

‘Do We Still Need the CIA?’: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Central Intelligence Agency and US Foreign Policy

Abstract

In May 1991, writing in the op-ed column of the *New York Times*, the US Senator for New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, called for the Central Intelligence Agency to be disbanded. Arguing that the CIA represented an historical anachronism that had outlived its usefulness to American foreign policymakers, Moynihan proposed that the Agency should be stripped of its autonomy and have its intelligence functions subsumed by the Department of State. Moynihan’s rhetorical assault on the CIA marked the opening salvo in a protracted campaign that, over the following decade, until his death, in March 2003, would see the one-time member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, lobby relentlessly for reform of America’s intelligence community and against pervasive official secrecy. To date, Moynihan’s evangelical fervour in championing a more open intelligence paradigm, which came to incorporate the drafting of congressional bills, the chairmanship of a bi-partisan commission on government secrecy, the publication of a book, and innumerable speeches and articles, has been interpreted in a narrow personal and political context. Commentators have tended to characterise Moynihan’s turn against the CIA, and toward government transparency, as symptomatic of individual eccentricity, disenchantment with purported Agency excesses during the Reagan administration, and ill-judged post-Cold War hubris. This article breaks new ground by reframing and reperiodising Moynihan’s relationship with intelligence. It suggests that Moynihan’s attitudes to intelligence and state secrecy were formulated much earlier than has hitherto been acknowledged, and in an environment far removed from Washington’s corridors of power. Specifically, the essay relocates Moynihan’s emergence as an advocate of intelligence reform in the global political turmoil of the early 1970s when, as Richard Nixon’s Ambassador to India, he was afforded ample scope to assess the CIA’s utility as an instrument of American diplomacy.

The morning of 6 August 1974 did not begin well for Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Sitting at his desk in New Delhi’s Roosevelt House, the official residence of the US ambassador to India, Moynihan was assailed by nagging doubts that his posting to the subcontinent would be judged as a failure. Moynihan had enjoyed a modicum of success in India. Most notably, he had eradicated a significant and long-running source of Indo-US friction by engineering an agreement to write-off a \$3.3 billion debt the Indian government had accumulated purchasing American food grains over the previous decade. Congratulating Moynihan on this achievement, one former ambassador to India, Chester Bowles, observed in admiration that, ‘I wrestled with this [debt problem] for six years and was never able to solve it.’¹ On that steamy

¹ Chester Bowles to Moynihan, 8 Oct. 1973, Box I-351, Correspondence File, Papers of Daniel P.

Indian summer morning, however, Moynihan's mood darkened with the appearance of an aide carrying reports on the latest incident, in what had proved a seemingly endless series of problems, involving CIA operations in India. On this occasion, the ambassador was informed that local security service officers had arrested several Indian nationals for passing information to CIA officers, and were demanding the expulsion of three American embassy staff associated with the affair. 'What may I ask is a man to do with the rest of a day that begins in such a manner?', an exasperated Moynihan confided later in his diary.² The answer, it transpired, was to draft a long letter to Washington, in which the ambassador urged US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, to:

...pull the C.I.A. out of India. It is a devastating liability while it remains.... Unquestionably we would get better and cheaper information. The alternative is to remain on the front page of the Indian press for yet another decade, with a quarter of the charges true and three quarters believed to be true by the most sophisticated and best informed people in government.³

Moynihan's tenure as Richard Nixon's ambassador to India, between 1973 and 1975, has received scant scholarly attention. Accounts of Moynihan's long career in public service have focused overwhelmingly on the periods before, and after, his tour of the subcontinent. Works such as Godfrey Hodgson's *The Gentleman from New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan – A Biography* (2000) privilege Moynihan's domestic accomplishments and dismiss his foreign service as a political and intellectual interregnum. Likewise, Steven Weisman's edited collection of Moynihan's diaries and correspondence, *Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Portrait of Letters of an American Visionary* (2010), marginalizes his time in India, and underplays its significance in recalibrating Moynihan's thinking on America's international relations. *Daniel Patrick Moynihan: The Intellectual in Public Life* (1998), a study of essays edited by Robert Katzmann, offers little insight into the two years that Moynihan spent in New Delhi. Gil Troy's recent publication, *Moynihan's Moment: America's Fight Against Zionism as Racism* (2013), is a welcome addition to the literature on Moynihan, but is directed exclusively at his post-Indian appointment as US ambassador to the United Nations. Some important investigations have been conducted, therefore, in tracing the evolution of Moynihan's eclectic life and work from its origins in poverty stricken Oklahoma, via Manhattan's pre-war Hell's Kitchen ghetto, Ivy League academia, service in four successive presidential administrations, from John F. Kennedy to Gerald Ford, and culmination in the US Senate. Yet, Moynihan's ambassadorial posting to India and, more pertinently, its influence on shaping his pronouncements on intelligence agencies and state secrecy, that first came to public prominence after the fall of the Berlin Wall, remains an historiographical lacuna in need of attention.⁴

This article will examine the process by which Moynihan came to develop a deep suspicion and mistrust of much of the work undertaken by the CIA, well before his

Moynihan, Library of Congress, Washington DC [hereafter DMP].

² Steven R. Weisman (ed.), *Daniel Patrick Moynihan: A Portrait in Letters of an American Visionary* (New York, 2010), diary entry 6 Aug. 1974, p. 346.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See, Godfrey Hodgson, *The Gentleman from New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan – A Biography* (New York, 2000); Weisman, *A Portrait in Letters*; Robert Katzmann (ed.), *Daniel Patrick Moynihan: The Intellectual in Public Life* (Washington D.C., 1998); and, Gil Troy, *Moynihan's Moment: America's Fight Against Zionism as Racism* (New York 2013).

elevation to the Senate and post-Cold War critiques of the Agency, and it will consider how his relationship with intelligence and secrecy evolved during his time in India. It will assess the rise of anti-American sentiment in the developing world in the early 1970s, habitually channeled through attacks on a purportedly subversive and anti-democratic CIA, and its impact on Moynihan. This article will also consider the extent to which the CIA's emergence in India as a potent symbol of American malevolence and amorality compromised wider Indo-US relations. Lastly, this article will engage with the question of how to account for Moynihan's transformation from virulent anti-Soviet spokesperson into Cold War sceptic and prominent advocate of intelligence reform and government transparency.

