

Proximity or Sycophancy? The Intelligence-Policy Relationship in the Nehruvian Era, 1947-1964

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Abstract

Scholars of Intelligence Studies have extensively debated the contours of an ideal relationship between intelligence services and policy making, in which agencies can maintain analytical objectivity while having a policy impact. However, this debate has not meaningfully embraced a geographic expanse covering the Global South. This article, firstly, addresses this by offering a comprehensive analysis of intelligence-policy relationship in India during the Nehruvian era. Secondly, it draws on the existing scholarly examinations of the global intelligence-policy relationships and argues that ‘proximity’ produces varying results in different decision-making cultures. Thirdly, the article contributes to the literature on contemporary Indian security by examining the impact of the relationship between Nehru and B.N. Mullik – former chief of Indian intelligence and an understudied personality – on Indian intelligence. It challenges the popular perception surrounding Mullik’s ‘sycophancy’ and argues that the decision-making culture that existed during the Nehru years demanded greater proximity, subservience, and in the worst case, sycophancy. A cost-benefit analysis presented in the article reveals that there were both pros and cons to ‘proximity’ with the former being more significant.

Keywords

Indian intelligence, Mullik, Nehru, politicisation, intelligence analysis, intelligence culture

Introduction

Speaking truth to power is an ideal sought by intelligence agencies. This implies a particular immunity from internal as well as external sources of influences on the intelligence product. In order to ensure such immunity, should the intelligence services maintain a distance from the

politicians they serve? The 9/11 Commission Report identified that the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI's) "real authority has been directly proportional to his personal closeness to the president".¹ Given such an observation, would it then be prudent to build greater closeness between intelligence and policymakers? These are not novel questions for intelligence scholars. However, the gap lies in the geographic coverage of scholarly inquiry. As will be explored later in this article, there is a dearth of focus on intelligence-policy relationship in the Global South. This article aims to address this by analysing how 'proximity' as a factor contributed to intelligence-policy relationship in India during its early years of independence.

This article makes the first comprehensive attempt at analysing the intelligence-policy relationship in India during the tenure of its first and longest serving prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. During Nehru's tenure, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (DIB), Bhola Nath Mullik, served for fourteen years; he remains the nation's longest serving intelligence chief. Existing literature on this topic is scant; but when Mullik does figure in the security literature he is mostly accused of 'sycophancy'.² Given the thinness of intelligence scholarship in the Indian context, empirical studies have not been conducted to assess the long-standing relationship between Nehru and Mullik and the impact it has had on Indian intelligence. The existing literature tends to portray Mullik in a negative light, while Nehru is usually glorified as an enthusiast and critical consumer of intelligence services.³ This article exposes the fallacy of such an assessment by consulting archival data and secondary source literature. But more importantly, the article triangulates this data with interviews of key intelligence personnel. The

¹ 'The 9/11 Commission Report', 86, accessed November 19, 2020, <https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>

² Y.D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, Bombay: Sangam Books, 1984, 212.; K. Sankaran Nair, *Inside IB and RAW: The Rolling Stone that Gathered Moss*, (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2016), 98.

³ Avinash Paliwal, 'Colonial Sinews of Postcolonial Espionage – India and the Making of Ghana's External Intelligence Agency, 1958-61', *International History Review*, (2021): 3.; Srinath Raghavan quoted in Subrata K. Mitra and Michael Liebig, *Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Intellectual Portrait*, (New Delhi: Rupa, 2017), 224.

findings present a far more complex picture than a sycophantic manager working for an intelligence-literate prime minister.

The central research question that this article seeks to address is: *how did 'proximity' between Nehru and Mullick impact the Indian intelligence-policy relationship during the Nehru era?* It emerges that there were practical reasons for Mullik to employ 'proximity' and 'benign subservience' as a tactic to ensure organisational survival and institutional development. The result of which is a unique intelligence culture that is essentially adopting to the nation's decision-making culture.

This article is divided into five parts. The first part traces the academic debates and discussions surrounding the ideal intelligence-policy relationship, with a focus on 'proximity' as a variable. The second part examines the rationale for proximity by observing Nehru's understanding of intelligence. The third part does the same from the point of view of the intelligence managers. The fourth part makes a cost-benefit analysis of the 'proximity' tactic employed by Mullik. Finally, a conclusion is presented that makes certain signposts in the post-Nehruvian era to highlight the continuity in the nature of intelligence-policy relationship that was etched in the Nehru years.

The Role of 'Proximity' in Intelligence-Policy Relationship

"Politicisation" is a commonly-used derogatory term to describe the polluting of a balanced intelligence-policy relationship. It is found to occur either through the manipulation of the intelligence product for political gains or the misuse of the intelligence machinery to extract political gains.⁴ One of the remedial suggestions long debated by scholars resides on the concept of 'proximity'. Should intelligence agencies maintain a distance from their consumers to ensure purity of product? Or should the intelligence agencies remain close to the consumers

⁴ Michael Fredholm, 'Briefing the Swedish Policymaker: The Analyst-Policymaker Relationship in a Small Country', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 20, no. 1 (2021): 27.

to better sell their product? The first generation of scholars who engaged these questions in the 1980s were broadly categorised as “traditionalists” and “activists”.⁵ The former argued in favour of separation of the two whilst the latter encouraged greater proximity between them. The traditionalists date back to the works of the legendary intelligence scholar Sherman Kent who argued that separation of intelligence and policy was required to maintain “objectivity and integrity of judgement”.⁶

