

“A Starving Man Helping Another Starving Man”

UNRRA, India, and the Genesis of Global Relief, 1943-1947

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The British Crown Rule in India, 1943



Source: Map 3 - India. Map. A Force More Powerful. 2006. Accessed March 2, 2018. <http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org/films/afmp/stories/india.php>.

Introduction

Forty-four men convened in the East Room of the White House on November 9 1943. Each represented a country that had vowed to defeat the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan in the Second World War.¹ They gathered not to discuss military matters but instead to rebuild after the conflict. That afternoon, they signed the charter of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. UNRRA (pronounced *un-ruh*) had one goal: to relieve the industrial, agricultural, and refugee crises that WWII had catalyzed. These disasters were many: both Allied and Axis forces had demolished factories, scorched wheat fields, and taken prisoners of war across Europe, North Africa, and East Asia. Each nation donated 1% of its GDP to solve these problems, accruing an initial budget of \$3.6 billion. Over the next five years, UNRRA became the first inter-governmental organization to procure and deliver aid across Eurasia.²

Also on November 9 1943, a famine was ravaging Bengal. What started as a minor flood in 1942 turned into an agricultural catastrophe when Japan invaded Burma and the British Army began stockpiling Indian grain, leaving the eastern Indian province without food. At least 500,000 Bengalis had died by November 1943; up to 3 million were dead by 1947. Ruled by British forces since the 18th century, India was an ally in WWII and a member of UNRRA. Despite its membership and the war-related causes of its famine, Bengal never received relief from UNRRA.³ This essay explains why.

Part of the reason was that the US government, which funded 30% of UNRRA, did not want to interfere with British activity in India. M. S. Venkataramani concludes that the American

¹ Memorandum, "Text of the Declaration by United Nations," January 1, 1942, in *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. I, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), I: 602-03, HeinOnline.

² George Woodbridge, *The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 1:3-5.

³ M. S. Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine of 1943: The American Response* (Delhi: Vikas, 1973), 38-45.

government adhered to the policy of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that no international organization should influence the actions of the British Government of India (GOI). To appease Churchill, the Roosevelt administration did not require UNRRA to aid India, even though the US had leverage to do so as its primary donor.⁴ Gary Hess and Dennis Kux concur that although Roosevelt desired to assist Bengal, he did not act against Churchill's wishes.⁵

The story of the American response to the 1943 Bengal Famine is incomplete, however, without considering low-level personnel—employees and diplomats who worked in administrative offices of the American, British, and Indian governments, as well as UNRRA. From 1943 to 1947, these agents attempted to supply UNRRA aid to the victims of the 1943 Bengal Famine. Their efforts challenged their nations' official policies, which prohibited America from relieving India. While they failed to send food to Bengal, their strategies showed how personnel-level agents could change the procedures of international aid organizations by contradicting the intentions of the governments that created those organizations. These officers sometimes worked secretly to aid India through UNRRA, obfuscating their actions so that they could preserve their reputations of allegiance to their governments. At other times, these employees told the leaders of Britain, America, and UNRRA how the organization could send aid without contradicting their nations' policies. Whether publically or privately, these officers—primarily Indian Agent General Girija Bajpai, US State Department agriculturalist R. V. Gogate, and Government of India Secretary of Commerce N. R. Pillai—developed strategies to aid Bengal when their Prime Minister, President, and Viceroy had decreed such aid impossible. UNRRA provided the diplomatic channels through which these officers interacted and broke

⁴ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 7.

⁵ Gary R. Hess, *America Encounters India, 1941-1947* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 131-135; Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States, 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994), 37-42.

from the stances of their nations' executives. These breaks changed the relationship between the United States and British India, allowing the two countries to have closer diplomatic and economic ties outside the purview of British diplomats. Having facilitated changes in American and Indian diplomacy as both nations emerged as global leaders, UNRRA deserves attention in the history of international affairs.

William Hitchcock notes that historians give UNRRA "short shrift" despite its relevance to postwar economic development.⁶ He is correct: few books on twentieth century international history focus on UNRRA. Christopher Thorne's *Allies of a Kind*, which examines US and British wartime collaboration in East Asia, refers to UNRRA in two sentences.⁷ The only book devoted to UNRRA came during its 1948 liquidation, when the organization commissioned Columbia University professor George Woodbridge to write its official history. His text delineates the structure, resources, and achievements of the agency's leaders, primarily its Director General, Herbert Lehman.⁸ It does not, however, evaluate whether the group succeeded in its goals. Hitchcock does so in his text on postwar Europe, focusing on UNRRA's refugee relief in Yugoslavia, Greece, and Italy. Hitchcock argues that UNRRA failed to solve all WWII-related crises but introduced the idea of international aid to nations around the world. Mazower concurs in this assessment, explaining how UNRRA's decline informed the US State Department's creation of other aid initiatives to assert free-market economics in western Europe.⁹

These histories make only passing references to UNRRA personnel. Woodbridge and Hitchcock both mention that UNRRA's ability to deliver aid, in Woodbridge's words, "depended

⁶ William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 398.

⁷ Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 475.

⁸ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:138-234.

⁹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 284.

primarily on the effectiveness of its staff [who] gave life and reality to its principles and objectives.”¹⁰ Mazower also recognizes UNRRA staff by praising Robert G. A. Jackson, an Australian officer in the British Royal Navy who streamlined the UNRRA-affiliated Middle East Supply Center, becoming the “tsar of food production across the Arab lands.”¹¹ To all three authors, UNRRA was an imperfect organization that was saved by the people who worked in its administrative offices. The authors refrain, however, from concentrating on these people.

It is possible that these historians, as well as those who examine the Bengal Famine, do not focus on personnel due to the sources they consulted. Woodbridge, Hitchcock, Mazower, Thorne, and Venkataramani read US State Department records and newspaper reports, but none examined the UNRRA Papers of the United Nations Archives. Containing over 30,000 pages of memos and telegrams from all UNRRA divisions between 1943 and 1948, the UNRRA Papers hold unseen information on postwar diplomacy. Using these sources, this essay examines the response of UNRRA to the Bengal Famine from the perspective of the low-level personnel who transformed their organization’s policy toward India. Their story begins in Bengal.

¹⁰ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:156; Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, 225.

¹¹ Mazower, *Governing the World*, 282.

Chapter 1: Disaster and Relief

The Bengal Famine

Bengali farmers knew how to keep their rice dry. Each week from summer to autumn, rains flooded the 90,000 square mile Ganges-Brahmaputra river delta of Bengal. As subsistence farmers, Bengali families stored their food in water-tight teak containers. Wealthier farmers transported goods in boats, which weaved through streams to Bengal's central market in Calcutta. Most of these boats carried aman, a rice crop that in 1940 supported 73% of the food supply for Bengal's 42.1 million people.¹² These millions were unprepared for the floods of October 1942, when a cyclone and two tidal waves destroyed 17% of Bengal's aman.¹³

British Burma had supplied Bengal's rice during previous floods. In January 1942, however, Japan invaded Burma and cut trading lines to Bengal. Fearing Japanese attacks on navy vessels, Prime Minister Churchill ordered a 60% decrease in British maritime activity in the Bay of Bengal in January 1943. His measure included food transportation boats.¹⁴ Members of the Ministry of War warned Churchill that his order would cause "cataclysms in the seaborne commerce" of Bengal. He replied that to defend against Japan, the people of coastal India "must live on their sticks."¹⁵ In March 1943, the Prime Minister instructed the Government of India to confiscate Bengali rice surpluses to prevent Japanese invaders from looting food stores.¹⁶ British-subsidized military companies could keep their food, including one construction company that stored 42 days' worth of rice to build military railroads between Calcutta and New

¹² Famine Inquiry Commission, *Report on Bengal* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1945), 4; Churchill quoted in Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 52.

¹³ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 7.

¹⁴ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 8.

¹⁵ Quoted in Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 8.

¹⁶ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 8.

Delhi through spring.¹⁷ The Government of Bengal sent its remaining food surpluses to the British Indian Army in New Delhi.¹⁸ By July 1943, weather and war had brought an unprecedented drop in food availability to Bengal.

The Bengali rice market price shows how much food Bengal lost.¹⁹ In December 1941, one maund (82.3 lbs) of rice cost 7 Rupees (Rs).²⁰ By August 1943, high demand and low supply brought the price to 37 Rs, indicating a massive shortage. The GOI tried to reverse the dearth in December 1943 by prohibiting government-subsidized companies from stockpiling rice.²¹ The measure failed to lower prices, and by January 1944, one maund cost 107 Rs.²² The lack and high price of food caused a famine in Bengal from spring 1943 through 1944. Poverty, disease, and death characterized the catastrophe.

A February 27 1943 headline from a local Bengali newspaper noted “indications of distress among local people” who lacked food to sell and eat. A June 12 article reported “bands of people moving about in search of rice” gathering in larger towns that held remaining grain supplies. Hundreds of thousands of these “rural destitutes” arrived in Calcutta by August.²³ In autumn, poverty turned to death. Bodies presented a logistical problem as they piled up in rural and urban streets.²⁴ Cholera, malaria, and smallpox killed Bengalis into 1945 through starvation-

¹⁷ Kali Charan Ghosh, *Famines in Bengal 1770-1943*, 2nd ed. (Bengal: National Council of Education, 1944), 49; Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 278.

¹⁸ Ghosh, *Famines*, 48.

¹⁹ Statistics on food availability in Bengal during WWII are virtually non-existent. Mukerjee argues that members of the GOI destroyed food production records to obfuscate how the British government caused the famine. Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 112.

²⁰ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 54.

²¹ Ghosh, *Famines*, 50.

²² Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 55.

²³ Local newspaper headlines quoted in Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 57.

²⁴ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 57.

caused diarrhea that infected the region's waterways.²⁵ The Famine Inquiry Commission, which the GOI assembled in 1945 to investigate the disaster's causes, reported that 1.5 million Bengalis died from starvation. Amartya Sen estimates 3 million deaths, counting those who died while travelling between villages.²⁶ Regardless of the death toll, two facts about the Bengal Famine are clear: Bengalis suffered on a vast scale, and the British government exacerbated it more than assuaged it. L. N. Saha understood these truths. A local legislator in Orissa, a coastal province that shared Bengal's rivers, Saha wrote in his diary of a December 1943 trip to Jaleswar, an Orissa town of about 10,000 people:

Imagination cannot go any further, mind cannot comprehend, and words cannot adequately describe the panorama of sorrow and acute misery that we witnessed [in] Jaleswar... While the aeroplanes are buzzing and whizzing constantly over Orissa, it behooves the authorities to see that there should be men walking on the earth and not shadows of human specters dropping dead here and there, unaided [and] uncared for... there is famine, famine and famine all round... Declare to the whole world that there is famine.²⁷

The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

One of the planes flying over Orissa may have belonged to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. A Soviet diplomat conceived the organization on September 24 1941 when he wrote to the British Imperial War Office about the possibility of an "Inter-Allied Committee on Post-War Relief" that would relieve industrial, agricultural, and refugee crises in nations invaded by Axis powers.²⁸ His suggestion had two purposes for Soviet diplomacy: to assert political influence in nations needing aid and to relieve its own ailing regions. It had been three months since Germany's surprise invasion through the Baltic states and the Belorussian

²⁵ Ghosh, *Famines*, 53.

