congress Party protested against the move, calling it a British plan to collapse the Chinese resistance against the aggressors. In 1940, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, president of the Congress Party, issued a statement which protested against the closing of the Burma Road. The road, he said, "had brought China and India and Burma nearer to one another and their contacts

grew from day to day. . . . The closing of the Burma Road means a severe restriction of these growing contacts and a flouting of Indian opinion. . . . It is evidently meant to hamper China in her struggle for freedom."

While the complex relationship between Gen. Chiang Kai-shek and Gen. Joseph Stilwell further complicated the American role in China, at a time when the Japanese marauders were killing off hosts of Chinese, there is every indication that Britain's priority was the defeat of Chiang. As Roosevelt's emissary to India, Col. Louis Johnson, was to observe candidly from the vantage point of India, British strategy was to let Japan conquer China and then claim a hunk of it at the time of the peace treaty. Perhaps General Stilwell saw through it, and that is why Lord Mountbatten hated him with a passion.

The Indian nationalists continued to support the Chinese in their battle against the "ruthless and inhuman imperialism" of Japan. A number of "China Days" were organized in India by the Indian National Congress in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Jawaharlal Nehru visited China on a goodwill mission in August 1939, carrying messages from Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhiji, "to convey the affection and sympathy of the people of India to the Chinese people," and "to bring back something of the courage and invincible optimism of the Chinese people and their capacity to pull together when peril confronts them." Nehru was warmly received by the people and the generalissimo. In a broadcast by the Chungking Radio on Aug. 30, 1939, Nehru stressed the importance of Sino-Indian cooperation "for the sake of the world." He returned from China with a love for that country which was excelled, to quote Gandhiji, "if at all, only by his love of his own country."

In 1940, China, on her part, sent two missions to India—one a goodwill mission led by Tai Chi-tao and the other a cultural mission headed by Dr. K. Wellington Koo of the Chinese Ministry of Education. In 1942, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek came on a visit to India, primarily to discuss political and military matters with the British authorities. This British-sponsored trip of the generalissimo was designed to restrain the Indian nationalists in the light of a potential Japanese invasion. Britain wished to use Chiang to impress on the Indian leaders—and on himself—that any effort on behalf of the Congress Party's demand for power in India would undermine the resistance to Japanese aggression—a policy of "no concessions to Indian freedom" which was simultaneously demonstrated in Churchill's sabotage of the Cripps Mission (see below).

However Chiang used the opportunity to meet Gandhiji, Nehru, and other Indian leaders. In the public statement issued at the time of his visit, he expressed the hope that Great Britain, "without waiting for any demands on the part of the people of India, will as speedily as possible, give them their political power." Chiang's recommendation not only fell on deaf ears, as far as British authorities were

concerned, but perhaps also conformed to British views of the priority of breaking Chiang.

Following his trip to India, Generalissimo Chiang found himself almost cut off from India by Japanese troops. He had long felt a natural kinship with the Indian nationalists. As Malaya was about to fall, Chiang talked to both Churchill and Roosevelt and told them how shocked he was by the military and political situation in India. He said that he had tried to view the colonial problem objectively, and was certain that the political problem must be solved before Indian morale collapsed. In yielding to Churchill, Chiang noted, Roosevelt had in effect repudiated Chiang's view.

Late in June 1942, Gandhiji wrote to Chiang, "I can never forget that five hours close contact I had with you and your noble wife in Calcutta. I had always felt drawn towards you in your fight for freedom. . . ." Gandhiji went on to say: "I would not be guilty of purchasing the freedom of my country at the cost of your country's freedom. Japanese domination of either country must be prevented. I feel India cannot do so while she is in bondage. India has been a helpless witness of the withdrawal from Malaya, Singapore, and Burma. . . ." His heart went out to China in its heroic struggle, abandoned by all. "I look forward to the day when Free India and Free China will cooperate together in friendship and brotherhood for their own good and for the good of Asia and the world."

Receiving this letter from Gandhiji, Chiang wrote to President Roosevelt in July 1942 that "the Indians had long been expecting the United States to take a stand for justice and equality. The Indians were by nature a passive people, but likely to go to extremes. Repression would bring a violent reaction. The enlightened policy for Britain would be to grant complete freedom and thus to prevent Axis troops from setting foot on Indian soil. . . ." Making a final appeal to FDR, Chiang wrote: "Your country is the leader of this war of right against might, and Your Excellency's views have always received serious attention in Britain. . . ."

