

Conflicting Visions

Canada and India in the Cold War World, 1946–76

Ryan M. Touhey



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Introduction

SETTLED IN THE LATE 1850s, Lucknow is a small farming community in Bruce County in southwestern Ontario. The rolling green countryside is lush, with fields that produce bounties of corn and strawberries. In winter, the fields are barren snowscapes. In the little town, streets are named Canning, Havelock, Outram, Rose, Ross, and Willoughby. At first glance, they seem to be common Anglo-Scotch settler names; closer inspection reveals a connection to a pinnacle moment in the history of Imperial India and the British Empire. The streets are named after the British generals involved in the Relief of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. A further imperial commemorative connection to India is that the town is located in a county named after James Bruce, the eighth earl of Elgin and the twelfth earl of Kincardine, the sixth governor general of the Province of Canada, and the viceroy of India from 1861 to 1863. The British consolidated their vast holdings across the Indian subcontinent in the years following the mutiny. As viceroy, Bruce administered British interests in this new era of the Raj. Oceans away, the colonies of British North America were on the cusp of unifying into a self-governing dominion. In the years after Confederation, generations of Canadians revelled in the glory of their empire, with India seen as the jewel of that empire.

Lucknow, Ontario, emerged at the height of British rule of India. That rule proved to be short-lived. Imperial rule buckled in the 1930s as the Indian nationalist movement multiplied and the edifice of empire crumbled in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. A nearly bankrupt Britain lacked the military resources to control India and contain mounting sectarian tensions that it had long nourished between Hindus and Muslims. London acknowledged that it could not prevent India from obtaining independence. Britain haphazardly planned the partition of the subcontinent into two states, India and Pakistan. The British withdrawal from South Asia ushered in the first phase of Commonwealth decolonization as India and Pakistan gained independence in August 1947. This process led the Canadian government to craft foreign policy and dispatch personnel to a region about which it knew little.

Similarly, historians of Canadian international relations know little about Canada's relations with India. A few important examinations exist of the bilateral relationship, primarily of the immediate post-independence era, but they tend

to be narrow in scope or memoirs of former diplomats who served in India.¹ This paucity reflects the predominant historiographical emphasis on Canada's diplomatic relations with the North Atlantic world. A new generation of historiography, however, is situating the history of Canadian foreign relations beyond the traditional confines. Scholars are examining Canada's international relations afresh, producing studies on Canada's ties to Japan, Indonesia, and Africa and asking questions about how decolonization and immigration relate to Canadian international history.² Some of these studies also pose new questions about how race, subnational actors, or even non-state actors intersect with the conduct of Canadian foreign relations. Much of the recent work sheds light on Canada's relations with the Asia-Pacific world. This study follows in that direction, providing the first thorough examination of how Canadian governments engaged with India from 1946 to 1976, bringing to light their changing visions of the bilateral relationship.

The Canada-India relationship encountered challenges that presented both opportunities and problems pertaining to decolonization, non-alignment, and non-proliferation within the broader context of the Cold War world. In dealing with the challenge of non-alignment, this study considers how religious and cultural assumptions of South Asia informed the views on India of key Canadian policy makers. Canadian nuclear cooperation with India shows the awkward balance between opportunity and challenge, best depicted by Ottawa's decision to export nuclear technology while promoting international nuclear safeguards. India had distinct nuclear aspirations and its own views on international nuclear safeguards. This work provides the first detailed survey of how a fledgling but optimistic relationship with India became one of the most complex, controversial, and important diplomatic relationships for Canada in the Asia-Pacific region in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1947, Canadian officials pondered what a newly independent India meant. Unlike its longer-standing ties with Japan or China, Canada had a smaller missionary and trade presence in South Asia. The first high commissioner, John Kearney, travelled to Britain for briefings and was told what to expect upon arrival in India. Yet, in anticipation of decolonization, prominent Canadian policy makers, such as Lester Pearson and John Holmes, saw the opportunity for Ottawa to play a unique role in nurturing links between India and Pakistan and the West. Ottawa could be the bridge between East and West as the Cold War began. Pearson wrote to Prime Minister Mackenzie King in December 1941 about the possibility of sending a high commissioner to India, thinking that Canada could connect with a future independent India. It is doubtful that Pearson thought of Lucknow, India, or Lucknow, Ontario, but he noted that both countries shared an imperial heritage. India was a polyglot of languages,

religions, and ethnicities. Pearson saw Canada as a nation of linguistic and religious minorities that flourished through accommodation. In a fine example of Canadian exceptionalism, Pearson reasoned that the Canadian experience might permit Ottawa to reach out to a newly independent India in a way that Australia, Britain, and the United States, all with colonial possessions, could not. Here was the genesis of the bridge thesis as applied to India: Canada could cooperate effectively with India and act as a bridge between the West and South Asia.

On the eve of the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent, Mackenzie King pondered whether an independent India and Pakistan, with millions of impoverished citizens, would transform the Commonwealth for better or for worse. Two months prior to British withdrawal, King rebuked Louis St. Laurent, the secretary of state for external affairs, for being too eager in advising cabinet to consider India's status in the Commonwealth. The prime minister lectured that Canada should not offer advice on a British mess in an area about which Ottawa was ignorant. King correctly deduced that his government knew little about South Asia. The lack of knowledge would have implications in the years ahead for Canadian policy making. But the conversation around the cabinet table in May 1947 reveals the gradual transition of the old order of Canadian foreign policy conduct to a new era.

Mounting Cold War tensions and crushing poverty in India informed Canadian attitudes toward the country. In the spring of 1947, a small advance team of Canadian diplomats travelled to India to establish Canada's third post in Asia – the only one in South Asia. The immediate question of India's world-view following independence prompted the St. Laurent government to encourage dialogue and strengthen friendly ties with New Delhi. Fear of India succumbing to communism if the West ignored the considerable economic and political needs of the Indian subcontinent in the wake of decolonization continued to nourish this interest.

The early years following independence brought about an unusual meeting of the minds between officials in Ottawa and those in New Delhi given the lack of substantive interaction between the political classes of the two countries. Canada was a firm ally of the two predominant Western powers, Britain and the United States, both of which India regarded with suspicion. Thinking that Canada was unencumbered by a colonial past, and far from being a great power, Canadian officials imagined a form of exceptionalism. Canada could build a bridge between a newly decolonized India and the West. And in doing so Ottawa could positively influence Indian foreign policy. Here was a vision of India in which historical, geographical, and considerable cultural, religious, and racial differences between Canada and India were not irreconcilable. Rather, the two

former British colonies shared linguistic, judicial, and political commonalities that could draw Ottawa and New Delhi closer. The assumption that commonalities existed further sustained a vision of Canada as a bridge between the West and India. One way to build the bridge was to cooperate with Britain to find a practical solution that would keep India in the Commonwealth as a republic. As long as Ottawa's interests were not affected, Canada could perform a notable role in the process that transformed the Commonwealth into a multiracial entity, with India remaining in it as a republic.