²⁶ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 54.

²⁷ L. N. Saha, Diary entry regarding Orissa Famine, December 1943, Mss Eur D714/67, Papers of Ian Hay MacDonald, British Library, London, UK.

²⁸ John G. Winant to Cordell Hull, telegram, June 22, 1942, in *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. I, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), I:89, HeinOnline.

front, and Leningrad was at risk of falling to Nazi invaders. Through 1942, British and American diplomats supported the plan but blocked Soviet authority. In a January 22 memo to US Secretary of State Cordell Hull, UK Ambassador John G. Winant noted that the organization would “consist of representatives of all the Allied countries on the basis of equality.”²⁹ Over the next three months, British and American diplomats, primarily Winant and Churchill’s economic advisor, Frederick Leith-Ross, discussed this group with increasing detail.

Most of these conversations articulated that the UK and US, in Winant’s words, would not give “undue influence to Russia.”³⁰ Leith-Ross concurred that America and Britain had “a special responsibility” in leading the group, “not solely because the nations of the world will look to them for leadership...but also because [of] their control of the seas.”³¹ Focusing on the size of their empires, the ambassador cited Britain and America’s global dominance to validate their control of the organization. They solidified that authority over the next 18 months, giving leadership positions to British and American officials and placing its headquarters in New York City. On November 9 1943, representatives of forty-four nations met at the White House to sign the UNRRA charter. Under the leadership of Herbert H. Lehman, the former New York governor who became the agency’s Director General, each signatory pledged 1% of their GDP to UNRRA’s goal: “Upon the liberation of any area [occupied] by the enemy...the population thereof shall receive aid and relief [including] food, clothing and shelter...Arrangements shall be

²⁹ Memorandum, "Text of the Declaration by United Nations," January 1, 1942, in *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. I, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), I:603, HeinOnline.

³⁰ Winant to Hull, June 22, 90.

³¹ Frederick Leith-Ross to John G. Winant, telegram, February 20, 1942, in *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. I, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), I:89, HeinOnline; John G. Winant to Frederick Leith-Ross, telegram, May 7, 1942, in *General, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. I, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), I:89, HeinOnline.

made for the return of prisoners and exiles to their homes and...the resumption of urgently needed agricultural and industrial production.”³²

One of the representatives was Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai of the British Crown Rule in India. Although part of the British Empire, India was a separate signatory from the UK. Its status satisfied colonial aims by requiring Indian taxpayers, rather than British citizens, to contribute India’s 1%. Bajpai assured that India would reinforce British policy in UNRRA forums. Born in northern India, Bajpai attended Oxford in 1915, where he became interested in serving the British government. In 1922, he proved his allegiance to the Crown as a member of UK Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour’s mission in the League of Nations. Then he became the youngest ever Secretary of the British Government of India. He stood out in diplomatic circles for two traits: his strictly British dress—he wore a suit and bowler hat to every meeting—and his dedication to UK policy. To the anger of Indian nationalists, the Government of the United Kingdom chose Bajpai as the first envoy between the United States and India in 1941. Because a title of “Minister” or “Ambassador” implied an independent status of India, Winant and Bajpai agreed that his title would be Indian Agent General to the United States.³³

Under this title, Bajpai signed the UNRRA charter and agreed that India would donate 80 million Rs.³⁴ But India did not qualify for relief. Japan never marched into India, so the people of Bengal were ineligible to receive provisions from UNRRA’s planes and ships. This omission was a non-issue to the architects of the organization. Neither Winant nor Leith-Ross mentioned

³² "The Agreement Creating the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration," *National Planning Association Pamphlets* 31-32 (February 28, 1944): 63.

³³ Olaf Caroe and B. R. Nanda, "Bajpai, Sir Girja Shankar," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine, 1, last modified September 4, 2004, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30544>.

³⁴ Memorandum by Henry Atkinson and D. N. Naravane, "'India in UNRRA' Talk Broadcast from the Baroda Radio," August 5, 1947, microfilm, H/4 Side 1: VII.7.2 Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

the Bengal Famine in the months prior to the November 9 charter signing. Speaking at the White House that day, President Roosevelt also seemed blind to the famine, even when celebrating UNRRA's dual goals: "First, to assure a fair distribution of available supplies among all of the liberated peoples...and second, to ward off death by starvation."³⁵

America, Britain, and India

On the day of the UNRRA charter signing, the White House received three copies of a letter. One was addressed to President Roosevelt, one to Eleanor Roosevelt, and one to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Its author, J. J. Singh, led the India League of America (ILA), an advocacy group of about 100 of the 2,400 Indians living in the US.³⁶ Singh implored his recipients to urge UNRRA to aid Bengal. His reasoning hit on a point from Roosevelt's speech: although Axis powers did not invade India, its people were dying and needed the world's help.³⁷

Singh's letters marked the first communication between the ILA and the US government. The group's primary purpose was to update Indian-Americans on events in India through a monthly newsletter, *India Today*.³⁸ The November 9 notes were unusual because the US and India rarely engaged in diplomatic communication without British participation. Agent General Bajpai's job was generally to ensure that all Indian communications reflected the aims of the UK government before reaching US eyes. Supporting British rule was the extent of the United States government's interactions with India. Roosevelt had private discomforts regarding the British rule of India, but during the war, he never publically disagreed with Churchill's opposition to Indian self-rule. Two weeks after the August 1941 Atlantic Conference, in which he and

³⁵ Quoted in Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine*, 41.

³⁶ Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 4.

³⁷ Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine*, 42.

³⁸ *India Today*, May 1942.

Churchill agreed to “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live,” Churchill stated that the agreement did not apply to the British Empire.³⁹ The US government did not oppose this interpretation.⁴⁰ The Roosevelt administration also took no stance on the Bengal Famine. The White House was aware of the famine from reports by the US Board of Economic Warfare, which Roosevelt established to research the war’s influence on the global economy. One July 1943 report estimated that “unless substantial quantities of food-stuffs [came] from outside sources, hundreds of thousands of deaths from starvation [would] occur” in Bengal.⁴¹ His Majesty’s Government told State Department officials that the British Government would handle the famine, so the US took no action. Churchill, known to historians to be dismissive of Indian welfare, also told Roosevelt not to mention the famine in diplomatic meetings.⁴² According to Venkataramani, Roosevelt’s acceptance of British famine policy was “another concession to the demands of Churchillism.”⁴³

Churchill’s insistence that India did not need outside help moved Roosevelt to deny aid to Bengal even when doing so would have helped the war effort. A State Department letter to the President from September 1943, for instance, explained that aid to Bengal would bolster Allied sentiment in India. Without aid, Bengali farmers would support an invasion “in the belief that Japanese would bring rice with them.”⁴⁴ The letter also suggested that the famine stymied talks between the British government and Indian nationalists, insisting that famine aid would allay

³⁹ Memorandum by Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston S. Churchill, "Atlantic Charter," August 14, 1941, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>.

⁴⁰ Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 20.

⁴¹ Quoted in Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine*, 17.

⁴² For an analysis of Churchill’s prejudice toward Indians and other non-white societies, see Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 113.

⁴³ Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine*, 21.

⁴⁴ William Phillips to Franklin D. Roosevelt, telegram, September 9, 1943, in *The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. III, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), I:300, HeinOnline.

conflict within India's borders.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Roosevelt refrained from making public statements in favor of aiding Bengal.

When Singh's letter appeared at the White House, Roosevelt and Acheson ignored the request. Eleanor Roosevelt did not. The morning of the conference, Eleanor implored her husband to help the millions of Bengalis starving from the British war effort. Perhaps because the British would not view aid from UNRRA as aid from America, Roosevelt took the request under consideration. He did not mention Bengal at the signing, but he telegraphed a reply to her that evening: "this is a matter which the new UNRRA can properly take up."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Phillips to Roosevelt, September 9, 301.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine*, 42.

Chapter 2: The India Clause

Conflict in Congress

President Roosevelt did not keep his promise to his wife. In the weeks after November 9 1943, he did not recommend to UNRRA that Bengal should receive aid. He remained silent through November 22, during the first annual UNRRA Council meeting in Atlantic City, where representatives from each member nation voted on the agency's priorities and methods of aid. Singh had implored Roosevelt to engage the council in a conversation over whether to send grain and ships to Calcutta. He asked the same from British and Indian representatives, and he failed with all three countries. The British envoy, John J. Llewellyn, said in a November 22 press conference that WWII had not caused the famine "and that nothing needed to be done to aid India."⁴⁷ Reflecting British policy, the Indian envoy Girija Shankar Bajpai also remained silent.

Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson followed Llewellyn and Bajpai. As the US emissary, his silence supported "Roosevelt's unwritten agreement with Churchill" that the US would not take an official position on events in India that the Britain could not control.⁴⁸ In the closing hour of the conference, Acheson noted that India "is afflicted today with widespread distress due to insufficiency of food over large areas, caused by the war...But her special situation has not prevented her from joining our work here. We are grateful for this token of her cooperation."⁴⁹ Mentioning India without calling for its aid, Acheson satisfied the Roosevelt-Churchill pact and gave the impression that UNRRA cared for the people of India. National newspapers praised the speech, including a *New York Times* column entitled "UNRRA Recognizes India's Food Crisis."⁵⁰ The praise was sure to promote American legitimacy in its

⁴⁷ Hess, *America Encounters India*, 133.

⁴⁸ Venkataramani, *Bengal Famine*, 42.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 45.