The tragedy was that while Chiang's emotional appeal to President Roosevelt was marked "strictly confidential," FDR, the day after receiving the letter, told Sumner Welles to send the complete text to Churchill, with a covering message. While the letter from Chiang was documentation of a desperately serious situation in India, President Roosevelt's covering message, drafted by Welles, requested the British prime minister's thoughts and suggestions. The reply came, not from Churchill, but from Clement Attlee on behalf of the War Cabinet. It was a stiff defense of the British position, plus notification that stern measures would be taken in the event of mass civil disobedience in India.

FDR, in return, sent a bland message to Chiang stressing the need for a strong defense against Japan and not to pressure Britain. Lauchlin Currie, an administrative emissary of FDR, sent a message from New Delhi warning Roosevelt that Gandhiji was accusing the United States of making a

common cause with Britain, and this tendency "endangers your moral leadership in Asia and therefore America's ability to exert its influence for acceptable and just settlements in postwar Asia."

Within India, as well as in England and the United States, the British policy to sit tight on the India issue came under severe criticism. While the Indian National Congress leaders continued with their campaign, U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull brought pressure on Lord Halifax, the British ambassador to the United States. In England, the inclusion of the Labour Party members in the War Cabinet saw the inclusion of other votaries of action on India. Lord Privy Seal Stafford Cripps challenged Secretary of State for India Leo Amery, an avowed racist, to rethink the Indian situation.

The Cripps Mission: loaded dice

All this added up to forcing the British War Cabinet to send a senior figure, Stafford Cripps, to India to discuss the issue of postwar independence and the issue of taking steps to give Indian leaders a larger governmental role during the war. In essence, however, the Cripps Mission, as it came to be known, turned out to be nothing more than an attempt to enlist the Indian leaders' support for Britain's war efforts, a fact which became clear only after it had begun its round of discussion in India.

In the United States, President Roosevelt saw the Cripps Mission as an opportunity to re-activate the India issue. Just before Cripps arrived in India, Churchill wrote to FDR about the mission and made it clear that Britain did not want to do anything that would break its close relationship with the Muslims. "Naturally, we do not want to throw India into chaos on the eve of invasion," Churchill wrote. Churchill's letter was designed to put FDR on the defensive, as was evident from his mentioning of the "eve of invasion," and his raising of the specter of "throwing India into chaos." However, for once at least on this issue, FDR was in his element. He wrote back that Britain should immediately establish "a temporary dominion government," on the lines of the U.S. Articles of Confederation. "Perhaps the analogy of some such method to the travails and problems of the U.S. between 1783 and 1789 might give a new slant in India itself, and it might cause the people there to become more loyal to the British Empire and to stress the danger of Japanese domination, together with the advantage of peaceful evolution as against chaotic revolution," Roosevelt wrote to Churchill.

In order to make sure that the Cripps Mission would yield some positive results, FDR announced the appointment of Col. Louis Johnson, a former assistant secretary of war and a prominent member of the West Virginia Democratic Party, on March 6, 1942, along with former Assistant Secretary of State Henry Grady and three industry specialists. Roosevelt, however, couched the visit of these specialists

to India in terms of evaluating and aiding Indian production of war goods. Just before Johnson left the United States, President Roosevelt upgraded his status to that of the President's Personal Representative to India. If Churchill had any apprehension about what Johnson was going to do in India, the last move of FDR made it clear to Churchill that Roosevelt was keen on intervening in the Indian scene, and that the Cripps Mission was the occasion chosen by the American President.

When Colonel Johnson appeared on the Indian scene, he was known as a wheeler-dealer with wide-ranging connections. Later, he became a true convert to Indian nationalism. His knowledge about India before his arrival was reportedly very little. By the time Johnson arrived in New Delhi on April 3, the Cripps Mission, properly rigged by Churchill, was heading for an unmitigated failure. Tempers were running high in India. With Allied forces losing ground fast in Asia, Gandhiji was in no mood to accept pledges, and he was demanding independence without delay. It was in this circumstance that Gandhiji made the famous statement that to accept the British pledge for India's independence at that hour was like taking a check drawn on a failing bank.

To the utter dismay of Churchill and the British monarchy, Colonel Johnson moved fast and muscled himself into the scene. Delivering a message from President Roosevelt to Congress President Maulana Abul Kalam Azad urging acceptance of the British proposals, Johnson found that both Cripps and the Congress leaders were eager to seek his help. Though Johnson maintained the President's position on the issue, he began shuttling between Jawaharlal Nehru and Stafford Cripps. His energetic activities worried Viceroy Linlithgow, a bird dog for Churchill, to no end.