The activists, on the other hand, were more concerned with the utility of intelligence than with analytical objectivity. To them, regardless of the ills of politicisation, it was necessary that the intelligence services and policymakers worked in tandem. Policymakers are generally observed to turn down intelligence owing to two reasons.⁷ The foremost reason is a disappointing experience in the past with intelligence agencies. The second reason lies in the disruptive potential of the intelligence product due to its conclusions running contrary to the consumer’s views.⁸ When this happens, if the consumer is also a subject matter expert the chances of accepting intelligence reduces further. The generic riposte offered by intelligence officials revolves around the unrealistic expectations of the consumers, optimism of the consumers that sits uncomfortably with the scepticism of intelligence, and finally, the policymakers’ belief that the analyst is divorced from the contextual realities that drive decision-making.⁹ In order to overcome these challenges, it is suggested that intelligence and policymakers work together.

⁵ Philip H.J. Davies, ‘All in Good Faith? Proximity, Politicization and Malaysia’s External Intelligence Organization’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 32, no. 4 (2019): 709.

⁶ Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 180.

⁷ John McLaughlin, ‘Serving the National Policymaker’, in Roger Z. George, *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles and Innovations*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 71-74.

⁸ Uri-Bar Joesph, ‘The Politicization of Intelligence: A Comparative Study’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 26, no. 2 (2013): 356.

⁹ James A. Steinberg, ‘The Policymaker’s Perspective: Transparency and Partnership’, in Roger Z. George, *Analyzing Intelligence: Origins, Obstacles and Innovations*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 83.

Notwithstanding the merits of the arguments of the first-generation scholars, one of the serious drawbacks in their studies was the exclusive focus on the US. The second generation of scholarship, in the 21st century, approached the issue of ‘proximity’ through cross-cultural analyses. Stephen Marrin, for instance, observed that the differences in the degree of proximity in the US and the UK “can be attributable to variations in the decision-making cultures”.¹⁰ Marrin used the concept of social institutionalism as a framework to suggest that organisations undergo a process of cultural adaptation to secure legitimacy, even if their efficiency is somewhat compromised. This was visible in the US intelligence agencies adapting to a competitive culture whereas their British counterparts sustained greater proximity to the policymakers by virtue of Britain’s consensual decision-making culture. In his final analysis, Marrin found that the “idealistic objectivity” demanded of the analyst was almost unachievable, the communication gap created as a result of distance was unnecessary, and as a result, an American equivalent of the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was desirable.¹¹

Although Marrin’s cross-cultural analysis did yield significant results, it still suffered from an ethnocentric trap. This was identified by scholar Philip Davies wherein he argued that the concern that scholars exhibited towards politicisation was “largely an artifact of intelligence in developed, stable liberal democracies”.¹² Davies attributed this to theoretical assumptions, which are largely based on a rigid demarcation between democratic and authoritarian polities, and an ethnocentrism that idealises “political culture and institutions of democracy” in states where they have existed for centuries.¹³ Therefore, the applicability of the results of ‘proximity’ in the British and American settings need not exhibit the same results in other

¹⁰ Stephen Marrin, ‘At Arm’s Length or At the Elbow? Explaining the distance between Analysts and Decisionmakers’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 20, no. 3 (2007): 401-414.

¹¹ Ibid, 409-411.

¹² Davies, ‘All in Good Faith?’, 694.

¹³ Ibid, 694-695.

decision-making cultures. This is borne out at least to a certain degree in recently produced works on South Korea and Sweden. In South Korea, proximity between intelligence and President Syngman Rhee ended disastrously with the assassination of the latter. In a military culture that respected the chain of command, the emerging proximity between the president and the Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) caused disgruntlement among CIC members and other military personnel leading to the elimination of Rhee.¹⁴ Sweden, on the other hand, operating initially on the principle of distance, soon discovered that greater proximity through oral briefings helped buy the attention of policymakers.¹⁵ Scholar Michael Fredholm thereby refers to the intelligence profession as “show business” and the “briefer had to display the manners of a successful showman”.¹⁶

In addition to decision-making cultures, there are also psychological impulses that determine the acceptability or rejection of intelligence. In this regard, the works of Uri Bar-Joseph and Rose McDermott clearly stand out.¹⁷ Drawing their analysis on the basis of an empirical study of six cases – Operation Barbarossa, the Battle for Moscow, the outbreak of the Korean War, the Chinese intervention of fall 1950, the Yom Kippur surprise, and the successful intelligence warning of October 12 in the middle of the Yom Kippur War – the two scholars reveal how the psychological factors of the decision-makers like narcissism or openness can impact the intelligence-policy relationship.¹⁸ In their analysis, it was the lessons learnt from the initial failures that increased receptivity and generated successes later.¹⁹ Therefore, as the literature review suggests, there are multi-layered influences on determining the intelligence-policy relationship in a nation at any given point in time. As a normative theory of intelligence-policy

¹⁴ Hyesoo Seo, ‘Intelligence Politicization in the Republic of Korea: Implications for Reform’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 31, no. 3 (2018): 453.

¹⁵ Fredholm, ‘Briefing the Swedish Policymaker’, 41.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 42.