⁵⁰ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 45.

leadership of UNRRA. Singh, on the other hand, understood that Acheson had buried any chance of aid to Bengal. In the December 1943 *India Today* issue, he promised that “India will survive this famine, as she survived famines in the past. But the memory of the hundreds of thousands who died because no help came from their allies, will be a ghost not quickly laid.”⁵¹

Singh may have agreed with one of Acheson’s statements. Acknowledging that WWII had caused the famine, the assistant secretary challenged British policy. Acheson’s negation of Llewellyn’s claim began a process by which America became more distant from Britain and closer to India as it negotiated UNRRA’s work in India. The American response to the Bengal Famine through UNRRA, while at first meager, catalyzed a new relationship between the United States government and the people of India. In a departure from British desires, American congressmen, UNRRA officials, and Indian envoys to America made plans to aid India from 1943 to 1945. While it is unclear if these actions promoted Indian nationalism, American attempts to aid Bengal initiated direct communication between the nations.

Having failed to sway the executive branch in Atlantic City, J. J. Singh turned to the US Congress. He focused on the bill that would appropriate \$1.3 billion to UNRRA operations: *HJ Resolution 192*.⁵² As UNRRA’s primary funder, the US could decide how and to whom the group gave aid. If the bill recommended that UNRRA include India among its recipients, UNRRA would have to oblige. To create such a recommendation, Singh allied with South Dakota Republican Karl J. Mundt of the US House of Representatives.⁵³ They met shortly after

⁵¹ *India Today*, December 1943, 4.

⁵² *Hearings on H.J. 192 Before the Foreign Affairs Com.*, 78th Cong. (1943) (ProQuest Congressional), 1.

⁵³ It is possible that Mundt, representing a state focused on grain farming, belonged to a tradition of US lawmakers who supported agricultural relief around the globe due to their grain-based constituency. See Adina Popescu, "Casting Bread Upon the Waters: American Farming and the International Wheat Market, 1880–1920" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), accessed March 2, 2018, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac:188475>.

the Atlantic City conference, and on December 21 1943, the congressman introduced an amendment to *HJ 192* that permitted aid to India.⁵⁴ Dean Acheson, representing the Roosevelt administration, had two arguments against it. The first addressed UNRRA's aims. According to Acheson, the UNRRA charter referred only to areas that Axis powers invaded.⁵⁵ "There may be victims of war in the United States or in the United Kingdom or other parts of the world," he told Mundt on the House floor, "but it is not the purpose of UNRRA to relieve them."⁵⁶ As in his statement at Atlantic City, he acknowledged that the war had caused India's plight, but that was insufficient to qualify Bengal for aid. Acheson's second argument was that the GOI was better suited than UNRRA to help India. The Indian government, Acheson claimed, had the money and boats to ship wheat—available in Australia—to Bengal.⁵⁷ UNRRA, in other words, had no responsibility and no reason to help India. It also lacked the resources: "While this war is going on there is absolutely nothing that UNRRA can add to the efforts now being made by governmental authorities to get ships...to carry food."⁵⁸ Prioritizing transportation for the war over transportation that could help India, Acheson ended his argument against UNRRA's potential to aid the victims of the Bengal Famine, which at the time was in its deadliest month.

Acheson's arguments matched the British stance on the famine. Twenty days after Acheson argued with Mundt, Viceroy of India Archibald Wavell released a public statement regarding Bengal. Although the statement came after Acheson's speeches to Congress, it was one of several reports that Acheson had access to while making his arguments. UNRRA also

⁵⁴ Hess, *America Encounters India*, 134.

⁵⁵ The recipient nations, chosen at Atlantic City, were Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSR, Italy, Austria, the Dodecanese Islands, Ethiopia, Finland, Hungary, China, the Philippines, and Korea. Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:106-107.

⁵⁶ *Hearings on H.J. 192*, 279.

⁵⁷ *Hearings on H.J. 192*, 280.

⁵⁸ *Hearings on H.J. 192*, 284.

received the report and filed it in its Office of the Diplomatic Advisor, which interpreted messages for UNRRA's leading officials.⁵⁹

Viceroy Wavell reiterated Acheson's points. Departing from Llewellyn's November statement, Wavell admitted that the war caused the famine. Coupling "anxiety about the outcome of the war and the loss of our rice imports from Burma," the Viceroy pointed toward WWII as a cause without mentioning how British stockpiling exacerbated the famine.⁶⁰ Wavell also echoed Acheson in his explanation that aid to Bengal would overextend wartime resources. He warned that by asking "for more help from abroad than we really need, we are expecting other countries...to send us ships which are urgently required for direct war purposes."⁶¹ Wavell's explanation contained the same themes as Acheson's argument: aid was possible, but it would harm the war effort, especially if it required maritime grain transportation. He also agreed with Acheson's second argument: India could help itself without international relief. Wavell praised the work of the British Indian military, noting that "in Bengal, the aid given by the army coupled with the prospects of a bountiful aman harvest have eased the position perceptibly."⁶² Little evidence suggests that the Indian army gave any "aid" to Bengal apart from banning grain stockpiling in December 1943. And although aman yield rose in spring 1944, effects of the famine continued through 1946. Nevertheless, Acheson and Wavell agreed that because the GOI could help, UNRRA aid was useless. Wavell also detailed how the GOI would promote "Self-Help in Bengal."⁶³ Although the GOI gave "a generous measure of assistance," he claimed that it

⁵⁹ Memorandum by Archibald Wavell, "Viceroy Outlines Government of India's Future Food Policy: Famine Causes and Remedies," January 10, 1944, Microfilm, DA/3 Side 1 II.2. UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY, 1.

⁶⁰ Wavell, "Viceroy Outlines," 1.

⁶¹ Wavell, "Viceroy Outlines," 4.

⁶² Wavell, "Viceroy Outlines," 5.

⁶³ Wavell, "Viceroy Outlines," 5.

could no longer “carry” Bengal. The GOI would continue to reduce food costs “by all means in its power,” he noted, but the Bengali people must work to replenish their grain.⁶⁴ With vague statements about the GOI’s means to support its citizens, Wavell repackaged Acheson’s view to argue that Bengal should receive no aid.

Wavell, finally, mirrored Acheson in his “deep sympathy to the people of Bengal for the sorrows that have fallen on so large a portion of a frugal, hard-working population.”⁶⁵ Showing support for all nations’ welfare, Acheson and Wavell implied that international aid had moral value and at the same time sustained their political aims of suppressing aid to India. Acheson’s speeches, echoing GOI policy in content and tone, displayed the link between American and British policy toward India in the winter of 1943-1944.

By January, Mundt had supporters on both sides of the House to oppose Acheson and Wavell’s approach to Bengal. In the final debate on *HJ 192* on January 21, Indiana Democratic Congressman Louis Ludlow asserted that UNRRA aid to India would be “anchored in sheer justice.”⁶⁶ On March 28 1944, Congress voted to include a new request:

It is the recommendation of Congress that in so far as funds and facilities permit, any area important to the military operations of the United Nations which is stricken by famine or disease may be included in the benefits to be made available to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.⁶⁷

Without language concerning “victims of war,” the text authorized UNRRA relief for Bengal.

On May 1 1944, Roosevelt approved the funding with Mundt’s amendment included.⁶⁸ His acceptance may have been due to a secret telegram he received from Churchill two days

⁶⁴ Wavell, “Viceroy Outlines,” 6.

⁶⁵ Wavell, “Viceroy Outlines,” 2.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 50.

⁶⁷ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:114.

⁶⁸ Comm. on Appropriations, Communication from the President of the United States Transmitting an Estimate of Appropriation to Enable the United States to Participate in the Work of UNRRA, H.R. Doc. No. 78-572, 2d Sess., at 5 (1944) (ProQuest Congressional).

beforehand. Although Churchill publically opposed aiding Bengal, his April 29 message suggests that he privately supported it. Possibly worried about nationalist sentiment spurred by the famine, Churchill admitted to Roosevelt that “at least 700,000 people died last year” from the famine, and that rice production could not “overcome India’s shortage.”⁶⁹ Churchill’s acknowledgement that India could not help itself contradicted his public statements on the famine. His final request also departed from established British policy. Seeking US ships to bring wheat to Bengal from Australia, Churchill confessed that “I am no longer justified in not asking for your aid.”⁷⁰ Roosevelt replied that he was “unable on military grounds” to divert ships, adding, “I regret exceedingly the necessity of giving you this unfavorable reply.”⁷¹ He was probably telling the truth, as the US was escalating its assault on Japan and Japanese-occupied China.⁷² Regardless, the funding bill’s passage shifted US policy away from official British policy and toward relieving India. American public support for the amendment spread over the next six months as newspapers heralded “the India Clause.”⁷³ On September 15 1944, the second UNRRA Council in Montreal adopted the India Clause as Resolution 54 of its charter.⁷⁴

Allies in the Agency General

As more US policymakers supported aid to Bengal against the wishes of the British government, several Indian officials in the GOI did the same. Memos to Agent General Bajpai

⁶⁹ Winston S. Churchill to Franklin D. Roosevelt, telegram, April 29, 1944, in *Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, ed. US Department of State, vol. V, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), V: 271, HeinOnline.

⁷⁰ Churchill to Roosevelt, September 9, 272.

⁷¹ Cordell Hull, telegram, May 31, 1944, in *Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, ed. US Department of State, vol. V, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), V: 273, HeinOnline.

⁷² Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 409-411.

⁷³ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:114.

⁷⁴ Hess, *America Encounters India*, 134.

suggest that he contributed to implementing the India Clause despite British opposition. A December 1944 memo from the UNRRA Health Division acknowledged that the Indian Agency General—the office that Bajpai oversaw—agreed to the policy that “any area important to military operations of United Nations which is stricken by famine or disease should be included in benefits to be made available by” UNRRA.⁷⁵ Using the words of the India Clause, the letter suggested that Bajpai approved of the amendment becoming a part of UNRRA code, despite disagreement from the Viceroy.⁷⁶ This and other correspondences through Bajpai’s office reveal that relatively junior American, British and Indian officials united in opposition to British policy in Bengal. UNRRA’s health office provided the channel of communication for those officials, in turn facilitating a closer relationship between the US and India beyond Britain’s purview.

One of Bajpai’s communications enclosed a telegram from the UNRRA Director of Health W. A. Sawyer to First Secretary of the Indian Agency General Humphrey Trevelyan. Like Bajpai, Trevelyan was known for his allegiance to the British Empire. The son of a baronet, Trevelyan followed three generations of forebears in service to the empire, mostly in India.⁷⁷ In his letter to Trevelyan, Sawyer noted that his UNRRA Committee on Health examined the “exact changes made in the draft which was approved...by the Council of UNRRA at its Second Session.”⁷⁸ He attached a copy of a letter from him to Narayanan Raghavan Pillai, head of the GOI Department of Commerce, noting that the changes “were given careful consideration by the Standing

⁷⁵ Memorandum to Girija Shankar Bajpai, December 10, 1944, Microfilm, DA/3 Side 1 II.2, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

⁷⁶ Bajpai’s sentence errs from the India Clause by replacing “may be included” with “should be included.” Because “should” is more normative than “may,” Bajpai’s language suggests the urgency with which he supported UNRRA aid to Bengal.