At the beginning of his political career, Moynihan's willingness to speak out in support of the poorest sections of US society and sympathy with the African American struggle for civil rights, saw him labeled a liberal. Yet, over time Moynihan's reputation as a progressive dimmed considerably. At ease with his working class roots, the self-made Moynihan courted controversy, refusing to shy away from criticizing what he saw as the failings of communities mired in poverty. Relations with social activists were further strained by questions Moynihan posed over the cohesion of the Black American family. In 1965, Moynihan provoked outrage by suggesting, in a report entitled 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,' that a culture of welfare dependency, illegitimate births, and broken homes, acted as a break on Black equality. Five years later, his relations with civil rights campaigners reached a nadir following the *New York Times*' publication of a note in which Moynihan urged the federal government to adopt a policy 'benign neglect' on issues of race, and instead focus its energies on job creation and economic recovery.⁵ By the early 1970s, Moynihan had shifted sufficiently to the right to feel comfortable serving in the administration of Richard Nixon.

Indeed, as the Cold War fizzled out in the late 1980s, and public support for the CIA and its triumphalist rhetoric came to represent an article of political faith within conservative circles, Moynihan might have been expected to conform to type. Instead, the implosion of the Eastern bloc witnessed Moynihan assail the CIA as incompetent, dishonest and Machiavellian. In Moynihan's view, the Agency had willfully inflated the Soviet threat to the United States; promoted a self-serving military-industrial paradigm injurious to American prosperity; and flouted the Constitution. Moreover, the CIA had fostered an opaque national security culture predicated on excessive and expensive layers of secrecy. In short, Moynihan argued, the CIA had ceased to serve America's national interest, and should be disbanded.

Moynihan's assault on the CIA marked the opening salvo in a protracted campaign that, over the following decade, until his death, in March 2003, would see the one-time member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, lobby relentlessly for reform within America's intelligence community and against pervasive official secrecy. To date, Moynihan's evangelical fervour in championing a more open intelligence bureaucracy, which came to incorporate the drafting of Congressional bill; the chairmanship of a bi-partisan commission on government secrecy; the publication of a book; and innumerable speeches and articles; has been interpreted in a narrow personal and political context. This article breaks new ground by reframing and reperiodising Moynihan's relationship with intelligence. It suggests that Moynihan's attitudes to intelligence and state secrecy were formulated much earlier

⁵ Daniel Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Hodgson, *Gentleman from New York*, p. 13.

than has hitherto been acknowledged, and in an environment far removed from Washington's corridors of power. In January 1974, from his vantage point in India, Moynihan observed privately that, 'CIA is not dead, but dying, I should think... Too much white shoe fun in an unfunny world.'⁶ To fully understand the genesis of Moynihan's emergence as an advocate of intelligence reform, it is necessary to travel back to the global political turmoil of the early 1970s when, as Nixon's ambassador to India, the future Senator for New York was afforded ample opportunity to gauge the CIA's utility as an instrument of American diplomacy.

I

In many respects, Richard Nixon's decision to appoint Moynihan as his ambassador to India in 1973 was surprising. Moynihan had carved out a career in public service on the back of a reputation forged in domestic policymaking, focusing on issues of unemployment, inner city deprivation and race relations⁷ Moynihan had no previous diplomatic experience or expertise in international relations. Having served in Nixon's first presidential administration earlier in the decade, in charge of a portfolio that encompassed civil rights, social welfare and environmental issues, Moynihan had earned a measure of the president's respect. Admired for his intellectual range, inquisitive mind and political astuteness, Moynihan embraced difficult challenges with alacrity. In the context of America's foreign relations, no challenge loomed larger than India.

At the time, Washington's relationship with New Delhi was under severe pressure. In 1971, Nixon had infuriated India's premier, Indira Gandhi, by 'tilting' decisively toward Pakistan following the outbreak of Indo-Pakistani hostilities. In turn, having thwarted US attempts to prevent East Pakistan's transformation into the independent state of Bangladesh, Gandhi's animus in full measure.⁸ In the aftermath of what came to be characterized at the 'South Asia crisis,' an atmosphere of deep mutual mistrust pervaded American relations with India. Indo-U.S. animosity was further aggravated by differences over issues as diverse as the Gandhi government's burgeoning ties to Moscow; Indian opposition to the war in Vietnam; and, New Delhi's fledgling nuclear weapons program. Within the confines of Nixon's Oval Office, Indians were labeled as 'bastards,' while Gandhi herself was excoriated as an 'old witch' and a 'bitch.'⁹

⁶ Weisman, *A Portrait in Letters*, diary entry 7 Jan. 1974, pp. 323-4.

⁷ Prominent publications by Moynihan in the domestic policymaking arena include: *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (Boston, 1963); *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington D.C., 1965); *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York, 1971); and, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York, 1973).

⁸ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1978), pp. 526-31. For an assessment of Indo-U.S. relations under Nixon, see, in particular, R. J. McMahon, "The Danger of Geopolitical Fantasies: Nixon, Kissinger, and the South Asia Crisis of 1971," in *Nixon and the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, eds. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford, 2008); Sanjit Gandhi, "The Tilt: The U.S. and the South Asian Crisis of 1971," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 79, 16 Dec. 2002 [accessed 10 Nov. 2014 at <<http://www.gwu.edu/nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB79/>>]; and, Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies* (Washington, DC, 1993).