¹⁷ Uri Bar-Joseph and Rose McDermott, *Intelligence Success and Failure: The Human Factor*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 27-48.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

relationship continues to evade scholars, it is clear that examinations of the theme in different cultural settings is the best way forward. In the remainder of this article, an attempt is made to ask why proximity became a factor in Indian intelligence-policy relationship during the Nehru years and what was its net effect. The next section begins from the consumer's point of view by examining Nehru's understanding of the intelligence profession and his interactions with it.

Colonial Experiences and Nehru's Intelligence Literacy

A theoretical appreciation of the intelligence profession, along with any personal experiences, shape how much of an intelligence literate an individual or a government is. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's education and life experiences as well as his era shaped how he thought about and engaged with intelligence. Although the focus of this article is Nehru, it is instructive to focus for a moment on another prominent personality, Sardar Patel, since it was under him that the IB operated from 1946, until his demise in 1950. Compared to Nehru, Patel emerges as a true enthusiast of intelligence.

Nehru's approach to intelligence was one of aversion, which can be attributed to three distinct reasons. First and foremost was Nehru's personal experience as a target of the colonial intelligence.²⁰ Being exposed first-hand to the travails of evading constant surveillance mounted by the colonial intelligence apparatus, a sense of disgust for secret organisations had developed within Nehru.²¹ Secondly, his distaste for operational secrecy was matched by his admiration for openness and transparency, which according to him was epitomised by the Indian National Congress (INC) – the organisation Nehru belonged to during the freedom struggle.²² The third factor that determined Nehru's interaction with the intelligence agencies

²⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 379.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire*, (New York: The Overlook Press, 2014), 131.

was his own intellect. A tremendous faith in his own intellectual abilities to understand the world and make decisions accordingly precluded his effective use of intelligence services.²³

For Patel, who was the chief organiser and a hardcore realist, intelligence was an essential part of the INC's functioning. At least dating back to the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928), Patel is known to have maintained a network of informers deep inside the British government system.²⁴ Realising the value of information for effective decision-making, Patel knew that an organised intelligence setup was inevitable if the Congress had to secure "maximum power after the British faded from the scene".²⁵ Therefore, when the interim government was formed in 1946, against the worst fears of the British authorities regarding the future of the colonial IB, Patel chose not to destroy the organisation. Instead, Patel proved his mettle as a leader in employing the IB to track political opponents with Norman Smith, a British officer, as its director yet denying information to the British on its activities.²⁶ In the immediate aftermath of independence, intelligence once again played a critical role in aiding Patel's negotiations with the princely rulers towards the mammoth task of nation building.²⁷ With such rich experience with the profession, Patel understood the utility and limitations of intelligence and was deeply involved in strengthening both the organisational and operational capabilities of the IB.²⁸ Bereft of such experience, Nehru remained largely ignorant of the nature of intelligence, which were seen on multiple occasions during the early years of independence. On all these occasions,

²³ This would become one of the main causes for the India's flawed policies towards China prior to 1962. Prem Mahadevan, 'The Failure of Indian Intelligence in the Sino-Indian Conflict', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 8, no. 1 (2008): 6-7.

²⁴ Hindol Sengupta, *The Man Who Saved India: Sardar Patel and his Idea of India*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2018), 69.

²⁵ Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*, (London: Harper Collins, 1997), 257.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 258.

²⁷ Buta Singh, 'Paramountcy, princes and Sardar Patel (1858-1947)', Shodhganga : a Reservoir of Indian Theses, 19 May 2011, accessed November 21, 2020, <https://sg.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/2085>

²⁸ 'Home Minister's Address at the Conference of the Provincial Premiers and Home Minister held at Delhi on the 22nd, 23rd Nov 1947. Lunch by Home Minister', Ministry of Home Affairs, File No. 106/47-P.S., Sardar Patel Papers, National Archives of India (Henceforth NAI).

detailed below, the IB required the support of Patel to defend the organisation, and thereby, ensure its survival.

Nehru's intelligence illiteracy is best expressed through the events that transpired between 1947 and 1950 where repeated annoyance with the intelligence delivered to him was the order of the day. To him, intelligence meant omnipotence and omnipresence, a misunderstanding that became visible as early as 1947. In connection to the civil unrest in Rawalpindi in May, Nehru declared to Evan Jenkins, the Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer in charge of the Punjab region, that the "official intelligence systems were bad".²⁹ Taken aback by this comment, Jenkins had retorted that no one, including the local minority Sikh leaders, had any hint about the upcoming troubles.³⁰ Adding to such ignorance of the limits of intelligence was also Nehru's strong faith in his own ability to read the situation. Nehru's intelligence chief B.N. Mullik mentions in his memoir that on at least four different occasions the IB's assessments were rejected as blatant exaggerations.³¹ The events in question were – the RSS trouble in the winter of 1948-49;³² the All India Railway Strike in March 1949; the Nepali Congress' struggle to overthrow the Ranas in 1950; and the working of the Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact in East Pakistan in 1950. On all these occasions, according to Mullik, it was Patel and the Home Secretary H. V. R. Iyengar, who initially came to the IB's rescue.³³

²⁹ 'Evan Jenkins record of interview with Nehru', 30 May 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)* 2(2), 310.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ B.N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1972, 57.