⁷⁷ Humphrey Trevelyan, *The India We Left: Charles Trevelyan, 1826-65, Humphrey Trevelyan, 1929-47* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 2.

⁷⁸ W. A. Sawyer to Humphrey Trevelyan, telegram, December 30, 1944, Microfilm, DA/3 Side 1 II.2, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Technical Committee on Health [and] were adopted by unanimous vote of that Committee.”⁷⁹ These messages made clear that Sawyer, an American member of UNRRA, joined Mundt supporting the India Clause, along with leading UNRRA public health advisors. Because Agent General Bajpai had an interest in the approval of the India Clause by the Health Committee, he most likely aimed to relieve Bengal. These letters do not mention the famine, but they do refer to its complications. The letter to Pillai discussed how the new UNRRA clause would assist people “exposed to smallpox,” which spiked in frequency during the famine.⁸⁰ It is possible that the authors of these documents, especially those employed by the GOI, did not allude to the famine to avoid incrimination from British superiors. Regardless of their nationality—Trevelyan was British and Pillai was Indian—these diplomats, despite being envoys of His Majesty’s government, disregarded British policy to aid Bengal. Working together through UNRRA, Sawyer, Bajpai, Trevelyan, and Pillai focused their aims to support Indian welfare rather than the aims of Churchill and Wavell.

Their actions were not enough to deliver material aid to Bengal. Although UNRRA’s Resolution 54 supported India’s access to relief, Resolution 1 prevented it. UNRRA could only operate, according to Resolution 1, “with the consent of the government...which exercises administrative authority in the area.”⁸¹ In order for UNRRA to relieve a nation, that nation’s leaders had to file a request with the organization. The three overseers of India—Wavell, Churchill, and King George VI—never did. Despite the work of Bajpai, Mundt, and Singh, the India Clause was impotent with regard to Bengal. Venkataramani, Hess, and Woodbridge end their histories of the India Clause with the same message: despite not receiving aid, India

⁷⁹ W. A. Sawyer to N. R. Pillai, telegram, December 21, 1944, Microfilm, DA/3 Side 1 II.2, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

⁸⁰ Sawyer to Pillai, December 21.

⁸¹ “The Agreement,” *National Planning Pamphlets*: 63.

“ironically” “became the sixth largest contributor to UNRRA funds” by “giving \$24 million to the organization.”⁸² Venkataramani adds that UNRRA’s support of the India Clause “was an empty formality...to appease the American Congress.”⁸³ Weeks before the second UNRRA Council, for example, Director General Herbert Lehman told reporters that UNRRA had no plans to aid India.⁸⁴ Like Sawyer and Mundt, Lehman was under no obligation to match British policy in the way that Roosevelt had to. His statement against aiding Bengal suggests, however, that in late summer 1944, he conformed to the Acheson-Wavell line.

⁸² Hess, *America Encounters India*, 134; Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:115; Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 56.

⁸³ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 56.

⁸⁴ Venkataramani, *Bengal*, 56.

Chapter 3: Mutual Aid

Gogate's Wager

As Mundt's India Clause advanced through Congress and evolved into an UNRRA resolution, the organization prepared its first relief efforts. While some nations, such as the United States, funded UNRRA with cash, others fulfilled their pledges with resources that UNRRA could deliver to recipients. UNRRA organized the transportation of these goods from donor nations to recipient nations in a process called procurement. The British Government of India agreed to fulfill its \$24 million pledge with procurable resources. Between July and October 1944, Director General Lehman charged ten Americans with organizing procurement from India. One was R. V. Gogate. Little is known about Gogate before 1944. He wrote an opinion piece in the Harvard Crimson as an undergraduate, outlining how he traveled from central India to study International Affairs in America. Here he commended the nonviolent work of Mahatma Gandhi "because of his chastity of life, firmness of principle, and righteousness of vision."⁸⁵ Gogate did not publish any praise of Gandhi after college. That Lehman selected someone sympathetic to Indian nationalism suggests that by mid-1944, UNRRA's leadership employed people whose politics were antithetical to British policy in India.

Through 1944, Gogate wrote analyses for UNRRA regarding procurement of Indian goods. Most passed through the organization's Far East Office, which oversaw aid in Asia. One of Gogate's texts, a November 1944 report called "India's Economic Position," opened with an explanation of the Bengal Famine as the consequence of "soil erosion and primitive methods and

⁸⁵ R. V. Gogate, "Gandhi Will Go Down in History as 'Great Soul,'" *The Harvard Crimson* (Cambridge, MA), November 28, 1923, 1, accessed November 26, 2017, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1923/11/28/gandhi-will-go-down-in-history/>.

means of farming.”⁸⁶ This opening seemed to mimic Acheson, Wavell, and Llewellyn in its denial of the effect of the British war effort on the famine. The first page continued along the Acheson line, explaining how procuring Indian goods would relieve other nations. He added a caveat: India could donate more materials if its resources were “processed through cooperative and subsidized cottage industries.”⁸⁷ In other words, if outside nations funded India’s means of producing goods, UNRRA could benefit from its donations. Gogate articulated his plan:

India could afford to play her part [in UNRRA] through mutual aid. India’s poverty and willing cooperation in meeting the emergency demands of this war since its beginning have weighed heavily upon her national economy...Subsidizing India’s cottage industries and investing in her...farm concerns by furnishing machinery, improved seeds, and technical experts would readily change her weakness...into active cooperation.⁸⁸

Gogate’s plan of “mutual aid” satisfied the Acheson-Wavell line. Praising India for donating aid despite its poverty, Gogate echoed Acheson’s sympathy at the 1943 UNRRA Council. Gogate’s idea, however, also included a method by which UNRRA could relieve farmers in India. Instead of shipping grain to India, mutual aid advised UNRRA to send farming technology, fertile seeds, and agricultural experts to India so that it could donate more resources to UNRRA’s recipients. Gogate may have made this suggestion with the idea of circumventing British opposition to the India Clause to aid Bengal. Regardless, this and other writings on the idea of mutual aid show that low-level personnel inside UNRRA were working to aid India, despite their government leaders’ silence on the issue of the famine. The place of these writings in the UNRRA bureaucracy suggests, moreover, that people at the highest levels of the organization were reading and supporting ideas of mutual aid, despite their public commitment to not aiding India.

⁸⁶ Memorandum by R. V. Gogate, "India’s Economic Position," November 1944, Microfilm, FE/9 Side 1 V.4, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY, 1.

⁸⁷ Gogate, "India’s Economic Position," 1.

⁸⁸ Gogate, "India’s Economic Position," 2.

Gogate also detailed how to implement mutual aid. One report, "Industrial Crops of India," is in the archive of the UNRRA Bureau of Administration, an executive office of the organization. Its place suggests that top officials, including Lehman, read his texts and filed them as valid methods of UNRRA activity. The memo opened like most procurement documents, charting the prevalence of jute, which grows in India's northeastern wetlands such as the coast of Bengal.⁸⁹ Afterward, he claimed that "no actual relief...is to be expected unless India's agriculture is improved to increase the production 30 percent."⁹⁰ It is possible that by "actual relief," Gogate was referring to rehabilitation in UNRRA's recipient nations. He was more likely talking about relief in famine-stricken areas of India. The rest of the document implies that he was in fact talking about relief in famine-stricken areas of India when pointing to methods by which UNRRA could help India grow more food. In a section entitled "Cooperative Agriculture," Gogate suggested that UNRRA should create an Indian "machinery pool. In a country like India where farmers are too poor to invest in modern machinery...it would be both practical and commendable...to create machinery in different provinces whereby groups of farmers could share their equipment."⁹¹ Gogate did not explicitly ask UNRRA to deliver this machinery, such as mechanical plows, wheat combines, and milling technology. His detail and persuasive tone, however, suggested that the health and output of Indian farms was just as important as UNRRA's procurement work in other nations. Although he did not refer to Bengal directly, moreover, a machinery pool would have supported Bengal's wetland aman fields, which require special technology for the dry storage and marine transpiration of goods.

⁸⁹ Memorandum by R. V. Gogate, "Industrial Crops of India," November 1944, Microfilm, BA/26 Side 1 I.11, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

⁹⁰ Gogate, "Industrial Crops of India."

⁹¹ Gogate, "Industrial Crops of India."

International Aid as Nationalist Analysis

Gogate not only asked UNRRA to help Indian farms. He also encouraged UNRRA officials to take an unprecedented stance on the country's politics. Next to "Industrial Crops of India" in the Bureau of Administration archive is a 1945 report that Gogate co-authored to explore the effect of national unity on agriculture. The Bengal Famine, he noted, exposed how India "cannot think and live in an isolationist fashion...the 'E pluribus Unum' structure of India geographically, culturally, and economically must be taken seriously to [aid] her agricultural, industrial, health, and educational problems."⁹² His references were vague—he may have been arguing against India's religious and caste divisions, or he may have been advocating for a unified independence from British rule. Gogate's comments on the benefits of unification, whatever they implied, differed from those of Acheson and Wavell. Although he suggested that famine relief could come from within the region, Gogate took a stance on Indian independence. Doing so in an official UNRRA document, he exhibited a new type of international intervention, in which personnel of aid organizations could make arguments about diplomacy even when the leading contributors to those organizations—Roosevelt and Churchill—rejected such arguments.