Just two days after his arrival in India, Colonel Johnson sent a cable to both President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull asking the President to exert pressure on Churchill, particularly on the issue of an enlarged Indian defense role, which, Johnson reported to FDR, was opposed by both Linlithgow and Commander-in-Chief General Wavell. Johnson's request was turned down promptly by Washington. Undersecretary Welles cabled back to Johnson saying that FDR was unwilling to make any personal request to the British prime minister. "You know how earnestly the President has tried to be of help. . . . It is feared that if at this moment he interposed his own views, the result would complicate further an already overcomplicated situation," Welles's cable read.

But Johnson was a difficult person to throw off track. He continued with his skillful negotiations, and on April 9 sent off an enthusiastic cable saying that both Wavell and Linlithgow had accepted his defense proposal and Nehru would also do so. The stars were also in Johnson's favor at that point, since the Japanese Navy in one foray had sunk 100,000 tons of shipping along India's east coast, and the British were desperate for American help to protect its supply

line. Johnson cabled home: "The magic name over here is Roosevelt, the land, the people would follow and love, America."

At the same time, Cripps, who personally did not want his mission to fail, saw in Johnson's efforts an opportunity to save the mission. He wrote back to Churchill that as a result of Johnson's help, he now hoped to gain Indian agreement. Cripps urged the prime minister to thank President Roosevelt for Johnson's assistance.

Cripps was not aware however, that Linlithgow had already informed Churchill about the American intervention, and had reported in anger to Churchill that Cripps had allowed Johnson to see the revised defense formulation. Linlithgow complained to Churchill that accepting Cripps's revised formula would make the viceroy a figurehead of a government dominated by the Indians, a most unacceptable solution. Linlithgow was also worried about the speed at which Johnson was moving. With the suggestion to scuttle the American initiative, Linlithgow cabled: "We cannot run the risk of the Governor-General [Viceroy], the [Commander-in-] Chief and HMG's being unwilling to honour a formula agreed between HMG's emissary and Roosevelt's personal representative."

Betrayal from Washington

As the prospects for the Cripps Mission's success brightened, a fresh American betrayal took place. Harry Hopkins and U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall were in London when things began to break open on the Cripps Mission. Churchill, angered over the developments as reported by his loyal viceroy, called Hopkins to 10 Downing Street, the British prime minister's office, and protested against Johnson's intervention. Churchill told Hopkins, in no uncertain terms, that the Indians would be made to accept the original formulation, and that Churchill would move the War Cabinet to reject the revised formulation, as worked out by Johnson, and that would be embarrassing for President Roosevelt.

Hopkins, whose sentiments always rested with the British colonial rulers, told Churchill that he was very sure that Johnson "was not acting as the representative of the President in mediating the Indian business." In Hopkins's presence Churchill immediately wrote out a message to New Delhi that Johnson was not Roosevelt's Personal Representative except for munitions questions, and the American President was opposed to anything like intervention or mediation. Later that day, Churchill moved the War Cabinet to reprimand Cripps for exceeding his brief and to raise questions about the appropriateness of Johnson's role in the discussions.

For all practical purposes, President Roosevelt's intervention and Colonel Johnson's efforts to shake loose the British colonial grip on India were over at that point. Johnson, bitter about the double-talking British, cabled back home reporting the collapse of the Cripps Mission. He

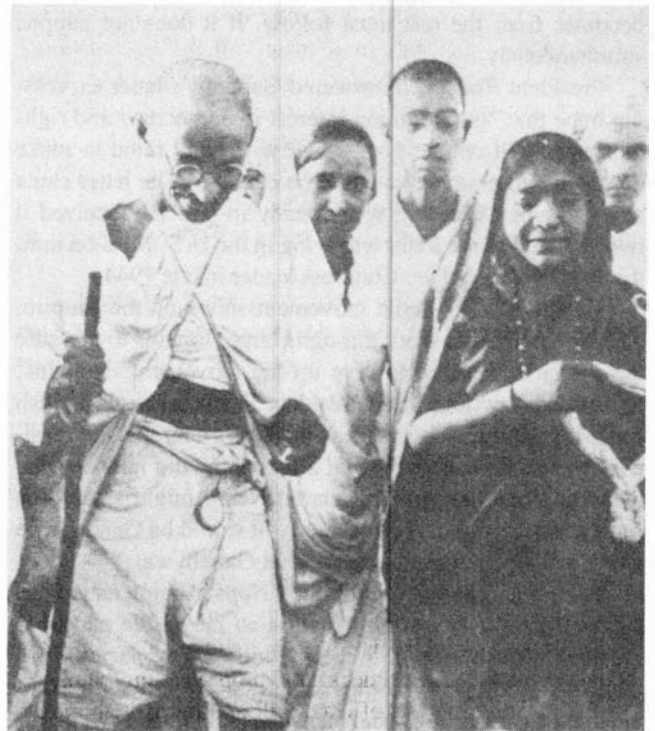
pointed out that the British wanted to lose India to the Japanese so that they could reclaim it at the peace treaty. He wrote to FDR about Nehru: "Magnificent in his cooperation with me. The President would like him and on most things they agree. . . . He is our hope here."