⁹ See, for example, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, Washington, 26 May 1971, and Conversation Nixon, Kissinger, and Haldeman, Washington, 5 Nov., 1971, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Vol. E-7, Documents on South Asia, 1969-72, Documents 135 and 150 [accessed on 10 Nov. 2014 at <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve07/>>]. See

Intriguingly, Moynihan had anticipated that Nixon would turn to him when, during the President's second term, the White House sought to normalize its relationship with India. In 1972, in conversation with his wife Liz, and against the backdrop of George McGovern's nomination as the Democrat's presidential candidate, Moynihan forecast that, 'Nixon will win [reelection] and he'll ask me to go to India.'¹⁰ Political commentators applauded Nixon's decision as an unconventional but inspired choice. Writing in the *New York Times*, Tom Wicker observed mischievously that, '...sending this imaginative and energetic Irishman as ambassador to India may be the best idea president Nixon has had; Mrs. Gandhi had best look to his neutralism and her wine cellar.'¹¹ In contrast, Moynihan's friends and colleagues were unsure whether his appointment merited celebration or commiseration. In a letter sent to Moynihan in December 1972, Theodore Barreaux, deputy director of the Securities and Exchange Commission, noted simply, 'India? Well, congratulations anyway.'¹² In the subcontinent, Moynihan's arrival was eagerly anticipated. The influential, *Times of India*, predicted that Moynihan would carry, 'the process of thawing Indo-American relations one step further. As a leading liberal intellectual, first associated with the Kennedy administration, he should find no difficulty in making friends in New Delhi.'¹³ Columnists in *The Indian Express* concurred. 'It would be a fair presumption that president Nixon would not have appointed Mr Moynihan,' the *Express* concluded, 'if he was not desirous of restoring some of the old warmth in the relations between the two countries.'¹⁴

Some Indians evidenced less enthusiasm for Moynihan. The left-leaning Indian daily, *Blitz*, pronounced scathingly that 'Tricky Dick' Nixon could, 'not have chosen a trickier person...as US Ambassador to India.' Disparaging Moynihan's credentials as a liberal scholar in sympathy with India, the Indian newspaper labelled the ambassador designate as, 'a double-thinking, double-talking and double-crossing politician has no place in socialist, non-aligned India...'¹⁵ Such expressions of hostility were emblematic of a wider and growing disaffection with the United States that swept across the developing world in the early 1970s. To many Indians, the global deployment of preponderant post-war American power had long seemed redolent of a hidden neo-imperialist U.S. foreign policy. More specifically, the CIA, in its capacity as the covert foreign policy tool of choice for US presidents, came to acquire a uniquely invidious international reputation as an antidemocratic socio-political malefactor. In India, as elsewhere inside the global South, symbolism attached to the CIA came to overshadow American diplomatic initiatives designed to win 'hearts and minds.' Trust and confidence in U.S. domestic institutions, and amongst America's international partners, was corroded by a climate of conspiracy surrounding the CIA which, in turn, fostered a political culture in the subcontinent that at times verged on paranoia.

Indeed, the harsh media spotlight cast upon some of the CIA's more questionable activities in 1967, following the public disclosure of Agency improprieties in the

also Kissinger, *White House Years*, (Boston, 1979), p. 848.

¹⁰ Bernard Weinraub, 'Daniel Moynihan's Passage to India,' *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 Mar. 1974.

¹¹ Tom Wicker, 'Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire,' *New York Times News Service*, 1972, Box I-352, Folder India Correspondence B7 1973-1975, DPM.

¹² Barreaux to Moynihan, 13 Dec. 1972, Box I-352, Folder India Correspondence Congratulatory 2, DPM.

¹³ 'Current Topics', *The Times of India*, 12 Dec. 1972.

¹⁴ 'A New Ambassador', *The Indian Express*, 18 Dec. 1972.

¹⁵ 'Tricky Dick's Ayaram!' *Blitz*, 6 Jan. 1973.

American magazine, *Ramparts*, was to have a profound and enduring impact upon Indian perceptions of the US government and its external intelligence service. In the wake of the *Ramparts* disclosures, which centred on covert Agency support for international educational institutions and cultural bodies, the CIA came to occupy a prominent place in mainstream Indo–U.S. cultural and political discourse. The blanket exposure given by the world’s press to CIA indiscretions, exemplified by the international media circus that developed around subsequent Congressional probes into the US intelligence community, made a deep psychological impression in the subcontinent. India’s journalists and politicians were captivated when, having publicly catalogued the CIA’s involvement in a series of plots to assassinate national leaders and subvert foreign governments, the chairman of one influential investigative committee, the Democratic senator from Idaho, Frank Church, famously characterized the Agency’s behavior as akin to, ‘a rogue elephant on a rampage.’¹⁶

Moynihan’s immediate predecessor in New Delhi, Kenneth Keating, had afforded some sense of the magnitude of the diplomatic task that the new ambassador faced in recalibrating relations between two nations that, in the words of one contemporary observer, had become ‘locked in a corrosive limbo.’¹⁷ Six months before Moynihan’s arrival in the subcontinent, the bitterness that Indira Gandhi’s government retained for the United States had come to the fore when Keating made a farewell call on the Indian premier, prior to returning home to oversee Nixon’s reelection campaign. Keating had suspected that his interview with Gandhi would prove awkward. During a thirty-minute audience with the Indian leader, the ambassador was, nonetheless, left stunned by his host’s ‘emotional and distorted’ assault on the Nixon administration, and the purportedly nefarious operations of the CIA. ‘Everything the U.S. does,’ a rattled Keating was informed by Gandhi, ‘is against India.’ Forces inside the American government, she assured the incredulous ambassador, were ‘working against us in India’; ‘cooperating with communist extremists’ to destabilize her administration; and encouraging ‘a lot of American professors . . . to engage in improper activities injurious to India.’ The latter charge, given Moynihan’s deep scholarly roots, appeared particularly unfortunate. Keating’s insistence that the \$10 billion of aid which the United States had allocated to India in the past could hardly be considered ‘anti- Indian,’ was dismissed by Gandhi in a ‘manner [that] was arrogantly confident, ready to believe the worst about the U.S., closed to any explanation, and thoroughly obnoxious.’ ‘Incredible!’ the dumbstruck Keating cabled back to Washington, ‘My successor has an even tougher task ahead than I anticipated.’¹⁸

It was with some trepidation and a sense of foreboding therefore, that Moynihan descended from the steps of a Pan Am jumbo jet at New Delhi airport just before dawn, on 20 February 1973, to take up his post as ambassador to India. Inauspiciously, Moynihan’s journey had been interrupted en route when a diplomatic spat erupted between the state department and India’s ministry of external affairs, leaving the ambassador designate kicking his heels in Rome. To Washington’s ire, in

¹⁶ See Frank Church, 25 Sept. 1975, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Washington, D.C. [accessed 10 Nov. 2014 at < http://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/church/reports/vol2/pdf/ChurchV2_3_Brennan.pdf >].