UNRRA staffers further separated from the Acheson-Wavell line by implying support for Indian independence. "Rural Reconstruction and Conflict of Views" has no listed author, but its interest in political changes as a means of preventing famines indicate that Gogate contributed to its authorship. It has no date, but its place in the chronological archive suggests it was written in summer 1944. Discussing how India could increase its food production, the author discusses civil government: "No reforms will be...satisfactory which do not utilize the village

⁹² Memorandum by R. V. Gogate, "Industrial Crops of India," 1945, Microfilm, BA/26 Side 1 I.11, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

organizations as the bedrock on which alone a true democratic edifice can rest.”⁹³ Here, the author moved beyond farming technology and geographical reorganization as methods of preventing famine. Instead, he highlighted, with passionate rhetoric, the importance of local Indian townships, not only for agricultural purposes but for democracy. The text continued to mediate Indian politics by focusing on two branches of nationalism: Gandhi’s “back to the land” philosophy, which supported small-scale farms as a political independence strategy, and socialist interests, which supported the development of factories to increase Indian productivity. The author concluded that the solution to India’s agricultural problems was “an objective synthesis” of both models, in which Indians would industrialize their farms within small communities.⁹⁴

Two claims in this statement departed from British policy. First, the document supported Indian nationalism. By arguing for a combination of Gandhi’s ideals and industrial development, the author implied that India did not need British rule to sustain its farms. Second, the author advised that international aid organizations should intervene in India. By calculating how India’s economy and government needed to change to support its farms, the author indicated that organizations such as UNRRA had the duty to address how nations should prevent catastrophes.

On the final page of the report, the author suggested how UNRRA could do so. He explained that in Russia and Sweden, poor farmers pooled their finances “as a community function” in order to buy and sell land for fair prices. He noted that this system was “possible only among neighbors in an agricultural locality,” and he explained that India, with 67,000 agricultural townships, was perfect for such a system.⁹⁵ To solve its agricultural problems, in other words, India needed and was ready for a system of communal sharing between local

⁹³ Memorandum, "Rural Reconstruction and Conflict of Views," 1944, Microfilm, BA/26 Side 1 I.11, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

⁹⁴ "Rural Reconstruction."

⁹⁵ "Rural Reconstruction."

villages inside one unified nation. Stating that European nations pioneered this method, the author recommended that India fuse Western culture and Indian agrarian practices to save its farms. The author, finally, explained how UNRRA could facilitate this fusion: by sending agricultural experts to India. UNRRA had not yet sent such experts to India, but other organizations had. The final paragraph of this text applauded how “recent reports of American experts visiting India indicate that proper encouragement and guidance will put...cooperative planning in India’s rural areas.”⁹⁶ The text does not state who sent these advisors, but it makes clear that sending farm specialists would promote mutual aid between nations.

UNRRA personnel encouraged Western agriculturalists, especially those from the United States, to enter India and teach farmers. This support contradicted both British and American government policy. For most of 1944, Wavell and Churchill made no statement to suggest that they were in favor of international aid groups entering the Raj. Keeping with British policy, the Roosevelt administration also did not support exchanges of knowledge and resources between Americans and Indians. In April 1944, for example, when Secretary of State Hull considered inviting an Indian professor “to visit the United States ...to discuss the question of a closer link between American and Indian educators,” his advisors warned against the idea because of “British antagonism to growth in American educational influence in India.”⁹⁷

At the end of 1944, however, officers of the British Government of India began to encourage US-India economic relations. Humphrey Trevelyan wrote to the US State Department in November that “the Government of India hopes that...a number of experienced agricultural workers from the United States [can be] made available to India...to give advice and guidance to

⁹⁶ "Rural Reconstruction."

⁹⁷ George Merrell to Cordell Hull, telegram, April 28, 1944, in *Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, ed. US Department of State, vol. V, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), V: 281, HeinOnline.

Indian workers.”⁹⁸ It is possible that Trevelyan was speaking for all of the GOI in this statement, signaling a major shift from Wavell’s proclamation eleven months prior. More likely, Trevelyan represented a small fraction of GOI employees who dismissed the Viceroy’s orders in their support of American diplomats’ aid to Indian farmers. In December, Trevelyan contravened British policy by assisting Girija Bajpai in support of the India Clause. Now, he was promoting the ideals of UNRRA official R. V. Gogate to send international agricultural rehabilitation specialists to India. Working against British and American policy Trevelyan and Gogate showed that UNRRA provided an environment in which diplomats could work together to deliver aid to Bengal, regardless of orders from their nations’ leaders.

Within this environment, Director General Herbert Lehman began to support aid to India against the desires of the Roosevelt and Churchill governments. By November 1944, he acknowledged Gogate’s memos without removing Gogate from UNRRA ranks. In December, he began plans to establish a physical procurement headquarters in India. This UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi had the authority to implement Gogate’s idea of mutual aid. Whether or not he sought to support victims of the famine, Lehman made sure that UNRRA’s plan in India would include mutual aid by making Gogate the Liaison Officer.⁹⁹ In this role, Gogate was the top intermediary between the India office and UNRRA headquarters in New York.¹⁰⁰ He also helped direct the day-to-day operations alongside the office’s Acting Director, US Army officer Henry R. Atkinson.¹⁰¹ Atkinson did not arrive, however, until November 1945. Giving Gogate complete control over the office for most of 1945, Lehman endorsed Gogate’s mutual aid

⁹⁸ Humphrey Trevelyan, telegram, November 21, 1944, in *Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, ed. US Department of State, vol. V, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), V: 287, HeinOnline.

⁹⁹ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 3:16.

¹⁰⁰ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:157.

¹⁰¹ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 3:16.

ideas, whether they included delivering farm machinery to India, encouraging Indian nationalism, or sending American experts to oversee India's farms. The Director General no longer tied himself to the ideals of Britain or American's executive governments. UNRRA was going to aid India regardless of those countries' policies.

Chapter 4: The UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi

The Procurement Office against Britain

From 1945 to 1947, UNRRA's India office promoted procurement strategies that prioritized Indian welfare to varying degrees. Most of these strategies extended only rhetorical support rather than material aid. Several procurement officers, however, used the office as a means of supporting Indian farmers. They pushed Indian-focused hiring policies, worked to send agricultural machinery to Indian farms, and criticized UNRRA's empty sympathy for Bengal. Working together in close proximity, American and Indian officers of UNRRA became increasingly supportive of Indian welfare and disillusioned with American and British policy.

Famine continued in Bengal after the war.¹⁰² Starvation killed 82,547 Bengali citizens in 1945, and 48,634 in 1946.¹⁰³ Famine-related illnesses also remained long after crops returned to Bengal's farmland. Before it kills, starvation causes diarrhea and perpetuates malaria. Malaria cases in Bengal increased from 85,505 in 1941 to 168,592 in 1943 and reduced only slightly to 123,834 in 1945 and 102,339 in 1946.¹⁰⁴ In September 1946, an analyst in the India office notified the Far Eastern Affairs Division of these statistics, confirming that UNRRA officials in both India and America had access to information about the famine.¹⁰⁵ UNRRA headquarters also filed reports from Herbert Hoover, the former US President who analyzed the food supplies of 38 countries after WWII.¹⁰⁶ In April 1946, he wrote that most Indians "remain in jeopardy of

¹⁰² Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 72.

¹⁰³ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 199.

¹⁰⁴ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 204-205.

¹⁰⁵ L. King Quan and F. D. Harris, "Summary of Notes on the Food Situation of Netherlands East Indies, India, British Malaya, and British Borneo," September 27, 1946, microfilm, FE/3 Side 2 V.1 Country File: India, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY, 2.

¹⁰⁶ George R. Merrell to James F. Byrnes, memorandum, June 10, 1946, in *The British Commonwealth, Western and Central Europe*, ed. US Department of State, vol. V, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), V:89 HeinOnline.

life [and] must have arrivals in the deficit areas of rice...amounting to 346,000 tons in May, 315,000 tons in June, and 441,000 tons in July.”¹⁰⁷ Hoover’s report confirmed to UNRRA the need for immediate and sustained relief.

The first telegrams with an “UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi” letterhead do not mention Gogate, nor do they allude to mutual aid or to sending American agriculturalists into India. They do, however, show that UNRRA altered its procurement strategy to avoid intensifying the famine. This change came in June and July 1945, in between the Allied victories in Europe (May 8) and Japan (September 2). Francis B. Sayre, an American officer in UNRRA’s Far Eastern Division, traveled to New Delhi that summer to organize a postwar procurement with GOI officials. They met three times. After each, he telegraphed his mission reports to Lehman. In the last report, he noted that UNRRA would not procure goods which “the Indian people were themselves in acute need.”¹⁰⁸

Azizul Huque convinced Sayre that UNRRA should limit its procurement. Huque was the Speaker of the Bengal Legislative Assembly and a professor of agrarian economics who in 1939 wrote *The Man Behind the Plow*, a 406-page analysis of Bengal’s farming economy.¹⁰⁹ His credentials, as well as his place as the only person in Sayre’s meetings who did not represent UNRRA or the GOI, show that Huque was in attendance to discuss the Bengal Famine.¹¹⁰ Huque discussed the famine’s continuing effect on Bengal’s people and economy, explaining how “inflation and the killing of cattle” had made both grain and plow animals prohibitively

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum by Herbert Hoover, "Hoover’s Statement on India’s Food Situation," April 30, 1946, microfilm, FE/9 Side 1 V.4 Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Francis B. Sayre to Herbert Lehman, telegram, "Mission Report by F. Sayre," June 30, 1945, microfilm, BA/26 Side 1 I.11 Administrative Services Division: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹⁰⁹ F. Noyce, review of *The Man Behind the Plough*, by M. Azizul Huque, *The Economic Journal* 50, no. 197 (March 1940): 136, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2225760>.

¹¹⁰ Francis B. Sayre, “Second Meeting Report,” July 13, 1945, microfilm, BA/26 Side 1 I.11 Administrative Services Division: India, UNRRA Papers.

expensive. He was willing, however, to support UNRRA procurement of Indian goods, noting that “things which we can spare will certainly be made at your disposal.”¹¹¹ Explaining India’s limited ability but willingness to donate to UNRRA, Huque articulated the organization’s purpose in India: to procure as many goods as possible without exacerbating famines. At the end of the meeting, Huque proclaimed support for this effort: “we will take the attitude of a starving man helping another starving man, but we will certainly do our best.”¹¹²

Although the UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi did not execute Gogate’s theories of mutual aid, its employees supported Indian welfare by working with Indian food experts. UNRRA ensured procurement would not interrupt Indian farming, moreover, by working with the GOI Department of Commerce, who gave UNRRA access to information about Indian commodities. With this information, the office was better able to procure materials without exacerbating famines. UNRRA coordinated almost all of its work with Commerce Department officials, three of whom sat beside Huque in Sayre’s July procurement meeting.¹¹³ One was the British-Indian Secretary of Commerce, Sir Narayanan Raghavan Pillai.