³² The years 1948-1949 were particularly turbulent for the RSS as the organisation was banned in February 1948 and M.S. Golwalkar, its chief, was arrested in December. Following his arrest, the RSS had planned a Satyagraha that continued well into the early months of 1949. Although Nehru had initially turned down the IB's assessments, in this instance, it can be found that he changed his views on receiving information from his private sources in Delhi and elsewhere. 'Note to the Home Ministry', 5 December 1948, SWJN 2(8), 128.

³³ The empirical details of how the IB was rescued by Patel and the Home Secretary in other instances can only be realized following the opening up of Indian intelligence archives. The author could only gather from interviews with former intelligence officers that the strong personalities of Patel and Iyengar helped the IB overcome the resistance posed by Nehru. However, Mullik's recounting of Nehru's misunderstanding of intelligence is in fact a continuation of the latter's intelligence illiteracy that is evident since 1947. In addition to the episode with Evan Jenkins noted above there was also a time when Nehru accused intelligence agencies of failure, following the communal incidents in Delhi. Patel defended the agency by drawing Nehru's attention

That Nehru would reject the IB's assessment owing to his *weltanschauung*, and the IB would rely on the interference of Patel, can be fathomed from at least one important study on the events leading to the signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact in 1950. Zorawar Singh-Daulet has established that Nehru's choices were "largely consistent with his worldview with little deviation from his basic foreign policy approach".³⁴ Within the context of the events leading to the signing of the pact, which entailed a series of arguments and disagreements between Nehru and Patel, with the former threatening resignation on two occasions, Zorawar asserts that "Nehru's beliefs constrained alternative policy choices that were fundamentally incongruent with his role conception for India as peacemaker".³⁵ Thus, deeply-rooted in his own presumed abilities to foresee events, it is unsurprising that Nehru disregarded the IB's assessments. However, Mullik has pointed out that as events unfolded, Nehru conceded that his own assessments were wrong and that his accusation of exaggeration in the intelligence reports were baseless.³⁶ It was not only Nehru's intellect, it was also his disdain for British colonial institutions that made him suspicious of the IB. His suspicion was that the IB had merely been forwarding analysis it had procured from the British intelligence.³⁷

Following these initial blunders, Nehru changed the way he processed intelligence. Part of this change was influenced by the 'proximity' that developed between Nehru and the DIB, which will be examined in the next section. But the change did not mean a reformed keenness for intelligence. Instead, two trends emerged during the 50s – firstly, his exaggerated faith in his intellect over intelligence assessments did not reduce remarkably; as is evident in the steadily

to the difference between intelligence failure and response failure. 'Jawaharlal Nehru to Sardar', 6 October 1947, 495; 'Sardar to Jawaharlal Nehru', 11 October 1947, 501.

³⁴ Zorawar Daulet-Singh, *Power and Diplomacy: India's Foreign Policies during the Cold War*, (Oxford: OUP, 2019), 73.

³⁵ Ibid, 91.

³⁶ Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, 57.

³⁷ Ibid.

condescending tone that is maintained throughout in his correspondence with other ministers.³⁸ One may argue that the reason for Nehru's rejection of intelligence on grounds of exaggeration or error is to avoid a 'commitment trap'.³⁹ However, such explanations notwithstanding, the outcome is bound to be a policy failure with the causation being the policymaker's wishful thinking. The second trend that emerged was that Nehru realised the value of intelligence in domestic politics.⁴⁰ His incarceration of Sheikh Abdullah of Jammu and Kashmir (in 1953), and his dismissal of the communist government in Kerala led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad (in 1959) are cases in point. The combined consequence of these trends was that the IB began to grow as a police organisation, while its core functions such as foreign intelligence and military intelligence analysis were dealt a blow. Drawing Nehru's attention to these areas required a massive strategic surprise, which came via the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

The IB had submitted its first report in 1950 on the aggressive intentions of Mao's China, which was seconded by Patel and the foreign secretary.⁴¹ Nehru, however, had rejected the assessment of China's expansionist tendencies as an expression of the agency's naïveté, and he was supported in this by the Indian ambassador in Beijing.⁴² Driven by his own worldview, the Panchasheel Agreement was signed in 1954 with no consultation with the IB.⁴³ Even as chief ministers of the bordering states repeatedly appealed to Nehru with intelligence reports of China's aggressive behaviour, the latter turned them down by accusing the intelligence officers and their assessments as unnecessarily alarmist and imaginary.⁴⁴ In 1957, when China

³⁸ Browsing through the correspondences between Nehru and other leaders, it becomes evident that intelligence reports are consistently mocked as misleading, trivial, exaggerated, vague, off the mark and so on. For a brief list, see: 'To Sri Krishna Sinha', 2 September 1948, *SWJN* 2(7), 14.; 'Nehru to Foreign Secretary', 30 October 1957, *SWJN* 2(39), 303.; 'Nehru to C. Rajagopalachari', 1 June 1951, *SWJN* 2(16-1), 636.; 'Nehru to Patel', 1 December 1950, *Sardar Patel Correspondences* (10), 463.

³⁹ This possibility was brought to the author's notice by one of the reviewers.

⁴⁰ 'Patel to Rajagopalachari', *SPC* (10), 462-463.

⁴¹ B.N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal*, (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1972), 110.