In 1949, India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, travelled to North America on his first visits to the United States and Canada. The visits differed dramatically. The American visit reflected an emerging divide between New Delhi and Washington over the perils of communism and American distrust of India's non-aligned foreign policy. The Canadian visit led to a different outcome, for Nehru found a willing audience among Canadians, who seemed to be less Manichean toward communism in Asia, more restrained and reflective in their worldviews.

Weeks later, in January 1950, a high-profile team of Canadian officials accompanied Lester Pearson on his first visit to South Asia to attend a conference of Commonwealth foreign ministers in Colombo, Ceylon. The visit sowed the seeds of the Colombo Plan – the first Canadian foray into development assistance. Over the next year, Ottawa committed a modest sum of financial aid to India and established a long-standing and substantial aid relationship. The decision to cooperate with the Colombo Plan occurred as the Korean War escalated. Mutual fear that the conflict would expand prompted cooperation at the United Nations. From 1947 to 1955, Canada and India worked consistently on matters related to decolonization and the spread of the Cold War beyond Europe. Leaders met frequently at multilateral forums, from Commonwealth meetings to the United Nations. During this era, senior policy makers in Ottawa viewed democratic India as the most important nation in Asia, if not the developing world, for the West. This era marks the first vision of Canadian officials of Ottawa's purpose regarding India during the period 1946–76: that Canada could successfully negotiate the divisions between the West and an all-important India and that a “special relationship” existed between the two countries.

Visions change. As the Cold War progressed, New Delhi's pursuit of non-alignment prompted the Liberal and Conservative governments of Louis St. Laurent and John Diefenbaker to reassess their appraisals of India. An array of Canadian policy makers in the Department of External Affairs (DEA) also began questioning non-alignment. Others criticized key Indian diplomats whom they encountered at the United Nations, namely, Krishna Menon. A small group of officials countered that India mattered to Canada and that it was a beacon

in the developing world. Both groups offered competing visions of where India should rank in Canada's worldview.

Unanticipated policy divergences emerged over issues such as the International Control and Supervisory Commissions (ICSC) in Indochina from 1954 to 1973, the Hungarian revolution in 1956, and nuclear proliferation in the 1960s, among others. India shifted from being the most important country in Asia to being at the periphery of Canadian diplomatic planning and governmental interest during the late St. Laurent years and the Diefenbaker era. But why was this? Had the commonalities ceased to exist? Were official Canadian attitudes toward India beginning to echo those of the United States?³ Other evaluations of the Canada-India relationship emphasize high policy to explain the peaks and valleys of the Canada-India relationship in the early to mid-1950s.⁴ It is difficult to disagree with the assessment that, as far as India was involved, Ottawa was only so willing to interpret East and West at the risk of alienating its relations with Washington. But other key factors subtly affected Canadian high policy toward India during the governments of Diefenbaker and Pearson.

This study considers Canadian policy makers' contemplation of cultural and religious dynamics to understand Indian actions. Those factors, in conjunction with opposition to non-alignment, informed policy making and official perceptions. Culture and religion must be considered along with the other traditional dynamics by which we assess changing perceptions of Nehru's India. And such factors are not isolated phenomena in the broader history of Canadian foreign policy in Asia. Historian David Webster observes in his study on Canada-Indonesia relations that Canadian policy makers initially "imagined" that they could act as a linchpin between the West and a newly independent Indonesia. Perhaps Canada's political evolution from colony to nation could be a model for a newly independent Indonesia. Webster notes that the same policy makers had limited knowledge of Southeast Asia and "plotted their approach to Asia geographically, on 'mental maps,' ways of picturing and trying to make sense of a complex world spatially." A hazy knowledge of Asia, its peoples, boundaries, cultures, and history facilitated a policy-making approach in which "Canadian mental maps privileged Eurocentric concerns" such as the primacy of relations with the North Atlantic world.⁵ Indonesia's pursuit of non-alignment and its authoritarian leftward tilt in the mid-1950s clashed with earlier Canadian and Western expectations. Subsequently, Canadian interest in Indonesia cooled as Jakarta ran afoul of Canadian Western alliance interests. Likewise, the emerging shift in Canadian visions of India by the mid-1950s can be attributed in part to how culture, religion, and geographic distance conditioned the shifting horizons of Canadian officials toward India.⁶ For their part, Indian politicians and policy makers had their own idiosyncratic perspectives on Canada. The bridge thesis

spanned both shores. New Delhi harboured hopes that Canadian foreign policy might sympathize with, if not reflect, Indian foreign policy.

By mid-1960, Chester Ronning, Canada's high commissioner in New Delhi, perceptively expressed concern about bilateral relations in a dispatch to Ottawa. Vigorous efforts were required, he warned, lest ties with India waned further. Ronning boldly questioned conventional wisdom regarding the importance of the Commonwealth link. The diplomat sought a realistic perspective from which a bridge or special relationship seemed to be wishful thinking. Canada's central foreign policy interests focused on the North Atlantic, specifically its relations with the United States and Britain, and it was through this lens that Canadian decision makers viewed South Asia.

Ronning's analysis coincided with the decline of the Commonwealth prime ministers' conferences as a valuable forum in promoting bilateral relations. The meetings became more impersonal as the organization expanded in response to decolonization in Africa and the Caribbean in the late 1950s and 1960s. Ottawa paid close attention to the newly independent states of these regions. South Asia and its myriad of social and political ills fell into neglect. Following Nehru's death, important changes occurred in Indian statecraft. India drifted closer toward Moscow under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. As the non-proliferation debate showed, India regarded itself as a regional power if not an emerging great power. For its part, Ottawa remained firmly aligned with the West, with NATO a pillar of its foreign policy. The era between 1955 and 1968 represents a struggle between proponents of the bridge vision and critics with misgivings about Indian foreign policy and a mounting sense that few ties bound Canada and India together.