Like Giriya Bajpai, Pillai was famous for his allegiance to the British Empire. GOI officials affectionately nicknamed him “Rag,” praising him as a well-educated diplomat devoted to the British Raj.¹¹⁴ His actions within UNRRA, however, indicated a desire to aid Bengal, which the Viceroy prohibited through 1946. In December 1944, for instance, Pillai had accepted letters from W. A. Sawyer in support of the India Clause. Sayre’s talks with Pillai, moreover, suggest that Pillai opposed Wavell. Like Lehman’s appointment of Gogate to the position of

¹¹¹ Francis B. Sayre, “Annex to Meeting Report,” July 13, 1945, microfilm, BA/26 Side 1 I.11 Administrative Services Division: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹¹² Sayre, “Annex.”

¹¹³ Sayre, “Second Meeting Report.”

¹¹⁴ Harish Kapur, *Foreign Policies of India's Prime Ministers* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2009), 51.

Liaison Officer, Sayre's decision to plan procurement with Pillai suggested his desire to create procurement strategies that helped to relieve famine. In doing so, the UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi not only supported famine-friendly procurement but also facilitated the first direct economic relationship between the US and India.

Sayre met with Pillai and Gogate in August 1945. With Gogate's knowledge of agriculture and Pillai's knowledge of Indian goods, they produced a list of resources that UNRRA could procure without exacerbating famines. The catalogue included only one food item, peanut oil, which UNRRA could extract to leave peanut husks for Indian consumption.¹¹⁵ Pillai made sure that UNRRA would respect India's food economy. He noted that "the stage was fast approaching when the whole question of supplies from India would have to be reviewed," suggesting that India's economy was not able to sustain itself under the weight of UNRRA procurement.¹¹⁶ Sayre promised that the UNRRA office would not "disregard India's vital economic needs," confirming that UNRRA would not hurt Indian farms.¹¹⁷ He implied, moreover, a respect for India's economic autonomy from Britain.

Pillai wanted that autonomy. Like Gogate, Pillai had worked to open trading lines with the US that excluded Britain as an intermediary. In February 1945, six months before meeting with Sayre, Pillai had contacted the US State Department to discuss commercial relations with India.¹¹⁸ Since 1942, in deference to Britain, the United States government had refrained from

¹¹⁵ Peanut husks, although low in nutritional value, are edible and can serve as a source of carbohydrates. Memorandum by Francis B. Sayre and N. R. Pillai, "Minutes of Second Meeting," August 2, 1945, microfilm, DA/3 Side 1 II.2: Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹¹⁶ Memorandum by Francis B. Sayre and N. R. Pillai, "Minutes of Third Meeting," August 7, 1945, microfilm, DA/3 Side 1 II.2: Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹¹⁷ Sayre and Pillai, "Minutes of Third Meeting."

¹¹⁸ George Merrell to Edward Stettinius, Jr., telegram, February 7, 1945, in *The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. VI, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), VI:271, HeinOnline.

supporting treaties that promoted trade with India because these policies implied support for Indian independence. In February 1945, the State Department rejected Pillai's offers, noting that the 1942 policy against US-India trade was still valid.¹¹⁹ In June, Pillai contacted Indian Agent General Girija Bajpai to find a new avenue of trade between the US and India.

To help Pillai, Bajpai again parted from British policy. Bajpai telegraphed the State Department that week to negotiate a commercial treaty with India.¹²⁰ The State Department took no official position on these talks, but it is clear that Bajpai and Pillai were working together to alter American policy and circumvent British interests regarding US-India trade. As with Gogate's mutual aid, their goals sought to industrialize Indian agriculture. In August 1945, around the time that he spoke with Sayre, Pillai informed the US State Department that his GOI Commerce Department "no longer will refrain from issuing licenses for the import of essential goods from the United States."¹²¹ George Merrell, the State Department official in India, notified the US Secretary of State of this decision by telegram. Merrell did not say whether Pillai had made this decision on behalf of the GOI. He did, however, express surprise that Pillai did not want British supervision of US-India commerce. Merrell also explained Pillai's intentions: to import agricultural machinery such as "deep well pumps" into India. Working through multiple channels to open trade between the US and India, Pillai pursued Gogate's goal of delivering American farming materials to India. Gogate and Pillai probably were in contact through this time, especially because they both attended UNRRA procurement meetings.

¹¹⁹ Merrell to Stettinius, February 7.

¹²⁰ Memorandum, "Conversation in the State Department Division of Commercial Policy," June 12, 1945, in *The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. VI, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), VI: 279, HeinOnline.

¹²¹ George R. Merrell to James F. Byrnes, telegram, August 28, 1945, in *The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, ed. US Department of State, vol. VI, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), VI: 278, HeinOnline.

From 1943 to 1945, Gogate, Pillai, and Bajpai—all Indians at birth—broke from their governments’ public stance on international aid to deliver agricultural machinery to farmers across India. The material effects of their efforts are unclear, and no histories of the international response to the Bengal Famine suggest that they brought prosperity to India’s starving masses. Their work, however, shows that UNRRA allowed them to collaborate, circumventing government policy to put humanitarian aims above political aims. Over the next two years, they continued to fight government policy to promote Indian welfare.

The Procurement Office against UNRRA

From late 1945 to early 1947, the UNRRA Procurement Office in New Delhi supported Sayre’s initiative to procure non-food goods. As Britain began to support a transition toward an independent India, UNRRA’s leaders announced support for Indian welfare. During this time, UNRRA personnel in the India procurement office criticized their leaders, as well as the American government, for not backing their rhetoric with material aid. Their criticisms, like the events of the India Clause, the theories of mutual aid, and the practices of non-food procurement, show that the strongest push for international aid to India came not from UNRRA’s leaders but instead from employees within the organization.

UNRRA’s leaders limited their support to lip service, most of which came from Fiorello La Guardia, the New York City mayor who became Director General in April 1946.¹²² That September, he lamented that “UNRRA is prevented by the rules of our international charter from sending food to a member country like India” but noted that “UNRRA has consistently spoken for India’s urgent needs before the food allocating authorities in Washington...to secure India’s

¹²² Gemma La Guardia Gluck and Rochelle G. Saidel, *Fiorello's Sister: Gemma La Guardia Gluck's Story* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 117.

full fair share from desperately limited world stocks.”¹²³ La Guardia here took two positions that UNRRA had not adopted prior to 1945. First, La Guardia noted that UNRRA was coordinating with alternative food aid organizations to deliver grain to India. Second, by mentioning India’s “fair share” from a “limited” global food supply, he implied that securing food for famine victims India was, while difficult, possible. La Guardia’s statements shifted from Lehman’s rhetoric. Unlike Lehman, La Guardia was publically willing to interfere with the British Empire’s management of India, and he did not believe that depleted stocks prevented India from accessing crops. The shift was likely due to many factors, including the end of the war, as well as La Guardia and Lehman’s differing political views. No matter the reason, La Guardia hoped that UNRRA could become an advocacy body for India.

It did not. No documents from before or after this speech show UNRRA officials soliciting other aid organizations for help. One such body was the Combined Food Board (CFB). The CFB was a committee of agricultural specialists from different countries who convened monthly in Washington to coordinate with organizations that could ship food across oceans. Often, but not always, the CFB worked with UNRRA to plan shipping routes.¹²⁴ In October 1945, a group of Indian citizens, the Indian Food Delegation, traveled to Washington to secure a shipment of 1.5 million tons of grains from the CFB. The GOI sponsored their trip, perhaps due to support from Pillai’s Commerce Department.¹²⁵ UNRRA was aware of these meetings, as reports of the Food Delegation exist in the Far Eastern Affairs archive. UNRRA was not involved in these talks. La Guardia had broken his promise that UNRRA would work with

¹²³ Fiorello La Guardia, “Public Statement of La Guardia,” September 1946, microfilm, FE/3 Side 2 V.1 Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹²⁴ *India Today*, May 1946, 4.

¹²⁵ Memorandum, “Allocation of Food Grains to India: Sir A. Ramaswami Mudliar’s Statement in the Central Assembly,” April 1946, microfilm, FE/9 Side 1 V.4: Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

Washington groups to feed India. The Indian delegation, on its own, was able to convince the CFB to send grain. In April 1946, the CFB agreed to allocate “1.4 million tons of wheat” to India, but only “after a great deal of argument” from the delegation.¹²⁶ Ironically, the case that the Indian delegation made to the CFB—that “there was a responsibility on the part of the United States towards...nations who had been their allies during the war”—resembled the moral rhetoric of the original UNRRA charter.¹²⁷ Using such language, the people of India were able to acquire aid without UNRRA’s help.

Employees of the UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi criticized this lack of support for famine relief. In November 1946, India Office Director Amarjit Singh telegraphed UNRRA headquarters that the “Indian food situation received little practical sympathy in international field especially no relief from UNRRA” and pointed out that few Indians had senior positions in UNRRA.¹²⁸ His comments made clear that La Guardia’s promises to promote Indian livelihood were null. Although the New Delhi office had hired two Indians in September 1946, Singh felt that this gesture did not make the hiring policy equitable. There are no replies to this message, but UNRRA’s replacement of Singh with D. N. Naravane as Indian Office Director in April 1947 suggests that UNRRA officials removed Singh due to his dissent.

As Singh criticized UNRRA’s hiring policy, Pillai attempted to wrest control of it. Then-Director Atkinson recorded that Pillai, although a member of the GOI with no control over UNRRA, increasingly sought to influence how the office hired its employees. In December 1945, for instance, Pillai ordered Atkinson to show him a list of candidates for UNRRA employment. Atkinson did not publicize Pillai’s request, worried that “it might have been

¹²⁶ “Allocation of Food Grains.”

¹²⁷ “Allocation of Food Grains.”