⁴² Arun Shourie, *Self-Deception: India's China Policies Origins, Premises, Lessons*, (London: Harper Collins, 2013), 64.

⁴³ Shiv Kunal Verma, *1962: The War that Wasn't*, (New Delhi: Adelphe Book Company, 2016), 13.

⁴⁴ 'Nehru to B.C. Roy', 16 November 1950, *SWJN* 2(15-1), 342.

inaugurated the highway between Sinkiang and Tibet, which passed through Indian territory, the Indian mission in China failed to report on it while the IB was the only organisation to have had at least some inkling of the road construction.⁴⁵ Finally, as conflict became obvious, it was in September 1961 that Nehru tasked the IB to produce a report on the Chinese intentions. With little institutional development and lacking human and technical capabilities required for foreign intelligence, the IB failed to accurately foresee the PLA's offensive in October-November 1962. The surprise attack is believed to have had a huge toll on Nehru's health. Insofar as intelligence was concerned, his aversion to secret means was wholly destroyed; leading to the first serious intelligence reforms since Patel's death in December 1950, which gave birth to the Directorate General of Security (DGS), comprising of the Special Service Bureau (SSB), the Special Frontier Force (SFF) and the Aviation Research Centre (ARC).

‘Proximity’: A Survival Tactic

In 1950, B.N. Mullik was appointed as the DIB, and with the approval of Patel, Mullik decided to meet Nehru every Saturday with intelligence reports. This, it was believed, would help alleviate the prejudice that Nehru had against intelligence.⁴⁶ After the death of Patel, when Rajagopalachari - another supporter and enthusiast of intelligence - became the home minister, Mullik continued the practice of keeping in regular contact with Nehru. What ensued for the next fourteen years (1950-1964) was a close relationship between Mullik and Nehru, the longest relationship between a prime minister and an intelligence chief in independent India. It is this special relationship that has been dubbed as sycophancy by observers.⁴⁷ If anything, this comment is a reflection of the need for a critical analysis of Mullick, arguably one of the most understudied personalities in contemporary Indian history. This section shall endeavour to

⁴⁵ Mullik, *The Chinese Betrayal*, 198-199.

⁴⁶ Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, 58.

⁴⁷ Y.D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives*, (Bombay: Sangam Books, 1984), 212.; K.S. Subramanian, *Political Violence and the Police in India*, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 84.

provide a perspective to the ‘proximity’ tactic Mullik developed, and the ‘benign subservience’ he observed with Nehru in order to build and sustain a workable intelligence-policy relationship.

In his memoir, Mullik justifies the ‘proximity’ tactic as a way of diluting the prejudice that Nehru nurtured against intelligence.⁴⁸ However, this does not explain the benign subservience, or in the worst case, the sycophancy that came to define Nehru-Mullik relationship. In order to understand the rationale for proximity and the value of subservience in the intelligence-policy relationship in India, it is necessary to examine the short-lived career of Mullik’s predecessor, T.G. Sanjeevi. Sanjeevi was a police officer from the erstwhile Madras province with a brief stint in the provincial police’s intelligence division (1939-1942).⁴⁹ When the pressures of decolonisation and nation building were at its peak, Patel hand-picked Sanjeevi to rebuild the IB – an organisation that was severely weakened due to partition.⁵⁰ At that point, Anwar Ahmad, the senior most IB officer chose Pakistani citizenship and carried with him every file of importance.⁵¹ Much of the IB’s workforce also migrated to Pakistan leaving behind only a skeletal structure. In pursuit of strengthening the Indian IB, Sanjeevi was faced with two principal challenges – bureaucratic and political. On the bureaucratic front, the challenges were that of finance, manpower, and allocation of other resources, which required the approval of other ministries.⁵² Sanjeevi adroitly managed these bureaucratic obstacles, partly by his own genius and partly due to Patel’s interference in managing inter-departmental turf battles,

⁴⁸ Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, 58.

⁴⁹ Howard Donovan, ‘Biographic Data: Tirupattur Gangadharam Pillai Sanjevi Pillai’, May 16, 1949, Office of South Asian Affairs: India Affairs 1944-57, RG-59, US National Archives.

⁵⁰ ‘Telegram 225’, 23 March 1947, *SPC* (5), 209.

⁵¹ L.P. Sen, *Slender Was the Thread: Kashmir Confrontation 1947-48*, (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1969), 19.

⁵² ‘IB Memorandum No. 26/Ests/47(9)’, October 31, 1947, NAI, Home Department, Repository-II, File No. 70/13/47-Appth.; ‘IB Memorandum No. 30/Est/50 (1)’, 1950, NAI, Home Department, Repository-II, File No: 40/36/50.

especially with the Ministry of Finance.⁵³ What was more difficult to contend was the political challenge.