As political relations ebbed throughout the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, the governments of Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau followed their predecessors, continuing Ottawa's lack of direct interest in India and South Asia. Still, Canadian officials debated India's importance to Canada as significant amounts of aid money continued to flow to New Delhi – with little consideration of why that was – and the fate of nuclear cooperation presented challenging questions. The third and final vision of how Canadian policy makers situated the bilateral relationship occurred from 1968 to 1976. Canadian officials questioned the notion that a “special relationship” existed, and they revisited the merits of re-engaging South Asia. Ottawa needed to adopt a realistic approach to India that included leveraging aid to create new trade opportunities for Canada. Attempts to establish bilateral ties along what policy makers considered more “realist” and “mature” lines came to an abrupt halt in May 1974 when India detonated a nuclear device that used plutonium extracted from a donated Canadian reactor intended strictly for peaceful purposes. India mattered again to Ottawa. That

one event coalesced years of frustration with and resentment over Indian foreign policy, and it amplified long-standing grievances in Ottawa toward India. The Trudeau cabinet and officials in the DEA encountered an unprecedented and complicated diplomatic task. Any response from Ottawa, particularly on questions of nuclear cooperation and export policy, had bilateral and multilateral ramifications. Only since 2006 have both countries begun to move beyond the legacy of 1974 and re-engage with each other.

India represented Canada's first major foray into the decolonizing world and its first nuclear export market. Yet Canada's diplomatic relationship with that country has received scant attention by scholars of Canada's foreign policy. Surprisingly, there remains no substantial history of the bilateral relationship. This study, then, is the first survey to trace evolving Canadian visions, perceptions, and official debates of India in Canadian foreign policy between 1946 and 1976. The study draws on a range of Indian sources from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs at the National Archives of India. The papers of Jawaharlal Nehru are closed from 1947 to 1964, but correspondence with his sister/diplomat Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru and other prominent officials are accessible at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The research also makes use of American and British records and draws extensively on Canadian archival sources, including the personal papers of prominent Canadian diplomats and politicians. Although consideration of Pakistan appears in certain chapters, it does so only when that country intersected with Canada's bilateral relations with India. Canada's relations with Pakistan never possessed the same import, or layers, as its relations with India. Ottawa wished to avoid involvement in the ongoing Kashmir dispute. Indeed, Canada's unwillingness to take sides in the 1965 war between Pakistan and India prompted Islamabad to question its own relationship with the West.

Organized chronologically, the chapters examine the conflicting visions that Canadian politicians and officials possessed of India's place in Canadian foreign policy and consider how these visions and the bilateral relationship changed over time. The study begins with an exploration of Ottawa's initial belief that Canada could bridge India and the West. Elements of the bridge philosophy were later projected onto other decolonizing Commonwealth countries, such as Ghana and Pakistan.⁷ The study then scrutinizes the equally important sense of exceptionalism as applied to India. Canadian governments expected India – newly decolonized, non-aligned, and the most populous member of the Commonwealth – to act in the midst of the Cold War in a manner amenable to Ottawa and its North Atlantic allies. The analysis then considers how cultural and religious assumptions intersected with, and shaped, the views and expectations of policy makers of India and non-alignment. Although such assumptions

have long been neglected in the writing and analysis of Canadian foreign relations history, they are salient to the development and practice of diplomacy. Later chapters examine the contradictory impulses of Ottawa's pursuit of reactor sales as political ties declined and wariness of India's nuclear ambitions grew. Nuclear cooperation became a major problem that bedevilled Canadian foreign policy toward India. Paradoxically, Ottawa sought to market its civilian atomic/nuclear technology with nascent safeguards to curb proliferation. New Delhi sought Canadian technology enthusiastically but disagreed with Ottawa over the validity of international safeguards and, later, the merits of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. How could tensions be negotiated? Decision makers balanced Ottawa's aspirations to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons on the one hand and to establish Canada as a key exporter of nuclear technology on the other. This study seeks to understand the policy disconnect that had a profound impact on later Canadian nuclear export policies.

Indian scholar M.S. Rajan suggested in a 1962 article that bilateral cooperation between the two countries was so intimate that it led to the "Indo-Canadian entente" or the "Ottawa-New Delhi Axis."⁸ Canadian diplomat Escott Reid famously expanded this theme in his memoir *Envoy to Nehru*. Reid suggested that Canada and India shared a special relationship.⁹ Finally, this study refutes the perspectives of both. For a brief period, Ottawa and New Delhi shared some common ground, but Canadian ties with Washington, London, and NATO proved to be resilient over the long term. Accordingly, if a "special relationship" existed beyond the North Atlantic into South Asia, then it existed only in Canadian eyes, and even then only select individuals in Ottawa adhered to this view. In the end, neither country was able to develop a foundation for a cooperative bilateral relationship because of conflicting visions of what each expected from the other. After 1976, Canada's interest in India, already weakened from decades of neglect and policy difference, entered a prolonged period of drift. Relations were not particularly friendly and certainly not close.

1

Plain Tales from the DEA

Why India?

THE BUSTLING TROPICAL port of Bombay could not have been farther removed from the harsh Ottawa winter when, on 16 January 1909, Deputy Minister of Labour Mackenzie King arrived for official duty. Two days later he travelled to the imperial bastion of Calcutta, the capital of the British Raj in India, on behalf of the Liberal government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. King sought limitations on Indian immigration to Canada. In Calcutta, he met with the viceroy, Lord Minto (a former governor general of Canada), to discuss the Canadian viewpoint and successfully obtained British support for the desired goal. A dinner party that evening allowed King to mingle with Minto and the cream of Calcutta's Anglo elite. The Indians whom King interacted with during his journey were from the anglicized classes – affluent, powerful, and English speaking. That segregation did not prevent him from recording his racial observations of his experience in his correspondence to Ottawa: “What I have seen of India and the condition of the people convinces me that India was intended for the Indians, and that they were not intended by nature for other countries.” King concluded that “India can never be a white men's country ... that the policy of England should be to train the Indian to self-government and loyalty, [and] that the presence of whites in any number may not continue to be a necessity.”¹ At the same time, poverty and aspects of Hinduism in particular caused King to recoil, buttressing his sense that the British civilizing mission in India remained necessary.² By present-day frameworks, his view appears far more odious, yet he held liberal views for the era in suggesting Indian self-government. King's perspective on self-government certainly ran contrary to that of many of the transplanted British officials, businessmen, planters, and traders residing in India.³ A clear racial and social divide existed between colonizers and the Indian populace, including the anglicized Indian elite, and King's view must be considered in the context of its time. One can only imagine the impression that the sights, smells, poverty, and colours of the Indian subcontinent made on King. The vast influence, power, and pageantry of the British Raj would have impressed him but placed Canada in stark contrast to the complexity of India. Surely this was a baffling experience for the young man, and it is fascinating that in later years he rarely reflected on his extraordinary time visiting the subcontinent.

King's first and only visit to India took place when British control of the subcontinent remained at its zenith and Canada had few direct ties to India – beyond immigration concerns. Although a notable missionary presence existed in parts of India, it is uncertain what impact it had on domestic views, given that the majority of Canadians knew little about India. Negligible trade existed between Canada and the subcontinent. India remained shrouded in mystery or imagined through the imperially bullish and romantic writings of British authors such as G.A. Henty, Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster. Children learned of India from their school texts: like Canada, India wore empire red on the map. As adults, they likely agreed with the candid words of Forster's character Mr. Fielding as he explains to two Indian colleagues why Britain governed India: "England holds India for her good."⁴ Few officials governing in Ottawa disagreed with the wry statement or even gave it a second thought.