¹⁷ Bernard Weinraub, ‘Daniel Moynihan’s Passage to India,’ *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 Mar. 1974.

¹⁸ Keating to Secretary of State, No. 9257, ‘Farewell Call on Prime Minister: Indo-American Relations,’ 25 Jul. 1972, Box 28, Folder Gandhi, Prime Minister Indira, Miscellaneous Cables, RG 84, Ambassador Keating Subject Files, 1968–1972, National Archives, College Park, Maryland [hereafter NA].

a speech delivered to the One-Asia Assembly, Indira Gandhi had assigned a racial dimension to America's bombing campaign in North Vietnam. In the circumstances, Nixon was disinclined to have Moynihan photographed shaking hands with India's premier. 'Will Moynihan come at all?' ran the headline on the front page of *The Indian Express*.¹⁹ Barely a year later, having failed to improve Indo-US relations in the face of repeated Indian accusations of CIA impropriety, an uncharacteristically 'subdued and broadly disillusioned' Moynihan was left to ponder whether, in response to the *Indian Express*' question, his answer ought to have been, 'No.'²⁰

II

Daniel Patrick Moynihan was to characterise the troubled twenty-three months that he spent as US ambassador in New Delhi as 'the plague years.' From the outset, Moynihan resolved to adopt a much lower public profile in India than some of his illustrious predecessors, such as the Harvard economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, and the congressman and former advertising executive from Connecticut, Chester Bowles.²¹ In part, Moynihan's determination to work, as far as possible, in the political shadows and away from the harsh glare of the media, reflected his conviction that an ambassador should implement policy rather than make it. Emphasising his willingness to faithfully toe Washington's line, whatever that might be, Moynihan noted in a letter to Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser, that, 'my fixed principle...has been to convey what I have thought policy was, and not what I might have wished it were.'²² Having completed over a year in post, Moynihan boasted that he had delivered only one set speech in India and made a grand total of three public appearances. 'I have tried to keep my head down out of a conviction that we have previously been far too much in evidence and are still thought, by Indians, to be omnipresent,' the ambassador explained to a friend.²³ 'We are not here to tell them how to run India,' Moynihan subsequently reflected, 'That is all over.'²⁴

Equally, Moynihan appreciated that the failure of the United States to cultivate harmonious and productive relations with India had, 'been a central feature of Asian politics for a quarter century, and by 1972 things had got about as bad as they could get.'²⁵ In the circumstances, an approach based on quiet diplomacy appeared likely to prove a more profitable means of burying political hatchets and placing bi-lateral relations on a more positive footing. Moynihan's circumspection drew plaudits in India. In April 1973, writing in *The Hindu*, the prominent Indian journalist, G.K. Reddy, expressed satisfaction that, 'for the first time in recent years, there is an American ambassador in New Delhi who knows his mind, the limitations of his brief...and the pitfalls of attempting to do too much in too short a time.'²⁶

Above all, however, Moynihan was acutely conscious of the toxic psychological prism of suspicion, fear and loathing through which many Indians had come to view

¹⁹ 'Will Moynihan come at all?' *The Indian Express*, 9 Feb. 1973.

²⁰ Bernard Weinraub, 'Daniel Moynihan's Passage to India,' *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 Mar. 1974.

²¹ Draft Manuscript for 'A Dangerous Place', I-350 Speeches and Writings File Folder A, DPM; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *A Dangerous Place* (Boston, 1978), p. 16.

²² Moynihan to Kissinger, 22 Nov. 1973, Box 370, DPM.

²³ Moynihan to Professor Lockwood, 29 Jul. 1974, Box 361, DPM.

²⁴ Moynihan notes, 20 Feb. 1974, Box 361, DPM.

²⁵ Moynihan to Davis, 19 Jun. 1974, Box 361, DPM.

²⁶ G. K. Reddy, 'United States, India and Moynihan,' *The Hindu*, 18 Apr. 1973.

the CIA. The noisy and intrinsically insecure covert operations mounted by the Agency across the developing world after 1947, which from the late 1960s had been the subject of headline stories in the mainstream international media, left their mark in India. On arrival, Moynihan echoed the sentiments articulated Keating, informing Kissinger that, 'the paranoia out here is thicker than the dust.' 'Stop sending India poisoned wheat,' Moynihan quipped to Kissinger, 'the Prime Minister is on to you.'²⁷ After three months in New Delhi, Moynihan was happy enough to be 'getting on very well' with the Indian officials. The ambassador's one concern was a, 'tremendous campaign mounting on the subject of U.S. spies.' The local press, Moynihan griped, appeared set on 'fingering one man after another' as a CIA agent. Some Indian government officers had 'gone along' with the espionage game, and 'informally' accused a member of the US consulate, in the eastern Indian city of Calcutta, of spying. Bridling at charges levelled against Americans who had 'done nothing,' Moynihan informed Indian officials that they were free to call for the expulsion of diplomats, 'but they should understand that I will be going home on the same plane.'²⁸

On a personal level, Moynihan had no axe to grind with the CIA. The ambassador liked and respected the Agency's station chief in New Delhi, a Dryden scholar and fellow academic from Cornell. Yet, in practical terms, Moynihan found the CIA to be less than useful. Specifically, the Agency's officers in India appeared intellectually hidebound and ineffective. '[I]n a year of trying to get them [CIA] to think about Indian Communism for me, they have not been able to do so,' he complained. Furthermore, in a wider regional context, Moynihan lamented that the CIA's public profile and operational ineptitude had come to represent serious and growing impediments to US diplomacy. In January 1974, the ambassador observed that:

They [CIA] have just mercilessly fouled up in Thailand: with a student government which had denounced the new American ambassador as a CIA agent before he even arrived last month, some clown dreams up a letter to the Prime Minister offering a cease fire from the Communist insurgents in the North ... Alas, the illiterate youth who was given the letter to mail registered it with the home address of the agent who had given it to him. Result, black wreaths hung on the Embassy gates, apologies, silences...²⁹

Later that year, Moynihan was taken aback when Indian government officials issued further public demands for the expulsion of U.S. embassy personnel on charges of espionage and, at the same time, privately requested closer Indo-U.S. intelligence liaison. The head of the Indian prime minister's secretariat, Prithvi Nath Dhar, and the chief of India's external intelligence service, R. N. Kao, quietly approached Moynihan to inquire whether CIA director, William Colby, would consider visiting India. 'The two [intelligence] services had worked together so well, and on so many important matters, Rao assured Moynihan. 'The training Indians had received in the United States was of such quality. The Director of C.I.A. would be so welcome.' Following his encounter with Rao and Dhar, a bemused Moynihan was left

²⁷ Moynihan to Kissinger, 10 Mar. 1973, Box I-377 Folder India Subject File White House 1973, DPM.

²⁸ Moynihan to Galbraith, 10 May 1973, Box I-377 Folder India Subject File Soviet Union 1973-74, DPM.

²⁹ Steven R. Weisman, *A Portrait in Letters*, diary entry 7 Jan. 1974, pp. 323-3.

pondering, 'What is one to do?' Having earlier pressed the State Department to pull the CIA out of India altogether in an effort to keep the Agency off the front pages of India's newspapers, following his meeting with Dhar and Kao, Moynihan rescinded the request. 'They [the Indian government] want us,' the ambassador wrote to Lawrence Eagleburger, Executive Assistant to Henry Kissinger, now US Secretary of State. 'Possibly they want even more of us.'³⁰

After shaking off British colonial rule in August 1947, successive Indian governments exhibited few qualms about surreptitiously cooperating with foreign intelligence agencies, including those of the United States, when it suited their interests to do so.³¹ Such collaboration occurred amidst a climate of rising popular antipathy for CIA in India, which increased markedly in the wake of the Watergate scandal and the publication of salacious exposes by Agency employees detailing Langley's historic misdeeds.³² In part, Indira Gandhi undoubtedly calculated that the Agency could serve as a convenient external scapegoat for India's internal troubles and, at the same time, provide a means of placating left-wing political allies with a show of anti-Western bluster.³³ Nonetheless, for all the political opportunism evidenced by Indian politicians, a series of events linked to the Nixon administration, and America's intelligence services more particularly, unquestionably exacerbated feelings of fear and anxiety that the CIA engendered in many Indians, and in Indira Gandhi, above all.

Most obviously, the Indian leader was affected by the CIA's complicity in the bloody rightwing coup in Chile, in September 1973, which removed the socialist government of Salvador Allende. Following Allende's demise, Gandhi was genuinely concerned that she would be the next target on Nixon's list for regime change.³⁴ Figures inside Gandhi's Congress party declared defiantly that the turmoil in South America would not be repeated in the subcontinent. The Indian government 'would not allow Delhi to be turned into Chile.'³⁵ In an interview reproduced in the Congress newsheet, *Socialist Weekly*, Gandhi laid bare her personal anxieties in relation to the CIA, asking pointedly, 'Have these several Western countries not given full moral and material support to the most authoritarian regimes of Africa and Asia? Have we so soon forgotten what happened to Chile?'³⁶ In an ill-judged bid to convince the Indian premier that the Nixon administration wished her no harm, the American deputy chief of mission in New Delhi called on Gandhi to reassure her, 'that of course the US had not' meddled in Chilean domestic politics.³⁷

Gandhi later witnessed the CIA's director, William Colby, testified before a US congressional committee that, between 1970 and 1973, the Agency had, in fact, spent

³⁰ Weisman, *A Portrait in Letters*, diary entries 6 Aug. and 5 Sep. 1974, pp. 346 and 351–52.

³¹ See, for example, Paul Michael McGarr, "'Quiet Americans in India': The CIA and the Politics of Intelligence in Cold War South Asia,' *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (2014), pp. 1046-1082.

³² Notably, Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (London, 1974), and, Philip Agee, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary* (London: Penguin, 1975).

³³ Moynihan to Secretary of State, No. 03617, 16 Mar. 1974, CFP, Electronic Telegrams, 1/1/ 1974-12/31/1974, RG 59, NA.

³⁴ Gandhi's biographers have made much of the "Chilean' effect on the Indian premier. See P. N. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency" and Indian Democracy* (New Delhi, 2000); Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London, 2002); and, Inder Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (London, 1989).

³⁵ Schneider (Embassy New Delhi) to Secretary of State, No. 07903, 16 Jun. 1975, CFP, Electronic Telegrams, 1/1/1975-12/31/1975, RG 59, NA.

³⁶ *Socialist Weekly*, 15 Aug. 1975.

³⁷ Moynihan to Secretary of State, No. 12063, 10 Sept. 1974, CFP, Electronic Telegrams 1/1/1974-12/31/1974, RG 59, NA.

more than \$8 million in an effort to destabilize the Allende government.³⁸ Following Colby's testimony, a disconsolate Moynihan complained that, by handling the Chile question in such an inept manner, Washington had done a first rate job of shooting itself in the foot. On 10 September 1974, Moynihan grumbled to Kissinger that Gandhi was now certain:

that we would be content to see her overthrown, as we have, to her mind, been content to see others like her overthrown. She knows full well that we have done our share and more of bloody and dishonourable deeds. This as such is not her concern. She knows all too much of such matters. It is precisely because she is not innocent, not squeamish, and not a moralizer that her concern about American intentions is real and immediate. And of course the news from the United States, as printed in the Indian press, repeatedly confirms her worst suspicions and genuine fears.³⁹