At that point, FDR made one last, but half-hearted, attempt to salvage the situation. He told Hopkins to convey a blunt personal message to Churchill urging him to make efforts so that the mission did not fail. Roosevelt wrote: "The general impression here is quite the contrary. The feeling is almost universally held that the deadlock has been due to the British Government's unwillingness to concede to the Indians the right to self-government, notwithstanding the willingness of the Indians to entrust technical, military and naval defense control to the competent British authorities."

The President also warned that if Japan successfully invaded India, the "prejudicial reaction of the American public opinion can hardly be over-estimated." Churchill noted the blunt message carefully and sought Hopkins's help to answer back. He noted that FDR had not said that the British offer was not good enough, and then lied, with the help of Hopkins, that nothing more could be done, since Cripps had already left India—a lie that Hopkins was most likely aware of. Churchill went on to say that "anything like a serious difference between you and me would break my heart and surely injure both our countries at the height of this terrible struggle."

It was all over, except the bugler playing the Last Post. That came in the form of Jawaharlal Nehru's letter to FDR, the only personal communication Nehru ever had with Roosevelt. Nehru wrote, and sent through Louis Johnson, that the Indian leaders were ready to accept a truly national government that could organize resistance on a popular basis. Nehru stressed, "How anxious and eager we were, and still are, to do our utmost for the defence of India. Our sympathies are with the forces fighting against fascism and for democracy and freedom." Roosevelt was upset. When Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes urged support for Indian independence, FDR replied: "You are right about India, but it would be playing with fire if the British Empire told me to mind my business." President Roosevelt might not have noticed, but that is exactly what the British Empire told him, and he accepted it. "In fact," wrote King George VI with a great deal of indignation, "the whole matter is in a most unsatisfactory state."

While Nehru was most civil, Gandhiji was livid at both Churchill and Roosevelt. In his newspaper, *Harijan*, he criticized the American role: "A never-ending stream of soldiers from America . . . amounts in the end to American influence, if not American rule added to the British." Nehru told Johnson that the United States should not have tried to work out a formula between India and Britain, because "between the two there is ineradicable and permanent conflict. The two cannot exist together or cooperate with each other, for each



Gandhi on his famous "salt march" in 1930. He and his supporters used civil disobedience against the British salt tax. In retaliation, the British killed hundreds of people and arrested many of the top leaders of the Congress party, including Gandhi himself.

dislikes and distrusts the other."

Gandhiji's anger gave birth to the Quit India movement. He announced, following the collapse of the Cripps Mission, that no further negotiation with the British was necessary. He gave the call for total civil disobedience to cripple the British Raj. Nehru, who was apprehensive of Gandhiji's call, finally rallied around and supported Gandhiji's call to bring the British Raj to its knees and adopt a scorched-earth policy in case of Japanese invasion.

As the tempers began to rise and the strategists in Washington began to voice concern, in unison with London, about Gandhiji's plan, Gandhiji's penned his "Dear Friend" letter to FDR. It was the only letter that the Indian leader ever wrote to the American President. He wrote: "My personal position is clear. I hate all war. If, therefore, I could persuade my countrymen, they would make a most effective and decisive contribution in favor of an honourable peace. But I know that all of us have not a living faith in non-violence." Then, Gandhiji made his appeal: "I venture to think that the Allied declaration, that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow, so long as India and, for that matter, Africa are exploited by Great Britain, and America has the Negro problem in her own home. But in order to avoid all complications, in my proposal I have confined myself only to India. If India

becomes free, the rest must follow, if it does not happen simultaneously. . . .”

President Roosevelt answered Gandhiji’s letter expressing hope that “our common interest in democracy and righteousness will enable your countrymen and mine to make common cause against a common enemy.” The letter came to India when Gandhiji was already in jail. He received it two years later; the letter was lying in the U.S. Mission until the British released the Congress leader in late 1944.