Thirty-one years later, now prime minister of the senior dominion of the Commonwealth, Mackenzie King and his officials contemplated establishing formal diplomatic relations with the embryonic Indian state. Through the sacrifices made in the First World War and the concessions gained at the Commonwealth conferences of 1926 and 1930, Ottawa, slowly but firmly, took control of Canada's foreign relations. A set of confident, remarkably talented diplomats and mandarins in the federal government enhanced the process.⁵ The Second World War continued the corrosive process of melting the British Empire's economic foundations, thereby diminishing London's ability to defend and maintain its overseas colonies. Meanwhile, Indian nationalism and political consciousness steadily developed. After the First World War, a new generation of nationalists emerged as a significant force despite Britain's attempts to limit their progress. Despite the passionate statement of Winston Churchill that he had not become the king's first minister "in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire,"⁶ it was clear that Britain possessed neither the military nor the economic capacity to maintain long-term control of the jewel of the empire. London considered the benefits of petitioning the senior dominions, particularly Canada, to become involved in India.

Britain approached Canada about establishing formal relations with India in late 1940. Lord Amery, secretary of state for India, met with Vincent Massey, the Canadian high commissioner, in London to suggest that it would be very helpful if Canada and India exchanged high commissioners. Amery believed that such an exchange "would demonstrate to the Indian mind the true nature of the British Commonwealth of Nations and [that] it would be very gratifying to Indian pride to have the greatest of the younger nations of the Commonwealth prepared to exchange representatives with India on parity."⁷ Massey, in his correspondence to King, did not indicate how Canada would benefit from this

exchange, and the altruistic, perhaps disingenuous, phrasing of the British proposal failed to mention the potential benefits for London as it coped with Indian nationalists.

In the new year, King's undersecretary of state for external affairs (USSEA), O.D. Skelton, prepared a memorandum for King on the possible high commissioner exchange. Despite the turbulent political situation in India, Skelton cautiously believed that a Canadian gesture would be well received by the Indian public. At the same time, he cautioned that Canada's exclusionary voting laws regarding Indians undermined the notion of equality in the British Commonwealth. Skelton thought that, if the franchise matter could be satisfactorily addressed and the right man found to go to New Delhi, then an exchange would be possible to "help in this difficult situation."⁸ King's instincts cautioned otherwise. In the margin of Skelton's memorandum, a pencilled comment noted, "let sleeping dogs lie."⁹

On 26 December 1941, less than three weeks after war had broken out in the Pacific, Mackenzie King received another memorandum on India drafted by Lester Pearson, an emerging star within the DEA. The memorandum drew attention to appointing a high commissioner to India. Pearson thoughtfully assessed Canadian interests in the postwar Indian subcontinent, concluding that India would emerge as a fully independent nation. He noted the necessity of encouraging the healthy political development of postwar India and that, like China, India could not be ignored. Canada could assist India to cope with "two major political problems: a) the attainment of satisfactory international status [and] b) the evolution of a political system which can combine respect for the appropriate autonomy of territorial and religious minorities within national unity." Pearson suggested that Canada could assist India in meeting these objectives better than the United States, Britain, or Australia. Canada had evolved peacefully, its officials had experience dealing with minority rights, and it did not have an imperial past. Pearson feared the potential of "a great danger after the war or in its later stages of bitter racial feelings against [the] Japanese ... expressed in ways which will alienate sympathies in China and India." Assuaging the tensions clearly benefited Canada and its allies. It was vital to emphasize "the solidarity of civilized and 'democratic' peoples in such a crisis," and India must have contact with other democracies apart from Britain. Perhaps recognizing Mackenzie King's cautious nature, Pearson concluded that Ottawa could conveniently initiate this process without great expense "and without assuming any embarrassing responsibilities."¹⁰

Why Pearson encouraged the matter is unclear. He lacked experience with India, and Asian affairs were not his strength. It is possible that he learned of British fears of India in a postwar world while in London and truly believed

that Canada could play a constructive role. Indeed, his initial sense that India required attention persisted for many years, often to the exasperation of his American counterparts in the 1950s. Pearson's memorandum reveals an assumption that later led many politicians and bureaucrats in Ottawa to sour on India. The idea that an independent India would naturally evolve in a Western democratic fashion, emulate the West, and be aligned with the West after the war ended ignored the country's complexities and its nationalist struggle. It also ignored the critical role of the sharply different geographical, cultural, and religious norms that shaped Indian foreign policy in the post-independence period. Unsurprisingly, there were few bureaucrats in Ottawa who initially considered such factors as they conceptualized post-independence "India."

The significance of considering a representative in India was twofold. First, Canada placed diplomatic focus firmly on Washington and London, with Commonwealth ties also given priority. By the end of 1939, Canada had established High Commissions in Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa. In contrast, before 7 December 1941, only two Canadian legations existed in Asia, one in Tokyo (established in 1929) and the other in Chungking China (established in July 1941). With the outbreak of war in the Pacific, the Canadian legation in Tokyo closed, and its staff repatriated, shutting Canada's main window on the Pacific. The Canadian mission to Chungking continued, but it operated in an isolated part of China constantly under threat of Japanese attack. Moreover, its minister, Major General Victor Odlum, was not experienced in Chinese or Asian affairs and ignored those of his staff who were.¹¹

Second, Pearson's memorandum deserves special consideration because it recognized the possibility of Indian independence before the Cripps mission led by Sir Stafford Cripps. The failed mission occurred after the fall of Singapore and Rangoon between March and April 1942, a watershed moment for the Indian independence movement. Facing cabinet pressure, Churchill grudgingly agreed to offer concessions to Indian nationalists through Cripps. The Cripps mission emblemized the dire straits of British rule in India. Effectively, the British cabinet offered India "the right to total independence after the war, in anticipation of immediate cooperation by the Government of India in pursuit of war."¹² India could either seek full dominion status once the war ended or leave the empire altogether. King appears to have considered Pearson's prescient memorandum even before the momentous British action.¹³