At an interpersonal level, Sanjeevi failed to develop an amicable relationship with Nehru. This was purely a consequence of his honesty and uprightness. In 1949, Sanjeevi had received a mandate from the Government of India to study the federal police systems and domestic intelligence services in foreign countries, for which he was given approval to tour several western capitals – Geneva, Berne, London, Cairo, New York, Washington and Ottawa.⁵⁴ On visiting London, Sanjeevi met Krishna Menon, the Indian High Commissioner in London, renowned for his leftist sympathies. At a time when New Delhi was engaged in fighting communist uprisings in several parts of the country, Menon accused Sanjeevi's organisation of barbarism and disapproved of the reliance on anti-communism as a link in Indo-British relations.⁵⁵ Subsequently, Sanjeevi drafted a report on his meeting with Menon highlighting the latter's communist leanings. The report caused considerable irritation among senior Congress leaders, including Patel, Morarji Desai, Maulana Azad and others. Nehru, however, chose to protect Menon – a close friend – by blaming the condition of his health.⁵⁶ Sanjeevi's report greatly irked Nehru and Menon. Matters became worse when Sanjeevi visited Washington and failed to report to the Indian Ambassador in Washington, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit – Nehru's sister.⁵⁷ Sanjeevi felt that technical work required no protocols. Whatever be the case, all these developments led to Sanjeevi's premature departure from the IB in July 1950. At the time of his departure, Sanjeevi had remarkably improved the IB's domestic intelligence

⁵³ 'IB Memorandum No. 26/Ests/47(7)', November 26, 1947, NAI, Home Department, Repository-II, File No. 70/13/47-Appth.

⁵⁴ 'Deputation of Mr. T.G. Sanjevi I.P. Director, Intelligence Bureau', 1949, NAI, Home Department, Repository-II, File No: 40/21/49.

⁵⁵ 'DIB's Report on Mr V.K Krishna Menon', 1949, NAI, Home Department, File No. DIB DO 2/49.

⁵⁶ 'Nehru's Letter to Patel', 1949, NAI, Sardar Patel Private Papers, File No. 2/301.

⁵⁷ 'Deputation of Mr. T.G. Sanjevi I.P. Director, Intelligence Bureau', 1949, NAI, Home Department, Repository-II, File No: 40/21/49, 25.

capabilities. On the foreign intelligence front, however, much was left to be desired. Between 1947 and 1950, three officers were posted to Pakistan, France and Germany without Nehru's knowledge.⁵⁸ Sanjeevi had also utilised his visit to Washington to study the CIA and had drafted a report to guide the IB's foreign intelligence division. Following his departure from the IB, however, the report was, according to Kulkarni, 'completely ignored'.⁵⁹

On the whole, Sanjeevi's good intentions in strengthening the IB and his rectitude as an intelligence chief were insufficient conditions in a political setting where, barring the Home Minister, support was less forthcoming. This lesson was well absorbed by his successor, Mullik, who sought 'proximity' as a tactic to impress upon Nehru the nature of the work that the IB did. He was also aware that the loss of Patel from the political scene meant that the sole authority that had ensured the IB's survival was now gone.⁶⁰ Thus, in addition to maintaining 'proximity' with Nehru, Mullik also followed a policy of 'benign subservience' to study the Prime Minister's mind and behave accordingly. As recollected by Major General D.K. Palit, former Director General of Military Operations (DGMO), "except in the presence of Nehru, where he [Mullik] would be deferential and compliant, he exuded an aura of self-command and authority".⁶¹ Objectively speaking, Mullik, an absolute workaholic and an honest intelligence officer, adopted 'proximity' and 'benign subservience' not out of a personality trait that denotes 'sycophancy', but a strategy to ensure organisational survival, and by extension to

⁵⁸ R.N. Kulkarni, *Sin of National Conscience*, (Mysore: Kritagnya Publications, 2004), 368.

⁵⁹ The ignorance of the report can be partly attributed to the operational culture prevailing in the Indian intelligence, which one intelligence officer termed – the 'predecessor syndrome'. According to this theory, the incoming chief largely undoes the decisions taken by the previous chief. Whatever be the reasons for this, one of the driving causes is the lack of political direction, which puts the onus of 'tasking, direction and reform' on the intelligence chiefs. Thus, where Sanjeevi saw the CIA as an organisation to replicate, Mullik preferred strengthening the IB's capabilities by building liaisons with the MI5 and the CIA. Knowing Nehru's prejudices towards foreign intelligence, Mullik arguably found it better to build relationships with western agencies using inter-personal connections rather than attempt organisational reforms that could prove unsuccessful. Ibid.; Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, 208.; Personal Interview with a former R&AW Special Secretary, 22 September 2018.

⁶⁰ Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, 59.

⁶¹ D.K. Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, (London: Hurst and Company, 1991), 163.

advance and protect national security. This tactic brought with it both pros and cons, which will be the subject of inquiry in the next section.

‘Proximity’ and Politicisation: A Cost-Benefit Analysis

In his study on purges of intelligence services, John A. Gentry identifies three key motives – major performance problems; insubordination and disloyalty; and ideological impurity.⁶² So far as the IB was concerned, the existence of performance problems was natural, given its infancy and an over-stretched mandate covering internal, external and military threats.⁶³ Yet it is hard to accuse the agency of any major failures, except the 1962 war, which was partly caused due to optimistic consumers – Nehru, Krishna Menon (Defence Minister) – ignoring the agency’s warnings for over a decade. The other two factors – insubordination and ideological impurity – were clearly an issue, since Sanjeevi’s enthusiasm for the intelligence profession was not matched by Nehru. Additionally, Mullik, despite his close relationship with Nehru, was known as a right-winger among Nehru’s close circles.⁶⁴ In such a scenario, purges seem natural, with the unintended consequences of harming effectiveness and counterintelligence. Mullik sought to anticipate and prevent a purge through ‘proximity’, which is its foremost advantage. Proximity effectively allowed Mullik to escape the fate of his predecessor.