Moynihan's gloom deepened when the investigative journalist, Seymour Hersh, obtained a copy of his message to Kissinger, and printed the ambassador's observations on Gandhi on the front page of the *New York Times*.⁴⁰ Worse still, to Moynihan's ire, Colby compounded Gandhi's anxiety that the CIA was out to get her by launching into a spirited public defense of the United States' rationale for undertaking covert actions. On 13 September, in an address to the Fund for Peace Conference, having confirmed the Agency's record of 'assist[ing] America's friends against her adversaries in their contest for control of a foreign nation's political direction,' the Colby proceeded to argue that:

a sovereign nation must look ahead to changing circumstances. I can envisage situations in which the United States might well need to conduct covert action in the face of some new threat that developed in the world . . . I thus would think it mistaken to deprive our nation of the possibility of some moderate covert action response to a foreign problem and leave us with nothing between a diplomatic protest and sending the Marines.⁴¹

On 2 December, Colby underlined his views on covert actions in an interview published by *US News & World Report*. After being replayed in the Indian press, the interview had the effect, in Moynihan's words, of whipping up a 'wholly predictable storm' in the subcontinent. 'No one [should] have any illusions as to how bad it has been,' Moynihan cabled back to Washington, 'or that it [the CIA issue] will go away.' The irate ambassador was left 'groping' for an answer as to why Colby had considered it wise to publicly debate the merits and morals of CIA clandestine operations. The KGB, Moynihan noted ruefully, felt no compulsion to air its dirty intelligence linen in public. On 3 December, in a bitter cable to Kissinger, Moynihan asked candidly, 'It is out of the question that some thought might be given in Washington to the effect in India of statements such as the Director has made? It is

³⁸ See, *The Patriot* and *The Times of India*, 9 Sep. 1974.

³⁹ Moynihan to Secretary of State, No. 12063, 10 Sep. 1974, CFP, Electronic Telegrams, 1/1/1974-12/31/1974, RG 59, NA.

⁴⁰ 'Concern by India on C.I.A. Related,' *The New York Times*, 13 Sep. 13, 1974.

⁴¹ William E. Colby, 'The View from Langley,' Address to the Fund for Peace Conference on "The CIA and Covert Actions," 13 Sep 1974, Box I: 371, Folder India: Central Intelligence Agency Folder, DPMP.

that nobody knows? Or is it that nobody cares?’⁴² In his private journal, Moynihan added that Colby had behaved ‘incredibly’ and ‘criminally’ in talking out of turn to journalists. ‘What can he [Colby] think he is doing,’ Moynihan raged, ‘Is there nothing to which bureaucracy will not lead a man.’⁴³

During a visit to the subcontinent in October, Kissinger had, Moynihan reminded the secretary of state, personally assured Gandhi that the Nixon government was not ‘directly or indirectly’ attempting to destabilize India. At the time, Kissinger made much of the fact that, as chairman of the committee that authorized American covert intelligence operations, he could state unequivocally that no such activity had been taken in relation to India.⁴⁴ ‘In what but an insane situation could a Director of Central Intelligence,’ Moynihan raged, ‘find himself giving interviews to the press asserting a right to do what the Secretary of State had said was not being done in India?’ Half the politicians in India, the ambassador protested, already suspected that the CIA was up to no good in South Asia, while the other half were astute enough to recognize that by demonizing the Agency, and its purportedly nefarious activities in India, they could outflank domestic critics. Colby’s display of candor, Moynihan mused, had all but ensured that the CIA would continue to be an unwelcome irritant in Indo-US relations. Urging Washington to exercise tighter control on Colby and his Agency, Moynihan emphasized to Kissinger that in India:

...we [the United States] are struggling to survive...Which is to say struggling to maintain the belief among a sufficient number of Indians that there is indeed a common purpose between our democracies such that at very least we wish India well and do not seek to subvert its regime. That such a minimal objective should seem in danger. That the day should have arrived when such matters could be questioned should in itself suggest the extremity of our situation.⁴⁵

Daniel Moynihan departed from India, in January 1975, in a state of depression. Two years previously, the ambassador had been attracted to the subcontinent by the formidable challenge of recalibrating the troubled relationship between America and India, a land in which, he declared, Asian ‘liberty resides.’ An essential element in Moynihan’s plan to reinvigorate Indo-US relations was predicated on quiet diplomacy. The United States had, in his estimation, alienated opinion within the developing world through a combination of overbearing rhetoric and the pursuit of an unnecessarily interventionist foreign policy. ‘I have not overburdened either the Indian or American public with commentary or advice,’ Moynihan stated proudly on the occasion of his last public appearance in India. ‘I have spoken in public only four times in two years, and two of these occasions took place a fortnight ago. I have not until this moment given a press conference.’ Moynihan was acutely aware, however, that his diplomatic taciturnity had been compromised by a poisonous legacy of CIA misdemeanours, past and present. ‘Both the United States and India have far closer and more cooperative relations with the totalitarian powers of the world, than we have with one another,’ a dispirited Moynihan reflected as he prepared to leave New Delhi.

⁴² Moynihan to Kissinger, No. 16066, 3 Dec. 1974, Box I-371, Folder India: Central Intelligence Agency, DPMP.

⁴³ Weisman, *Portrait in Letters*, diary entry 27 Nov. 1974, p. 360.

⁴⁴ Weisman, *Portrait in Letters*, diary entry 28 Oct. 1974, p. 356.

⁴⁵ Moynihan to Kissinger, No. 16066, 3 Dec. 1974, Box I-371, Folder India: Central Intelligence Agency, DPM.