In early March, Churchill informed King of the purpose of the Cripps mission. King welcomed "the statement of policy laying-down the steps [that London] has proposed to take for the earliest possible realization of complete self-government in India."¹⁴ Echoing Pearson's earlier point, the Canadian prime minister informed Churchill of Ottawa's possible high commissioner exchange

with India. An accommodating King offered that Canada “would be glad to make an early appointment of a High Commissioner” if London believed that doing so “would help to signalize India’s emergence as an equal member of the Commonwealth.”¹⁵ The usually cautious King went so far as to suggest that the Cripps mission might be given a boost if the self-governing dominions voiced “their readiness to co-operate at the time of peace negotiations in insuring immediate recognition of India’s status as one of equality with the other self-governing parts of the British Commonwealth of Nations.”¹⁶ Churchill replied unenthusiastically to King’s offer on 18 March, pointing out that the “grim” issues negotiated by Cripps had significant sectarian and military ramifications for both India and the British government. He coolly instructed King: “I should strongly recommend your awaiting developments till we see how the Cripps mission goes.”¹⁷ Churchill’s bluntness dampened the far more optimistic telegram that Leo Amery, the British secretary of state for India, wrote to King the previous day. Amery eagerly declared that “the interest that would be shown in India and the recognition of India’s status implied in an exchange of High Commissioners between India and Canada, would be of the very greatest help with a sensitive people like that of India.” Amery intended to raise King’s suggestion immediately with the viceroy, adding that, “when the peace negotiations come in sight, a lead from the senior Dominion in welcoming the Indian delegates [to the peace conference] would be immensely helpful.”¹⁸ A disconnect clearly existed between Amery and Churchill, with the former wondering if, “on the subject of India [particularly self-government], he is really quite sane.” Churchill’s firm response to King belied this fact as well as his ambition to maintain London’s grip on India.¹⁹

Amery cabled the viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, who expressed interest in the Canadian proposal and promised to give it consideration. But at the end of March, Canada made its own decision. The Cabinet War Committee met in Ottawa and, in light of Churchill’s rebuke, agreed that an appointment of a high commissioner to India should be deferred until the results of the Cripps mission became clear.²⁰ In May, Amery received a positive response from the Viceroy, seemingly unaware of the March decision, asking Massey to inform King that the Indian government was now in a position to exchange representatives with Canada.²¹

The Canadians dropped the matter altogether until June 1943, when Norman Robertson, the USSEA, sent a copy of a letter from Odum, in China, to King. Robertson reported that Odum “would like to have someone in India with whom he could compare notes. I think that the establishment of our Legation in Chungking is indeed an additional reason for putting a High Commissioner in India. I wonder if we might not revive this question now.”²² Robertson pursued

the issue on 28 August when he cleverly provided King with a copy of a flattering letter between Odlum and Canadian diplomat Hugh Keenleyside.²³ Having spent a brief period in India, Odlum gave Keenleyside his impressions of Indian attitudes toward Canada. It was trusted among Indian parties more than any other part of the British Empire, Odlum wrote. The leaders of the Indian nationalist movement distrusted Churchill, and resentment toward the British ran deep, while King garnered high regard as “a great constitutionalist.” From Odlum’s vantage point, Indians saw King as the “one man in the British Empire who I think could exert a great influence if he were in any way to become associated with the settlement of the Indian problem.”²⁴ While King likely enjoyed reading about his distinguished status, he chose not to pursue Robertson’s suggestion.

Some officials in the DEA began to question the plodding nature of the denied requests and echoed Pearson’s early arguments about the importance of having a representative in India. John Holmes, a talented young diplomat, lobbied his senior colleague, Hume Wrong, for renewed consideration of appointing a high commissioner to India. Holmes noted that Australia had beat Canada to the punch by appointing its own high commissioner. Surely, Holmes argued, “if there is a question of priority it is more important for Canada to try to play a role for which she is peculiarly fitted, in settling one of the major world problems, than in worrying about the grievances of the Peruvians or the Cubans.” Wrong agreed but doubted Canada’s efficacy in settling India’s internal problems. Yet there remained a strong case for having a Canadian representative in India, and Wrong was “sorry Australia got in first.”²⁵

Toward the end of 1943, King returned to favouring the idea of appointing a high commissioner to India. In a conversation with Robertson, King proposed Andrew McNaughton, a Canadian general, only to have Robertson urge caution.²⁶ During the past year, Robertson had unsuccessfully contemplated the posting. Finding a willing, qualified candidate, preferably from outside their depleted department, had proven very difficult.²⁷ Still, with powerful proponents in the DEA such as Pearson, Robertson, Wrong, and now Prime Minister King, a decision would soon be made.

In November, Ottawa notified the British government and the Indian government of its desire to send a representative to India. Although the Indians maintained a representative in Washington throughout the war, a representative in Ottawa would be more than symbolic: it would strengthen the nationalist demands for independence. The British government also seemed to favour the proposal, requesting only one small concession. Malcolm MacDonald, the British high commissioner to Canada, informed Robertson in April 1944 that, if the Canadians wished to proceed with their initiative,

then the British and Indian governments would be grateful if they could be informed in advance.²⁸

As the war turned in favour of the Allies and the likelihood of independence increased, Indian officials expressed hope that Canada would play an active and influential role in the British Empire and within the Commonwealth. K.P.S. Menon, the Indian agent general in Chungking, communicated to Odlum in May 1944 that the Indians admired King and had great faith “in Canada’s good intentions.”²⁹ Reflecting on Canada’s accumulated goodwill, Odlum echoed Pearson’s earlier observation, speculating that “perhaps it [India] thinks that Canadians have not become as biased in judgement as have certain British leaders if only because Canada has not been so close to or so obsessed with Indian problems.”³⁰

Furthermore, Ottawa learned from London that the government of India was “anxious to appoint a High Commissioner to Canada as soon as possible.”³¹ The Indians proposed sending a representative to Canada even if Ottawa could not immediately reciprocate. The Canadian government delayed action because of the strained resources of the DEA and the ongoing search for the right individual. Even Pearson despaired that the rapid expansion of Canada’s emerging diplomatic presence hampered the hunt. The department was competing with other branches of the civil service for able talent.³²

The year 1946 proved to be decisive in establishing Canada’s bilateral relations with India. In March, the British Labour government of Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced that his government approved of India’s complete independence and sought to repatriate British soldiers as soon as possible. King called this decision “the right course” in his diary, but he also betrayed a cautious whiff of the Cold War; he observed that, if Britain did not leave the Indian subcontinent peacefully, then “it is almost certain that India, sooner or later, would join with the other Eastern powers in helping to overthrow British rule.”³³ Concern that the Cold War would extend to South Asia compounded a fear that the Soviet Union would come to control the “Oriental peoples; possibly the people of India as well before very long.”³⁴ This is really the first hint that the impact of decolonization in Asia as well as the emerging Cold War influenced Ottawa’s interest in India. King’s tangible fear found purchase among other Canadian policy makers and their allies. By 1950, Ottawa and its allies employed concerted efforts to combat Soviet influence and communism in South Asia by promoting the virtues of the British Commonwealth “club” and through the innovative use of development aid.