The second advantage that ‘proximity’ offered was in terms of expanding the IB’s organisational capabilities. For instance, in September 1952, Nehru approved the establishment of Security Liaison Units (SLU) in London to monitor Pakistani activities.⁶⁵ This is one of the episodes that could potentially convince observers of Nehru’s presumed enthusiasm for

⁶² John A. Gentry, ‘Purges of Intelligence Services: Motives, Methods and Consequences’, *Journal of Intelligence History*, (2021): 2-7.

⁶³ The Himmatsinghji Committee organised in 1951 recommended that strategic military intelligence also be made the IB’s responsibility. See: ‘The Himmatsinghji Committee Report’, August 10, 2012, accessed November 23, 2020, <https://claudearpi.blogspot.com/2012/08/the-himmatsinghji-committee-report.html>

⁶⁴ Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 25.

⁶⁵ ‘Nehru to B.G. Kher’, 9 September 1952, SWJN 2(19), 632-634.

intelligence. However, understanding this development requires deeper reading of this episode. The single biggest factor that compelled Nehru to approve the establishment of the SLU was to avoid reliance on British intelligence. As mentioned above, in the interim years (1947-1950), Nehru's dismissiveness of the IB's reports owed to his belief that they were a product of British intelligence. He had nurtured a deep sense of animosity towards colonial institutions, especially the British intelligence, and did not want any "tie-up between [India's] intelligence and any other foreign intelligence, including UK intelligence".⁶⁶ Mullik, being aware of this concern, possibly a direct consequence of 'proximity', was able to impress upon Nehru the need to post an Indian officer in London to monitor Pakistani defence purchases.

Another instance where 'proximity' allowed Mullik to influence Nehru's decision was on the question of Tibetan resistance in the 1950s. Nehru was completely against covert operations and did not want the IB to get involved in any kind of secret mission against the Chinese.⁶⁷ Owing to his concerns that the Tibetans should not use India as an operational base, Nehru approved Mullik's request to establish links with Gyalo Thondup, brother of the Dalai Lama. This allowed Mullik to secretly allow limited training for the Tibetans aimed at creating an informer network within Tibet.⁶⁸ But more importantly, when Nehru approved the creation of the DGS in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War, these connections had allowed Mullik to lay groundwork for such an organisation and, hence, the DGS was established at an astonishing speed.⁶⁹

The third and the most important advantage of the 'proximity' tactic was observed in the formulation of intelligence assessments and increasing the chances of receptivity. Intelligence

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival*, (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), 121.

⁶⁸ Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire: North-east India*, (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1996), 27.

⁶⁹ Personal interview with a former Special Service Bureau (SSB) officer, January 26, 2019.

scholar Prem Mahadevan has noted that “Mullik’s foresight and acumen in bringing about this arrangement [proximity] meant that chances of intelligence failure occurring due to lack of high-level dissemination were reduced”.⁷⁰ Mahadevan’s observation is accurate and can be validated by the fact that Nehru, despite his condescendence towards the intelligence reports, could never accuse the agencies of failing to report on strategic issues. Mullik had ensured that, whatever Nehru’s own views were, the assessments of the IB were nevertheless reaching the prime minister. In addition to dissemination, drafting of the agency’s reports was also eased by understanding the political leaderships’ thoughts. Understanding the prime minister’s biases, prejudices, world views, enabled the IB to draft its assessments in an open-ended fashion.⁷¹ Thereby, the IB continued to retain its objectivity whilst respecting the political leadership’s role as an analyst.⁷²

The biggest failure of the ‘proximity’ tactic was that it did not achieve entirely its intended outcome. There was indeed an incremental acceptance of intelligence by Nehru. Significant intelligence coups, such as intercepting Moscow’s communications with the Indian communists in May and October 1951 were appreciated.⁷³ But in domains such as foreign intelligence, proximity proved less than a potent force to eradicate Nehru’s extraordinary confidence in his intellect. As noted above, Mullik could use Nehru’s anxieties regarding cooperation with the British intelligence to expand the IB’s network to cover Pakistan’s activities. This was also partly aided by Pakistan’s overt expression of antagonism towards India. Nevertheless, similar expressions were not available elsewhere, as in the case of China. The development of foreign intelligence capability completely hinged on Nehru’s own

⁷⁰ Prem Mahadevan, *The Politics of Counterterrorism in India: Strategic Intelligence and National Security in South Asia*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 29.

⁷¹ According to Mahadevan, this trend grew stronger once regime protection gained prominence under Indira Gandhi in 1974. Ibid, 242.

⁷² Stephen Marrin, ‘Why Strategic Intelligence Analysis has Limited Influence on American Foreign Policy’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 32, no. 6 (2017): 727.