¹²⁸ Telegram by Amarjit Singh, November 19, 1946, microfilm, BA/15 S1 I.4 Country File: India: Contributions, UNRRA Papers.

interpreted in nationalist circles as an attempt...to sift Indian members of UNRRA upon a basis of political views rather than merit.”¹²⁹ Atkinson’s suspicion continued until a confrontation occurred. In March 1946, Pillai asked Atkinson whom he planned to hire. Atkinson “gave him such information as I could off hand, information which was not complete.” Responding to Atkinson’s lack of specificity, “the expression on Pillai’s face changed into that of a very intent man, and his eyes indicated that he was suspicious of me. He then said, in effect, that his prestige as ‘head of the Department’ was affected.”¹³⁰

One can interpret Pillai’s behavior in several ways. In one sense, Pillai cared more for his own “prestige” in the British Government of India than he did about how UNRRA operated. The only way for him to attain a good reputation, then, was to influence the India office’s hiring practices to reduce Indian nationalist influence in UNRRA. Such an interpretation makes sense in the context of Pillai’s support of the British Empire, for which UK government officials showered him with prestige.¹³¹ This interpretation is incorrect, however, in the context of Pillai’s activity regarding global relief. Since the beginning of 1945, Pillai had helped Bajpai bring the India Clause to fruition and had helped Gogate promote mutual aid and agricultural exchanges between the US and India. Although Pillai garnered praise from the British government, he was covertly undermining it to send aid to famine-stricken areas. His confrontations with Atkinson demonstrate that he sought to work with UNRRA only to the extent that its offices could help him deliver such relief. Atkinson wrote in February 1947—four months after he left UNRRA—that he did not send his notes on these incidents “through usual channels of the office since they

¹²⁹ Memo by Henry R. Atkinson, “Confidential Note on Mechanics of Procedure of Clearance with Commerce Department of Personnel Recruited in India,” December 1945, 1, microfilm, H/4 Side 1 VII.7.2 Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹³⁰ Atkinson, “Confidential Note”

¹³¹ “Supplement to the London Gazette,” *The London Gazette*, June 4, 1946, 2762, accessed March 5, 2018, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/37598/supplement/2762>.

might have...complicated the pleasant and simple relations which appeared to attain Armarjit Singh and M. Pillai.”¹³² Tying Pillai’s behavior to Singh, Atkinson equated Pillai’s behavior with Singh’s criticism for UNRRA’s treatment of Indian people. In doing so, Atkinson implied that Pillai tried to control who the office hired to ensure that its employees would advocate for the starving people of India. Office records do not state whether other employees agreed with Pillai and Singh in their criticism of UNRRA. Regardless, helping starving Indians was not Atkinson’s key goal. Hoping to continue the “pleasant” relations with Pillai and Singh, Atkinson’s primary directive was to ensure that the Indian public viewed UNRRA as a well-intentioned organization.

International Aid as Public Diplomacy

Lehman had ordered Atkinson to uphold UNRRA’s image. The Director General instructed him in March 1946 to “conduct public information activities in India in order to make known UNRRA policies and principles to the...people of India.”¹³³ In other words, the New Delhi office ought to engage in public diplomacy. UNRRA promoted its image through a moral narrative that capitalized on the national spirit of a country on the brink of independence. After Huque stated that India would be “a starving man helping another starving man,” Sayre replied that “the attitude of India is a heartening manifestation of the spirit of international co-operation which is the only possible foundation on which lasting peace can be built.”¹³⁴ Even though UNRRA did not give aid to India, nor encouraged the CFB to aid India, Sayre claimed that the relationship between India and UNRRA was morally good because it promoted a postwar world based on interconnectedness and peace. After WWII, Sayre and other American diplomats in

¹³² Letter by Henry R. Atkinson, “Confidential Material for History of New Delhi Office,” February 17 1947, 1, microfilm, H/4 Side 1 VII.7.2 Country File: India, UNRRA Papers.

¹³³ Telegram, Lehman to Singh, “Functions.”

¹³⁴ Sayre, “Annex to Meeting Report.”

UNRRA referred to their work in India as crucial to building this new international structure while nearly ignoring the millions of lives lost in a preventable famine.

La Guardia continued Lehman's focus on public relations. In September 1946, he noted that "India, in such desperate need herself, has seen her way clear to express in so faithful and generous a manner her belief in world fellowship. This is the quality of human mercy at her very best."¹³⁵ Like Sayre, La Guardia focused on India's role in promoting global interconnectedness in order to justify the aid that India sent to Europe without receiving any in return. By personifying India as a moral figure in this process, the Director General suggested that India had a unique role in the postwar order. He may have made such a comment to gain credit with Indian nationalists who viewed their people as worthy of national independence.

The UNRRA office in India upheld Lehman and La Guardia's interest in cultivating positive relations with the people of India. By hiring Naravane as Director in January 1947, UNRRA leadership found a leader who, unlike Amarjit Singh, would conform to their public relations goals. On August 5 1947, ten days before India gained independence, Naravane explained India's contribution as valuable in terms of global relief and universal morals. Atkinson wrote the script for his statement, which aired on a radio broadcast in Baroda, India, over 1000 miles from Bengal in western India:

A question might be asked why a poor country... which suffered [as] a result of famine was asked to contribute to this relief operation. Should not charity begin at home? The answer is "no." Such a course would have been completely against India's proverbial and traditional generosity of sharing her own bread with her neighbors. The days of isolation are over. India's rise and prosperity are linked up with those of the world and any sacrifice which India makes for the common cause puts her place high up in the comity of nations.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ La Guardia, "Public Statement."

¹³⁶ Atkinson and Naravane, "India in UNRRA" (see chap. 1, n. 29).

Atkinson, through Naravane, made explicit three themes that Lehman, Sayre, and other UNRRA officials had implied. First, India's contribution was an absolute moral good. Second, India's contribution was indicative of a national culture of generosity that had long existed among the people of India. Third, India's national culture was crucial to the new postwar order that will prioritize international coordination, and because of this, India was one of the most important nations in the world. Such language would have captivated Indian nationalists, who not only wanted India to be free, but also wanted India to have authority in the postwar world. Praising Indian culture and aligning with Indian nationalism, American officials in UNRRA turned their procurement during the Bengal Famine into an endorsement of Indian greatness. In presenting procurement as voluntary, they absolved themselves of any responsibility for failing to aid millions of starving human beings. Like the speeches of the assistant secretary of state and the Viceroy, four years prior, Naravane's words supported Indian self-determination. Like Acheson and Wavell, however, the speech's rhetorical sympathy for the people of India allowed India to go, in the words of L. N. Saha, "unaided and uncared for."¹³⁷

UNRRA records do not note whether Gogate and Pillai still worked with UNRRA in August 1947. No records indicate whether they reacted to UNRRA's focus on public relations rather than on aid to India. While Gogate and Pillai may have remained silent, Girija Shankar Bajpai had been openly critical of UNRRA for a year. In March 1946, he made a public address at the fourth UNRRA Council meeting. The setting was the same as three years prior—Atlantic City, NJ. But Bajpai did not maintain the silence he displayed at that first meeting:

The Director General said: 'Those who fought the enemy deserve to be considered first.' We take no exception to this statement. All that we claim is that we also fought the enemy...Our claim is the most modest of all. It is not a claim for what most of our people would regard as luxuries—meats or fats. It is a claim for a handful of wheat or maize or barley or rice. We seek only bread and we seek it only to live. For us there is no tightening

¹³⁷ Saha, Diary entry.

of belts because you cannot straighten a straight line. The Director General said: 'Peace cannot be built on famine.' We agree and we hope that it is a universal, not a regional truth.¹³⁸

It is possible that some members of the UNRRA Council agreed with Bajpai. Many diplomats at this time were becoming aware of the geopolitical ramifications of not aiding India. A confidential June 1946 US State Department memo detailed how famines stoked the threat of Soviet influence in India. Here, George Merrell referred to an international English-language communist publication, which claimed that Americans “are feeding cattle more than enough to make up ‘India’s total 1946 shortage’ because ‘feeding cattle brings more profit.’”¹³⁹ Arguing that profit margins informed America’s policy in India, the article claimed that the Truman administration hoped “to let the British burn their finger in an Indian famine and then rush in to the rescue on their own terms [to gain] the political and economic domination of India.”¹⁴⁰ Although these arguments were “half-truths and maliciously twisted facts,” Merrell warned that they contributed to anti-American sentiment across India. He noted that all political sides of India—“pro-Hindu, pro-Muslim, and pro-British—have exhibited a remarkably anti-American bias...on the subject of food.”¹⁴¹ Fearing communist influence in India, especially regarding the availability of grain, Merrell argued that the State Department had a strategic interest in delivering aid to starving areas like Bengal. Others in the UNRRA Council probably shared the concern over Soviet influence in India in light of the lack of UNRRA aid. Desiring to protect the world from communist ideologies, many may have applauded Bajpai for his criticisms.

¹³⁸ Memorandum, "Speech by the Hon. Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, Agent General for India. At the UNRRA Conference. Atlantic City.," March 21, 1946, Microfilm, FE/9 Side 1 V.4, UNRRA Papers, Columbia University, New York, NY.

¹³⁹ Merrell to Byrnes, June 10, 88 (see chap. 4, n. 105).

¹⁴⁰ Merrell to Byrnes, June 10, 89.

¹⁴¹ Merrell to Byrnes, June 10, 90-91.

The State Department did not solve the Soviet threat by sending aid to India. Instead of working to feed India, Merrell suggested that American officials “cultivate acquaintance with members of the Indian press with a view of helping them understand the United States.”¹⁴² By stating that Indian journalists do not “understand” the US, Merrell implied that rather than send grain to India, America should send information to show that the US was a fair, prosperous nation that fed its starving citizens. Even though aiding India had become a Cold War interest, the American government delivered no food to South Asia.

¹⁴² Merrell to Byrnes, June 10, 92.

Conclusion

The Bengal Famine and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration both began in 1943. Historians argue that UNRRA never relieved Bengal due to its leaders' decisions. A closer look at the low-level administrators of the organization and its member nations reveals a more complex story. From 1943 to 1947, American, Indian and British officers directed aid from UNRRA to Bengal. While their attempts did not yield any material aid, the international staff developed and shared political goals that differed from those of government and UNRRA executives. By acting upon their goals, these agents shifted their organizations' priorities. India Agent General Girija Bajpai communicated with the UNRRA Health Division to make India eligible for aid. When this plan failed, R. V. Gogate wrote papers to convince UNRRA leadership that India needed aid to relieve other nations. Possibly due to his writings, Gogate became the leader of the UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi, where he worked with GOI Commerce Secretary N. R. Pillai to ensure that UNRRA's procurement would not exacerbate India's famines. Low-level personnel did not aid Bengal, but they did transform UNRRA, as well as the relationship between India and America.

In summer 1946, Congress voted to defund UNRRA in a spending battle with the Truman administration. Other nations discontinued UNRRA contributions at the same time. At the fifth UNRRA Council meeting at Geneva in August 1946, the forty-four member nations agreed to close the group's offices and transfer relief functions to other aid groups.¹⁴³ The United Nations Organization, created in October 1945, handled most of the transition. The UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi closed in spring 1947. By India's independence in August 1947, UNRRA had left the country.

¹⁴³ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 1:302.