In the meantime, Canada required a representative in India now that independence loomed on the horizon. With Norman Robertson residing in London as the high commissioner, Pearson sought to put his own stamp on the

position of undersecretary. He reiterated the importance attached to filling the New Delhi post in a memorandum to Secretary of State for External Affairs (SSEA) Louis St. Laurent. Yet the problem of finding the right person “for this difficult and quite important post” remained. The ideal candidate required “a good understanding of the working of Dominion-Provincial relations and of Canada’s place in the Commonwealth and the international community.” General Andrew McNaughton remained a possibility, King’s suggestion, so too former politician and now diplomat T.C. Davis. Uninterested, the latter persuaded Pearson that the job called “for a younger man,” which then struck McNaughton from the list of possibilities.³⁵

Throughout the autumn of 1946, the department continued to search. As late as 25 November, Pearson contacted potential candidates, only to be rebuffed repeatedly.³⁶ Finally, Mackenzie King chose John Kearney to be the Canadian representative, believing that he would “make an excellent representative there.”³⁷ Prior to 1941, Kearney practised law in Quebec, and like many in the Irish Catholic community he had ties to the Liberal Party. In July 1941, King invited Kearney to become the high commissioner to Ireland. Kearney remained in Dublin until the end of the war until his appointment as envoy to Norway and Denmark in February 1946. Ireland’s wartime policy of strict, albeit benevolent, neutrality raised tensions within the Commonwealth and the United States. Kearney’s experience in discreetly dealing with both a very divisive policy and Ireland’s anti-British politicians suggests that King’s choice was a considered one. On 18 December 1946, cabinet approved Kearney’s appointment as Canada’s first high commissioner to India.³⁸ Pearson notified the government of India (GOI) the following day, and as 1946 ended the GOI welcomed the appointment, indicating its desire to reciprocate as soon as possible.³⁹

Kearney became the first high commissioner after years of debate over numerous candidates; since he was not the first choice, the appointment represented a compromise for the DEA. Kearney was not “a younger man,” his wife was ill, and, like most other candidates, he admitted to being “pretty much in the dark about India.” After consulting with a physician, he and his wife concluded that they could go to India, “provided suitable residence can be found not only in Delhi but more particularly in hills where I understand Government retires during part of the year.”⁴⁰ Much of his knowledge of India read right out of a Kipling story. Early in 1947, Kearney cabled Ottawa suggesting Simla as a residence, the former summer capital of the British in the foothills of the Himalayas, immortalized in Kipling’s *Plain Tales from the Hills*. He spent his last weeks in Norway meeting with anyone who had journeyed to India and reading any available books, such as *India: A Restatement*, by Sir Reginald Coupland, which Kearney described in his diary as an informative and up-to-date account of the

British Raj in India. Written primarily by Westerners, the books frequently sympathized with the role of the British Empire in India.⁴¹ Coupland, speaking years earlier in Toronto, declared that “it is British statesmanship and British strength that has saved and is at this moment saving the three hundred and sixty million people of India from suffering the fate of China.”⁴² Given the dearth of knowledge on India within the DEA, Ottawa advised Kearney to learn from British officials in London. He eagerly did so, but it is debatable how helpful these talks were in shaping his understanding of a contemporary India.

Indian nationalists found 1947 to be bittersweet. A nation was on the verge of being born, thereby fulfilling the hopes and dreams of India’s leaders. At the same time, a sense of uncertainty swelled over the socio-political stability of the subcontinent as Hindus and Muslims jockeyed for position. Mackenzie King too felt this sense of insecurity, exacerbated by the British decision to move up the date of independence to midnight, 14–15 August. Attlee telegraphed King with a dreary outlook on the British plans to transfer power to the Indian government. In response, King soberly reflected on the “possibility of very serious civil war there [India], so much so that the present govt. have decided to fix a definite date when they will hand over India to whatever authorities may have become constituted for carrying on govt. by that time.”⁴³

Despite the potential for conflict, King believed that the British were “right in not trying to govern India by repression” and reflected that “we were passing through one of those great epochs of history when the British Empire itself was breaking up.” He feared a power vacuum on the subcontinent that “left open the way for India to run completely outside of the Commonwealth which she will probably do.”⁴⁴ King was partially correct. The British Commonwealth underwent fundamental political and constitutional change during the final years of his leadership, yet King could take solace in having established the platform from which Canadian policy would help to create a new, vibrant, and racially inclusive Commonwealth.

Just as Ottawa began to develop its newest post, the threat of political instability in India, whetted by sectarian strife, became increasingly worrisome. A skeleton Canadian High Commission opened at the stately Imperial Hotel in New Delhi in April 1947 with Alfred J. Pick as the second secretary. Pick set up the new post, dealing with the DEA’s inability to determine post needs for the tropics, such as clothing and furniture.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Pick did an admirable job despite poor logistics symptomatic of the growing pains that the DEA encountered during this period in establishing a South Asian presence.

Pick’s initial report to Ottawa depicted India’s future as troubling. Drawing on Lord Durham’s famed depiction of race relations in Lower Canada, Pick reported that “in India two nations” were “warring within the bosom of a single

state.”⁴⁶ The administrative machinery, long the pride of the Raj, showed strain, and “even at this early stage there are signs of growing inefficiency, favoritism, and possibly even corruption.”⁴⁷ Pick further observed that India’s minorities chafed at the prospect of rule by Hindus. Muslims increasingly believed that they would be disadvantaged if they remained in a Congress-led India, and these fears gave currency to the idea of a separate Muslim state. If anything, Pick mused, the cleavages among India’s communities grew wider. The Muslim League warned that it would not look favourably on Nehru becoming India’s first prime minister.⁴⁸ The successes of the Muslim League in the 1946 general election coupled with the Congress Party’s desire for a strong, unitary, and non-sectarian state, and London’s zeal to leave the subcontinent as quickly as possible, pointed to a partitioned subcontinent. Pick cautioned that the “indications are that Hindustan at least will secede from the Commonwealth. Muslim India seems more sympathetic to the British connection.”⁴⁹ With some foreshadowing, he noted finally that “peaceful transfers of power are not common in human history and it seems that India must go through a good deal of trouble before she becomes a well ordered, self governing and independent country, or more likely for some time at least two countries.”⁵⁰ Sectarian riots occurred in some major cities in 1946, further embittering relations among India’s peoples. Pick’s superior, John Kearney, would arrive in India during a time of unprecedented sectarian strife.