‘Indeed, it is from one another that we are increasingly isolated.’⁴⁶

III

Irksome repercussions, or blowback, from the CIA’s fractious and conflicted relationship with India, continued to bedevil Moynihan long after his return to the United States. In 1979, the publication of Moynihan’s memoir, *A Dangerous Place*, reignited debates in the subcontinent over the Agency’s purported interference in India’s internal affairs. Controversially, Moynihan’s book confirmed that while serving as ambassador in New Delhi, he had ordered an enquiry into the history of CIA operations in India, the remit of which stretched back over three decades. Having resolved to establish ‘just what we [America] had been up to,’ Moynihan claimed that the CIA had twice, but only twice, interfered directly in India’s domestic affairs by covertly channelling money to political parties. On both occasions, the former ambassador revealed, once in the western Indian state of Kerala and once in the eastern province of West Bengal, CIA funds had been provided to the Congress party, and in one instance to Indira Gandhi herself. Moynihan went on to speculate that the CIA’s record of covert political funding may have fuelled Gandhi’s paranoiac attitude towards the Agency when, on his watch, ‘we were no longer giving any money to her.’ Stark discrepancies between the marginal political benefits reaped in India from these intelligence operations, and their considerable longer-term costs, Moynihan argued, strongly suggested that this was ‘not a practice to be encouraged.’⁴⁷

Back in India, Moynihan’s book met with a furious rebuttal from Gandhi and her political supporters. On 20 April 1979, members of the South Calcutta district youth congress marched on the US consulate and delivered a letter addressed to US president, Jimmy Carter, in which Moynihan was castigated for an ‘ugly’ political attack on Gandhi that ‘may ultimately create sever bitterness between the people of these two countries.’⁴⁸ Congress leaders rushed to condemn Moynihan for impugning Gandhi’s reputation. Implausibly labelling Moynihan a ‘CIA agent’ and ‘Zionist’ bitterly opposed to India’s pro-Arab policies, the Congress party’s parliamentary leader called for the US embassy to be closed unless an immediate apology was forthcoming from Washington. Prominent titles amongst India’s left-wing tabloid press, such as *Wave* and *Blitz*, ran banner headlines proclaiming, ‘Moynihan a Zionist, Racist Scorpion,’ and, ‘Liar Moynihan’s Accusations are a Cover-Up for Real CIA Lobby.’ One indignant Indian citizen, Mohinder Singh, saw fit to file a defamation case in the Indian courts against Moynihan on Gandhi’s behalf.⁴⁹

Indira Gandhi vigorously denied Moynihan’s charges, disparaging them as ‘mischievous, malicious and baseless.’ Rallying behind their leader, Congress supporters attending a party meeting in the city of Jaipur set fire to pictures of Carter, in protest at what they characterised as Moynihan’s complicity in the latest in a long

⁴⁶ Last press conference in India, I-352 Folder India Correspondence B7, 1973-1975, DPM; Moynihan, *A Dangerous Place*, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Moynihan, *A Dangerous Place*, p. 41; First draft manuscript for ‘A Dangerous Place’, Box I-348, Speeches and Writings File Folder A, DPM.

⁴⁸ New Delhi to Secretary of State, ‘Moynihan Demonstration,’ No. 6828, 21 Apr. 1979, Box II-2965, Speeches and Writings Folder ‘A Dangerous Place’ India’s Reaction April 1979, DPM.

⁴⁹ New Delhi to Secretary of State, ‘Further Reaction to “A Dangerous Place,”’ No. 6826, 20 Apr. 1979, Box II-2965, Speeches and Writings Folder ‘A Dangerous Place’ India’s Reaction Apr. 1979, DPM.

line of American attacks on Indian sovereignty.⁵⁰ Uncomfortably for Gandhi, India's mainstream media was less inclined to discount Moynihan's charges. In an editorial entitled, 'A Serious Affair,' the respected Calcutta daily, *The Statesman*, insisted that:

...the allegation cannot be dismissed as a casual remark or a bit of political gossip...Unless Washington comes out with an official explanation, Indians will find it difficult to believe that the practice of financing political parties has really ended. Instead, there will be increasing cynicism about democratic procedures and the role of alleged foreign friends.⁵¹

Meeting with Indian press correspondents in Washington towards the end of April, Moynihan robustly defended *A Dangerous Place*. Addressing the statements that he had made concerning CIA support for Indian political parties, Moynihan stated that, 'what we [the United States] did was perfectly legitimate according to the standards of the time... today I would say "don't do it."' 'Looking back,' he added, 'obviously that [CIA activity in India] caused us trouble. There was constant and incessant insinuation of some massive activity on our part which never existed...'⁵²

The climax of the *Dangerous Place* affair played out on the evening of 7 May during the course of a stormy four-hour debate held in the Lok Sabha, India's lower house of parliament. In a turbulent session, Congress MP's heaped abuse on Moynihan, while opponents of Gandhi pressed the Indian government to appoint a commission of inquiry into alleged CIA funding of political parties. Observing events from inside the parliamentary chamber, American diplomats looked on in horror as Indian politicians launched a series of 'histrionic, vitriolic attacks on Sen. Moynihan [and] the CIA...' The debate concluded with India's embattled Home Minister assuring exercised colleagues that his government would take action to address irregularities in the funding of political parties and, 'try to plug as many loopholes as possible to stop the influx of illegal foreign money.' In an attempt to stop the fallout from Moynihan's book spiralling out of control, both the US embassy in New Delhi and the state department back in Washington declined all invitations from Indian journalists to comment on Moynihan's disclosures. In the India's cities meanwhile, crowds seized copies of *A Dangerous Place* from bookshops and burned them in the streets alongside effigies of the reviled Moynihan.⁵³

IV

Orthodox accounts of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's long political career locate his emergence as a prominent critic of the CIA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the Cold War stuttered to a close. Moynihan developed his critique of the intelligence bureaucracy, so the story goes, while serving inside the Federal government, first as Senator for New York and, latterly, as a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. In April 1984, Moynihan garnered national news headlines by temporarily standing down as vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in

⁵⁰ 'Gandhi Alleges Close Ties between Moynihan, Militant Hindus,' Hong Kong AFP, 25 Apr. 1979, Box II-2965 Speeches and Writings Folder 'A Dangerous Place' India's Reaction, DPM.

⁵¹ 'A Serious Affair,' *The Statesman*, 14 Apr. 1979.

⁵² 'CIA and CIB worked together: Moynihan,' *Indian Express*, 28 Apr. 1979.