Gandhiji’s Quit India movement shook up the Empire. The British tried to work through Harry Hopkins to pressure the Indian leadership to give up the movement. Hopkins, after his discussions with President Roosevelt, told British Embassy Minister Campbell several days later that the President was anxious about India, although he did not see what could be done. Even if Jawaharlal Nehru might say all the right things, Hopkins commented, “it would be Gandhi who would decide, and we all know what Gandhi was.”

More than 11 months after the Cripps Mission ended in a fiasco, pushing the country toward an inevitable partition, President Roosevelt sent William Phillips to replace the ailing Colonel Johnson. Phillips, a blue-blooded Boston Brahmin brought up in a baronial mansion and trained at Harvard, had risen in his diplomatic career to become undersecretary in the State Department. He had been in the OSS as the head of its London office and served as ambassador to Mussolini’s Italy.

The Phillips initiative

Unlike Johnson, Phillips was not disliked by Viceroy Linlithgow. In fact, Linlithgow wrote back to London that “it is difficult to imagine a greater contrast to Johnson. . . . Phillips seems to me better really than anything we could reasonably have hoped for.” Phillips was instructed by Secretary of State Cordell Hull to apply “friendly” but never “objectionable” pressure to keep the British reminded of the President’s continued interest in India’s freedom.

Phillips walked into a difficult situation. Gandhiji was in jail, and the Indians were increasingly distrustful of the American position. Phillips’s request to see Gandhiji in jail was turned down by both the U.S. State Department and Linlithgow. There was little for Phillips to do at that point. When Gandhiji went on a fast in the British jail, President Roosevelt made it clear that the Indian leader should not be allowed to die in jail.

Writing the day after Gandhiji had broken his fast, Phillips told President Roosevelt that he was deeply moved by Gandhiji’s willingness to sacrifice himself for Indian independence, and found the viceroy’s cold reaction unfeeling. He told FDR that most Indians, believing that Great Britain has no intention to grant independence, were turning to the United States. He asked President Roosevelt to help settle the differences among various Indian political groups and help convene an all-party conference. He wanted to discuss

the matter further with the President once he was in the United States. Phillips also made it clear that the partition of the country would weaken both parts.

When Phillips came back to the United States in May 1943, he met briefly with the President and submitted a report within a few days. In that report, Phillips forcefully argued that India was unlikely to cooperate fully in the war effort unless the British made a major gesture toward independence. The United States should have a voice, Phillips asserted, rather than mutely accept the British view that “this is none of your business.”

The persuasive nature of the report moved President Roosevelt, but he was adamant in not bringing up the issue with Churchill again. He asked Lord Beaverbrook to bring it up with Churchill, and that did not go anywhere. Finally, when Churchill came to Washington that summer, FDR asked Phillips to meet Churchill and express his views.

Phillips met Churchill at the British Embassy, and the meeting was not pleasant. After Phillips had laid out his plan, Churchill paced back forth across the room and then stopped to bark angrily: “Take India if that is what you want. Take it by all means but I warn you that if I open the door a crack there will be the greatest bloodshed in all history. Mark my words.” Churchill said, shaking his finger at Phillips, “I prophesied the present war, and I prophesy a bloodbath.” Phillips wrote in his diary: “It was helpless [sic] to argue. It is only too clear that he has a complex on India from which he will not and cannot be shaken.”

With Phillips’s swansong over, and President Roosevelt entering the last year of his life, the India issue, as far as the United States was concerned, was handed over in totality to the British. Although a number of American writers criticized British policy for creating the Muslim League for the vivisection of India, American opinion could not have any significant influence over what Britain wanted to do, and the idea of partition was surfaced without opposition. The deafening silence within the American establishment, as India was cut up into pieces by the British, bringing the biggest and most painful exodus in the history of mankind, whereby millions lost their homes and their families and were turned into instant rootless beggars, was cruel testimony to the futility of the entire American initiative on the India issue.

On Aug. 14, 1947, President Harry S. Truman welcomed India’s independence and its sovereign status in the world community and assured her of U.S. friendship and goodwill. It was a routine statement. For the first three years after India gained independence, her official relations with the United States were rather formal and definitely not close. Both India and the United States were beginning to adjust to a larger role in world affairs. It was during the 1950-51 period that the American interest in India began to show signs of life, when a number of crises in Asia made the United States a key power in Asia, and Washington began to divert her attention to India.