Knowing that Congress would support international aid that countered Soviet influence, Truman proposed the Marshall Plan. Whereas UNRRA aided countries regardless of their political leanings, the US government devised the Marshall Plan to advance American interests. In return for American aid, nations had to support policies of free-market capitalism and defend against Soviet expansion. Any nation that allied with the USSR or was unimportant to US security aims would not receive aid.¹⁴⁴ When Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin pressured eastern European countries to withdraw from the plan, the program became a means of strengthening economic and security ties between the United States and western Europe.¹⁴⁵

In December 1947, the US secretary of state informed the ambassadors of Pakistan and India that their nations did not qualify for Marshall Plan relief. At the same time, he promised that the US was “deeply sympathetic with the efforts that are being made for the relief and rehabilitation.”¹⁴⁶ Echoing Acheson’s sympathy for Bengal, the US government clarified its policy toward international aid: countries received relief only if they could also support American military and diplomatic aims.

The nation’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, told his Ambassador to the US to be weary of America’s domination of international cooperation. “I should like to make it clear,” he advised, “that we do not propose to be subservient to anybody.”¹⁴⁷ Around that time, Nehru had just appointed his first Secretary General for External Affairs: Indian Agent General Girija Bajpai. Bajpai served as Nehru’s chief foreign policy advisor through 1952, helping him navigate US attempts to control global politics. When the US pressured India to relinquish the

¹⁴⁴ Mazower, *Governing the World*, 228.

¹⁴⁵ Mazower, *Governing the World*, 228.

¹⁴⁶ James F. Byrnes to Abul Hassan Ispahani, telegram, December 17, 1947, in *The British Commonwealth, Europe*, ed. US Department of State, vol. III, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), III:174, HeinOnline.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 51.

Kashmir territory to Pakistan in November 1947, Bajpai urged Nehru to resist. Nehru subsequently told US Ambassador Loy Henderson that he was “tired of receiving moral advice from the United States. [India] would hold its ground even if Kashmir, India, and the whole world went to pieces.”¹⁴⁸

Girija Shankar Bajpai died at his home in Bombay on December 5 1954.¹⁴⁹ Humphrey Trevelyan remembered him in his memoir, recollecting their mission “to obtain aid for Bengal famine relief, led inappropriately by a globular politician who had clearly never missed a meal in his life.”¹⁵⁰ Trevelyan did not discuss UNRRA apart from this probable reference to Lehman, but he did remember his friendship with those who sought to aid Bengal. When Bajpai arrived in India to be Nehru’s advisor, Trevelyan was the only person, apart from Bajpai’s family, to meet him at the airport. Trevelyan’s interactions with the British government was also “made tolerable for me by my personal friendship” with Narayanan Raghavan Pillai.¹⁵¹ Trevelyan left India in 1948. Over the next twenty years, he worked with the British government to facilitate the empire’s withdrawal from its colonies, most notably Yemen. Pillai became India’s Commissioner General for Economic and Commercial Affairs in 1947. In 1956, he founded India’s first research institution for economic policy, the National Council of Applied Economic Research. As of 2018, the Council continues to support scientific research of industrialized farming, climate change, and the rights of workers. Pillai died in 1992.¹⁵²

Bajpai, Trevelyan, and Pillai changed UNRRA, and UNRRA changed them. Before 1943, each seemed fully committed to the diplomatic aims of the British government. Two things

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Kux, *Estranged Democracies*, 62.

¹⁴⁹ Caroe and Nanda, “Bajpai,” 1.

¹⁵⁰ Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 239.

¹⁵¹ Trevelyan, *The India We Left*, 241.

¹⁵² "Legacy," National Council of Applied Economic Research, last modified 2018, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.ncaer.org/about.php?pageID=legacy>.

happened when they joined UNRRA: they worked so closely that they became friends, and they increasingly circumvented their government's policies. After they left the organization, all three made careers out of resisting or reducing British colonial power. As they worked together, in other words, they began to understand the importance of aiding India against British policy.

UNRRA offers a case-study in how the priorities of large organizations depend on their staff members, and how staff members change their priorities while working with one another within such organizations. An examination of the work of low-level bureaucrats in governments and global organizations exposes the inconsistencies between the official policies of these groups and the implementation of those policies. UNRRA employed over 15,000 people at its peak in 1945.¹⁵³ How many of them altered how UNRRA tackled humanitarian crises? How many documents in the UNRRA archive trace their actions and the shifts in their political ideologies? Those shifts occurred with those who worked with India. Officers of the dozens of other member nations probably navigated similar questions. Historians must do with these people what American and British leaders failed to do with the starving individuals of Bengal: listen to them.

¹⁵³ Woodbridge, *History of UNRRA*, 123.

Appendix

Key Figures by Nationality

United States of America

Acheson, Dean: Assistant Secretary of State (1941-1945); Undersecretary of State (1945-1949)
 Atkinson, Henry: Acting Director, UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi (1945-1946)
 Hull, Cordell: Secretary of State (1933-1945)
 La Guardia, Fiorello: Mayor of New York (1934-1945); Director General, UNRRA (1946)
 Lehman, Herbert: Governor of New York (1933-1942); Director General, UNRRA (1942-1946)
 Merrell, George: US State Department Consul for India (1938-1945)
 Mundt, Karl: Member of the US House of Representatives from South Dakota (1939-1948)
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano: President of the United States (1932-1945)
 Sayre, Francis: Central Planning Officer, UNRRA Division of Far Eastern Affairs, (1943-1946)
 Truman, Harry S: President of the United States (1945-1953)
 Winant, John Gilbert: US Ambassador to the United Kingdom (1941-1946)
 Woodbridge, George: Director, UNRRA Office of the Historian (1947-1949)

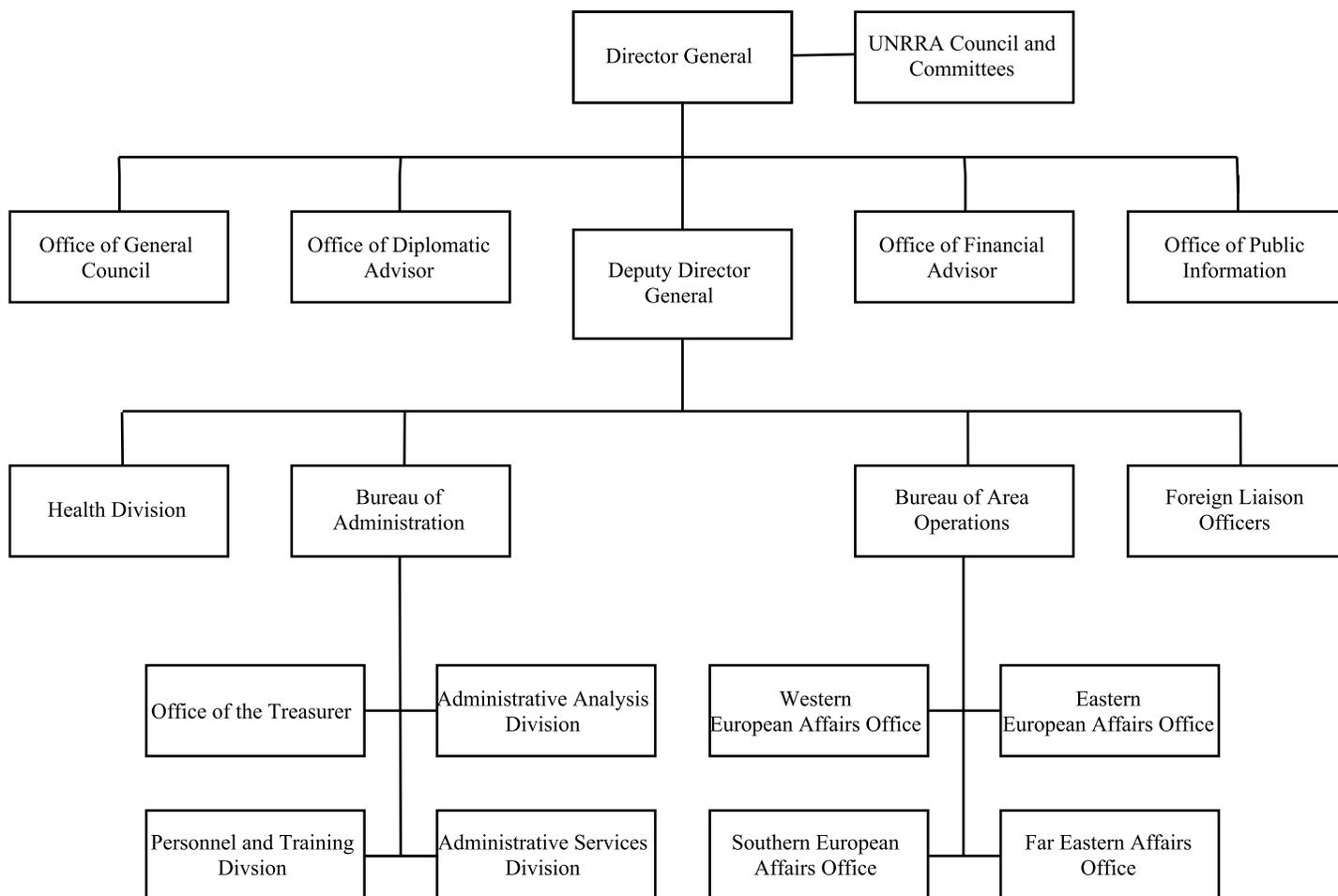
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Amery, Leopold: Secretary of State for India and Burma (1940-1945)
 Churchill, Winston: Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1940-1945)
 Leith-Ross, Frederick: Chief Economic Advisor to the United Kingdom (1932-1945)
 Trevelyan, Humphrey: First Secretary to the Indian Agent General (1941-1947)
 Wavell, Archibald: Viceroy of India (1943-1947)

British Crown Rule in India

Bajpai, Girija Shankar: Indian Agent General in Washington (1941-1947)
 Gandhi, Mohandas: India Independence Leader (1913-1948)
 Gogate, R. V: Liaison Officer, UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi (1945-1946)
 Huque, Azizul: Bengali Economist and Commissioner of India to London (1942-1943)
 Naravane, D. N: Director, UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi (1947)
 Nehru, Jawaharlal: India Independence Leader and Prime Minister of India (1947-1964)
 Pillai, Narayanan Raghavan: Secretary, Government of India Dept. of Commerce (1942-1947)
 Singh, J. J: President, India League of America (1942-1945)
 Singh, Armarjit: Director, UNRRA Office of Procurement in New Delhi (1946-1947)

Map of UNRRA Organization



Source: Woodbridge, George. "Headquarters Organization, December 1944." Chart. In *History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, 156. Vol. 1. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1950.

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