The future of an independent Indian state and its constitutional relationship with the Commonwealth preoccupied British policy makers; the topic vexed the Commonwealth member states into 1949. The Muslim League and the Congress Party finally accepted partition in June 1947. The Indian Congress leaders contemplated remaining in the Commonwealth, with the caveat that they “were willing to accept the Crown” but wanted reference to the emperor of India “deleted from the Royal Title.”⁵¹ London sought the views of the senior dominions on the future status of India within the Commonwealth. Canadian policy reflected caution, but King’s fear that India might bolt into the Soviet sphere remained. On closer examination, this matter revealed an emerging split between King and his SSEA, Louis St. Laurent. The ever wary prime minister did not share St. Laurent’s and the DEA’s desire to play a larger role in India’s transition to self-government. King apparently forgot his offer to Churchill five years earlier when he committed his government to assist efforts to keep India in the Commonwealth. King now feared that London schemed to promote Commonwealth centralization, so he forcibly rebuffed St. Laurent.

Despite his reluctance to engage actively in the question of self-government for India, Mackenzie King wanted India to remain in the British Commonwealth. On 23 May, the secretary of state for dominion affairs wrote King an update,

noting that the future of India within the Commonwealth and its current constitutional demands held consequences for all members of the Commonwealth. The willingness of Congress Party leaders to entertain Indian membership in the Commonwealth was unpopular among the party rank and file, and London urged “extreme secrecy on this matter because if it became known that Congress leaders had privately encouraged this idea the possibility of their being able to bring their Party round to it would be seriously jeopardized.”⁵²

Ottawa notified London that it was best for all parties if India became a member of the Commonwealth and that partition would not preclude the future state from entry into the Commonwealth. Indeed, membership in the Commonwealth, Ottawa mused, might even alleviate difficulties raised by partition while augmenting good relations among the peoples and governments of India and those of the Commonwealth.⁵³ Another communication followed on 30 May, in which King offered his support for London’s attempts to find a solution that would grant self-government and stability to India, but he did not commit Canada itself to the partition process. The intricacies of partition and British motives worried King. He fretted that events were moving too quickly, thereby making a measured response difficult. This is apparent in his diary entry of 28 May 1947. King recorded the details of a cabinet discussion on India that had provoked his suspicion that Britain was attempting to unload its problems in India onto the Commonwealth. During the discussion, he rebuked St. Laurent and the DEA for preparing a draft statement outlining Ottawa’s response to whether Canada would accept an independent India or other partitioned states into the Commonwealth following independence. The statement supported partition. In response, King came “out pretty strongly against pretending to advise on matters that we knew nothing about. I said quite openly that there was not a single member of the Cabinet who was in a position to advise in regard to India.” Not only did his colleagues not understand the situation in India, King continued, but also they did not “realize what implications there might be in tendering advice in a matter of this kind.” He mused about the outcome of a Canadian action alienating one of the newly partitioned states, forcing it to “join in with Russia to form a common cause with her,” and “we would be pulled into some of the civil war that may result from an action which may be taken at this time by Britain.” For the moment, Britain held responsibility for India, and “she should deal with the matter herself” instead of placing its burdens onto the dominions. Ottawa would only “help bear burdens that were legitimate.” King believed that cabinet agreed with him, with the exception of St. Laurent, who, King scoffed, would loyally support the DEA.⁵⁴

The Canadian prime minister assured the British that his government would not “impede or delay” an agreement outlining India’s “future political status,”

as determined by the Indian people, even though such an arrangement might result in “the enlargement of the number of member states within the Commonwealth.”⁵⁵ King also voiced open support for deleting “Emperor of India” from the royal titles and informed the British that his government had already “instructed its High Commissioners some time ago to consult with the other Commonwealth governments on the desirability of discussing the revision of the Royal Style and Titles” at the next Commonwealth prime ministers’ meeting.⁵⁶ At that meeting, the Indian suggestion could be considered with any other proposed modifications. King’s carefully phrased despatch to London arrived after Lester Pearson learned of the prime minister’s admonishment to St. Laurent during the cabinet meeting concerning his draft telegram. Pearson sent King a tactful “clarification” of the DEA’s position on India and the changing Commonwealth; he indicated that, though the domestic situation in India concerned primarily London and New Delhi, the entry of one or more newly independent South Asian nations into the Commonwealth should be a matter of concern to all members. Pearson defended the DEA draft, arguing that it did not recommend Canadian intervention and would not make Ottawa vulnerable to a Commonwealth centralization scheme. Ottawa needed to consider “the principles which should govern additions to, or withdrawals from, the existing association of nations.” Pearson warned that “unfortunate results might occur if it were agreed that any one state in the Commonwealth could bring about the addition of new members without consultation with, and approval by, the others.” He understood that the addition of multiple Asian states into the Commonwealth would transform that institution. He suggested that two principles be established on the question of new member states: “1) there should be no new states added to the Commonwealth without the consent of the existing members; and 2) new states should be fully independent.” In the meantime, Ottawa could choose not to comment on the matter or “send a more noncommittal reply.”⁵⁷ King chose the second alternative.

A few weeks after these exchanges, John Kearney arrived in the sweltering heat of Bombay. In his diary entry on 19 June, he lamented that “it is difficult to sleep when one is dripping wet. The temperature has been around 100, and the humidity is almost equal to it.”⁵⁸ The diplomat suffered equally on the train to New Delhi: “When we arrived at New Delhi and opened the door of our compartment, it was like going into a blast furnace. I could not realize that the weather could be so hot. There is a breeze but it is a detriment instead of an asset. It seems to blow the heat into one’s system, and besides carries dust with it.”⁵⁹ Ironically, in the comfortable confines of the Imperial Hotel, Kearney needed to turn off the “Desert Cooler” since it gave him a headache.⁶⁰

Ottawa's expectations of Kearney were remarkably similar to those suggested by Pearson to King in 1941.⁶¹ Four directives drove the mission. The emphasis lay on maintaining and strengthening friendly relations, cultivating trade links, and keeping Ottawa posted on matters of interest concerning Indian internal policies and the exchange of views on external relations that might be of "common concern." In other words, Kearney had to strengthen the profile of Canada and cultivate Western sympathy. The recommendation that he keep close watch on India's relations with the Soviet Union illustrates that point and reflects the escalating Cold War tensions beginning to influence Canada's India policy.⁶²

Kearney's first major test involved the brilliant and charismatic prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Sophisticated and cosmopolitan, Nehru moved seamlessly between East and West. The product of a wealthy and fairly anglicized family, he was educated in Britain at Harrow and Cambridge; his interest in and knowledge of foreign affairs were fed by travel and extensive reading in politics and history. He stood out among his senior colleagues in the Congress Party. Indeed, few Indian politicians had travelled beyond India or possessed a solid background in international affairs. As such, Nehru became "the major Congress authority on future foreign policy," a position that he retained until his death in 1964.⁶³