⁵³ Goheen to State Department, 'Stormy Debate on Moynihan's Disclosures,' 10 May 1979, Box II-2965, Folder 'A Dangerous Place India's Reaction May 1979,' DPM.

protest at the CIA's failure to 'properly' consult Congress on the mining of Nicaraguan harbours.⁵⁴ A subsequent apology from CIA Director, William Casey, saw Moynihan resume his post, although relations between the Senator and the Agency remained uneasy. Prior to this, Moynihan had openly disparaged inflated CIA estimates of Soviet power, dismissing as nonsense dire warnings from Langley that the United States risked being left behind by Moscow's planned economy.⁵⁵

Celebrated as 'the quintessential liberal anti-Communist,' Moynihan was especially well qualified to challenge the institutional guardians of America's secret intelligence community.⁵⁶ In May 1991, in an op-ed article written for *New York Times*, Moynihan announced his intention to place a bill before Congress calling for the abolition of the CIA, and the transfer of the Agency's intelligence functions to the state department.⁵⁷ Moynihan renewed his call for the Agency to be scrapped four years later, in early 1995. "Secrecy is a disease," he asserted. "It causes hardening of the arteries of the mind. It hinders true scholarship and hides mistakes...The State Department must function as the primary agency in formulating and conducting foreign policy. Any other arrangement invited confusion."⁵⁸ Such radical prescriptions for intelligence reform, however, unnerved more conservative legislators, and Moynihan's bills were never put to a vote.

Contemporaneous claims made by the CIA that the Agency was shedding a Cold War mentality predicated on extreme secrecy, and embracing a new model of transparency and accountability, were received with scepticism by Moynihan. In February 1992, CIA director, Robert Gates, gave a public address on the subject of 'CIA Openness.' Acknowledging that many journalists in the audience would interpret the subject of his speech as 'oxymoronic, like bureaucratic efficiency,' Gates nevertheless committed the CIA to, 'a real shift...toward greater openness and a sense of public responsibility.' Moynihan was not alone in reacting to Gates' initiative with a measure of cynicism. Senator Alan Cranston, a Democrat from California, observed that he had, 'seen too many [CIA] documents classified that shouldn't be.' 'I'd like to talk with Gates,' Cranston proclaimed, 'and spur him on to explore what further can be done.' Gates planned to inject substance into his rhetoric through the creation of a CIA 'Openness Task Force.' Comically, the CIA's commitment to transparency floundered when the Task Force's first report was classified, and screened from public scrutiny.⁵⁹ Responding from the floor of the Senate, an exasperated Moynihan proclaimed that, 'the secrecy system is out of control because it has no means to correct itself.'⁶⁰

Moynihan went on to chair a bipartisan commission on protecting and reducing government secrecy that, between January 1995 and December 1996, conducted a wide-ranging review of the US intelligence community and its relationship with America's citizens. The commission's core findings, which appeared early in 1997,

⁵⁴ 'Moynihan to Quit Senate Panel Post in Dispute on CIA,' *The New York Times*, 6 Apr. 1984.

⁵⁵ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 'Will Russia Blow Up?' *Newsweek*, 19 Nov. 1979.

⁵⁶ Richard Gid Powers, Introduction to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Secrecy: The American Experience* (New Haven, 1998), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 'Do We still Need the C.I.A.? The State Dept. Can Do the Job,' *The New York Times*, 19 May 1991.

⁵⁸ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 'Introducing the abolition of the Central Intelligence Agency Act or The Central Intelligence Agency Abolition Act of 1995,' *Congressional Record*, Vol. 141, No. 1, 4 Jan. 1995 (USGPO, Washington, 1995).

⁵⁹ 'Gates Acts to Promote CIA Openness: Agency to Cooperate in Declassifying JFK Files, Within Limits, He Says,' *The Washington Post*, 22 Feb. 1992.

⁶⁰ 'C.I.A. Director Announces Plan for More Access to Agency Files,' *New York Times*, 22 Feb. 1992.

were brought to a wider public audience the following year with the publication of Moynihan's book, *Secrecy: The American Experience*. In *Secrecy*, Moynihan presented a characteristically sweeping and urbane analysis of the evolution of American secret intelligence, from the onset of the First World War to the end of the Cold War, and beyond. Singling out the CIA for particular censure, Moynihan depicted the Agency as an information-gathering organization that had lost its way and succumbed to the lure of audacious, but invariably disastrous, covert operations. A conspiracy of secrecy ensued between CIA directors intent on preserving the Agency's bureaucratic power, and US presidents minded to pursue foreign policies free from domestic or international legal constraints.

It is within the pages of *Secrecy*, that we are reminded, almost as an aside, that the genesis of Moynihan's interest in the linkages between intelligence operations, secrecy and diplomacy were first distilled not in the cool, marble chambers of Capitol Hill, but in the fierce political heat of India.⁶¹ The two years that Moynihan spent in New Delhi as US ambassador, between 1973 and 1975, undoubtedly played a crucial part in shaping the attitudes, actions and utterances in relation to the CIA that dominated the twilight of his political career. In March 1975, within months of leaving India, the searing impact of dealing with endless CIA scandals in the subcontinent, real and imagined, were clearly evident in Moynihan's thinking on matters of intelligence. Writing in *Commentary* magazine, Moynihan made the case for placing less reliance of the dubious merits of secret operations, and more emphasis on engaging in open and honest dialogue with the United States' global partners. Anticipating the Indian furore that accompanied the appearance of *A Dangerous Place*, America's representatives abroad, Moynihan argued pointedly, 'should come to be feared in international forums for the truths he might tell.'⁶²

Today, events in South Asia have thrown up familiar questions surrounding the extent to which the CIA has functioned as the US executive's private army, absent from appropriate legislative scrutiny. In prosecuting a so-called 'War on Terror,' centred in the Indian subcontinent, the CIA, we are reminded, has engaged in assassination, kidnapping, extrajudicial detention and torture. Had the US Congress or the American people openly debated these actions, it is unlikely they would have been approved. Without doubt, such actions have eroded the legitimacy of American foreign policy. Salutary lessons on the interrelationships between intelligence, secrecy and diplomacy that Daniel Patrick Moynihan absorbed during his time in South Asia, it seems, remain as pertinent today in the midst of our century's first global war, as they did over two decades ago, at the conclusion of another.

⁶¹ Moynihan, *Secrecy*, p. 3.

⁶² Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 'The United States in Opposition,' *Commentary*, Mar. 1975, p. 42.