Kearney met Nehru for the first time on 26 June 1947. He used the introduction to draw Nehru out on domestic matters, with Nehru indicating his preference that India become a moderate "socialistic state."⁶⁴ Kearney also lobbied Nehru for a formal residence and offices, of which very little could be offered. The Canadians remained on the top floor of the Imperial Hotel. After an hour-long conversation, Kearney left suitably impressed, recording that Nehru "has a most engaging personality and has a wonderful command of the English language. The Indian character as evidenced in Nehru, reminds me of the Irish – a melancholy look, which in a flash changes into a bright smile."⁶⁵

Kearney used his experiences in Ireland to assist in conceptualizing his Indian interlocutors. Months after the meeting, he wrote to close friend J.L. Ralston, the former minister of defence in Mackenzie King's cabinet, that "India has plenty of interesting characters. Nehru is a most lovable personality; his faults are just as attractive as his virtues. Mahatma Gandhi reminds me of a pocket edition of DeValera [the prime minister of Ireland] in diapers; but for the love of Pete, never quote me as having said so!"⁶⁶ How the towering, bombastic DeValera reminded Kearney of the gnomish, mystical Hindu persona of Gandhi is uncertain. It serves as the first of many examples of the challenge for Canadian figures to situate India and its leaders outside an Anglo-imperial context.

Nehru had good reason to appear melancholy at his first meeting with Kearney. Judith Brown notes in her biography of Nehru that "the coming of independence

was an experience of tragedy as much as celebration. He witnessed the partition of his homeland (Kashmir), the horrific killings which preceded and accompanied it, and the violence which locked India and the new state of Pakistan in conflict.”⁶⁷ The latter conflict(s) sorely bled the financial coffers of an already bare treasury, making Nehru’s hope of developing an impoverished state a Herculean task.

Nehru faced colossal choices and tasks during the weeks leading up to independence in mid-August. Perplexing issues such as “the provincial choices about joining India or Pakistan, the setting up of a Boundary Commission to deal with the partition of Punjab and Bengal, the division of assets of British India, including the army, [and] the question of who should be Governor-General of each of the new Dominions” demanded attention.⁶⁸ Nehru and his colleagues attempted to deal with them pragmatically, lacking a blueprint that might help to guide them.

For all the troubles, Nehru and his compatriots rejoiced as their ancient land prepared for its long-awaited entry into the community of independent nations at midnight of 14–15 August. (The date was chosen to prevent independence from occurring on an inauspicious day for Hindus). Salman Rushdie elegantly captured the feeling in his novel *Midnight’s Children*: the birth of India was greeted with gasps, fireworks, and crowds. The title of Rushdie’s novel was inspired by Nehru’s eloquent speech to the Constituent Assembly in New Delhi:

At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.⁶⁹

Hearing the announcement on the radio, Mackenzie King revelled in the news of India’s birth. “A great moment in history,” King recorded in his diary, contemplating the “remarkable” fate that “Mackenzie’s grandson should have been the one to send Canada’s greetings & good wishes to India & Pakistan & receive as I have (Aug 15 replies from the two first Prime Ministers of India).”⁷⁰

In contrast, Kearney felt disappointed with the whole affair: “When the clock chimed the witching hour of midnight, I felt quite worked up. I was waiting for a tremendous demonstration. I was greatly disappointed by its luke-warmness. I felt that such an event in Canada or even in London, would have been marked by an up-roar.”⁷¹ Kearney forgot to record that a monsoon had drenched New Delhi and ignored “the delirium of the thousands of ordinary Indians who

waited for the chimes of the clock to signal independence.”⁷² According to Brown and historian Denis Judd, the night of 14–15 August dazzled with pageantry and “electric excitement, with huge crowds participating in the capital’s celebrations: probably nobody, either British or Indian, had ever witnessed anything like it before.”⁷³ The Union Jack fell from flagpoles throughout the subcontinent, and the remaining British regiments embarked for home from Bombay “while the bands on the waterfront played Auld Lang Syne.”⁷⁴ Reporting his initial observations to Ottawa, a sanguine Kearney predicted that, if India avoided further misfortunes during the partition process, then it could “become a great power in the East, and that in the measurable future, in combination with other Asiatic countries, the future balance of power in the world will rest with her.”⁷⁵

A maelstrom of horrendous violence, which Kearney witnessed, marred the celebrations and the nascent hopes and dreams of sectarian harmony. Within hours of partition taking effect, the Punjab “erupted into flames and violence.”⁷⁶ Long-standing suspicions and fears sparked an unprecedented bloodletting as Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs attacked one another. This violence plunged the government of India into crisis as waves of ethnic cleansing swept across much of the north and into New Delhi, where there was a significant Muslim population. Approximately 15 million people were dispossessed of their homes and belongings, with rape and mutilation occurring systematically.⁷⁷ The refugee crisis added to India’s list of staggering problems. A weekly churchgoer, Kearney was driven to Mass on 7 September and saw dead bodies littered throughout the streets and watched helplessly as a man was stabbed and set ablaze with gasoline in front of his church. Kearney could do little except retreat to the Imperial Hotel and report the violence to Ottawa. Even at the hotel, he encountered “Sikhs who are armed and drinking heavily.”⁷⁸ To add to his unease, he came down with a case of “Delhi Belly.” Indian authorities imposed a curfew that had little effect; columns of smoke appeared across the skyline, and gunfire echoed throughout the city. The government suspended all mail, railway, and air services.

By mid-September, the situation had improved slightly in New Delhi and other major cities, but Kearney reported intermittent gunfire and that the Muslim populace avoided straying onto the streets. In addition, disease broke out as “many thousands” were living in unorganized refugee camps.⁷⁹ The Canadian mission planned for evacuation if the situation deteriorated, but fortunately Kearney and his staff outlasted this harrowing period.

The situation did improve. Overcoming the relative inexperience of Ottawa’s chief policy makers regarding India, the Canadian government finally developed a post in a part of the world that it had long neglected. Over a period of five years, Canada’s interest in India matured despite Mackenzie King’s cautionary

approach. The change from initial contemplation of whether to assist British aims in India to recognition of the importance of having a set of Canadian eyes and ears in New Delhi to the eventual establishment of a diplomatic post in New Delhi illustrates the profound shift in Canada's external relations policy during the war and postwar period. The Canadians saw the value of ascertaining the Indian view on international affairs as well as the need to share their, and the West's, perspective with New Delhi as Cold War tensions escalated in Asia. In particular, during the next seven years, Canadian policy makers dedicated a great deal of effort and committed significant financial resources to prevent India from succumbing to communism. Connected to this goal, Ottawa prepared to work closely with London and New Delhi to create the framework for a new, multiracial Commonwealth. The seeds of a potentially cooperative and fruitful relationship had been planted.