⁷³ Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: 1948-1964*, 61.

assessment of the intentions of international actors, which were generally positive.⁷⁴ Ironically, despite Nehru's quest to avoid relying on western intelligence, mainly British, for intelligence, his own reluctance to develop the IB's foreign intelligence capabilities against China had caused the IB to greatly rely on the British agencies. However, due to the presence of Krishna Menon, the Americans deciding against cooperating with India, and Washington had also directed the British to exercise restraint.⁷⁵ In such a scenario, 'proximity' as a tactic had little value and Mullik had to await a major disaster like the 1962 war to insist on the need for reforms. The war played a crucial role in both eliminating Nehru's ignorance of the real need for intelligence in statecraft, as well as humbling the arrogance of Nehru. That the DGS was created as a consequence goes to prove John A. Gentry's observation that "major intelligence failures often are 'punished' by granting budget increases".⁷⁶

Closely related to the first failure is the second drawback in the 'proximity' tactic. In the absence of political interest in intelligence matters, intelligence reforms totally relied on the wisdom and capabilities of the intelligence managers of the IB, which presented the logical challenge of bureaucratic politics. To make sense of this, it is necessary to understand the IB's recruitment pattern during the Nehru era. In order to draw the best talent and command respect for the organisation, Sanjeevi and Patel had decided that the DIB would be the senior-most police officer in the country, drawing a monthly salary of 3,500 rupees. To further strengthen the quality of manpower, Mullik devised a recruitment strategy known as the Ear-Marking Scheme (EMS). Accordingly, the top-ranking officers in the Annual Conference Reports of the Indian Police Service (IPS) officers submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs would be absorbed into the IB as Class-1 officers.⁷⁷ With a monetary incentive of 100 rupees (per

⁷⁴ Personal interview with former Indian Home Secretary, R.D. Pradhan, 14 November 2018.

⁷⁵ 'Sino-Indian Hostilities', 1962, DEFE 4/149, Joint Intelligence Committee, UK National Archives: Kew, London.

⁷⁶ Gentry, 'Purges of Intelligence Services', 19.

⁷⁷ Personal interview with a former R&AW Special Secretary, 22 September 2018.

month), the EMS ensured that the IB drew the best talent from the elite IPS.⁷⁸ Notwithstanding the advantages accrued by the EMS, it caused some problems with other bureaucracies that could have been effectively managed through the positive interference of the political leadership. For instance, the mandate for covering strategic military intelligence could not have been fulfilled by the IB, since its cadres were completely oblivious to military knowledge. When the IB's civilian analysts were sent to the military academy for training during the early 1950s, the experiment failed due to an argument over the allocation of military rank equivalent to the civilians, which would have effectively threatened the IPS' supremacy.⁷⁹ In the interest of national security, such bureaucratic politics require the interference of the political leadership. However, with an apathetic political leader, 'proximity' served little value in overcoming bureaucratic obstacles.

The combination of political disinterest and bureaucratic politics in the Nehru era had its negative impact on two other areas – foreign intelligence organisation and all-source assessment. The biggest irony of the Nehru era in terms of intelligence is that India lacked a dedicated foreign intelligence agency, even as it became the creator of the Foreign Service Research Bureau (FSRB) – Ghana's foreign intelligence agency. In his note to Nehru outlining the plan for Ghana's intelligence setup, Mullik wrote: "Unlike an Indian state which has got no external responsibility, Ghana will have to collect external intelligence".⁸⁰ Given that the note was to be shared with Ghanaian Prime Minister Nkrumah, it is plausible that Mullik's denial of the existence of the SLU in London was deliberate. However, observing the overall strength of the foreign intelligence setup under Nehru, Mullik's comments are not completely off the mark. Referring to a 1956 speech given by Nehru on the topic 'World Scenario and National Security' in which he argued that border countries needed to be the target of Indian

⁷⁸ Personal interview with former Secretary (Research) A.S. Dulat, 18 October 2018.

⁷⁹ Kulkarni, *Sin of National Conscience*, 97-98.

⁸⁰ 'A Security Service for Ghana', Mullik to Nehru, 5 June 1957, *J.N. Papers*, SECRET, 536/Pt.1, NAI.

intelligence, observers tend to misconstrue foreign intelligence as an essential component of Nehru's policymaking.⁸¹ But the fact is that Pakistan was the sole target of foreign intelligence, which, as noted above, was an obvious threat that required monitoring.⁸² As an institution, foreign intelligence never took off effectively under Nehru. During the days of Sanjeevi, a single desk was tasked with covering foreign intelligence, which only grew marginally under Mullik.⁸³ It was only in September 1968 that a dedicated foreign intelligence agency – the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) – was created owing to an executive order by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.⁸⁴

All-source assessment in India was the responsibility of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) – another colonial inheritance. However, given Nehru's political disinterest in intelligence and the lack of a Mullik-style leader in the JIC, the agency could not find its true position within the decision-making structure. For practical purposes, the JIC was considered as a 'defunct organisation', not only by its Chairman but also by some observers.⁸⁵ The 'proximity' tactic that strengthened the IB's position significantly weakened the position of the JIC. The latter has developed a reputation of a parking space for unwanted bureaucrats.⁸⁶ The silver lining

⁸¹ 'World Scenario and National Security', 13 March 1956, *SWJN* 2(32), 489-498.; Paliwal, 'Colonial Sinews of Postcolonial Espionage', 6.

⁸² With no direction from the political leadership, the burden of tasking and targeting fell entirely on the shoulders of the intelligence chiefs. Sanjeevi had prioritized Pakistan and Europe whilst Mullik selected India's 'limitrophe' countries as main targets. This included neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal and Burma. However, since these countries did not pose a visible threat like Pakistan or pose an ideological threat like communism, policymaking seldom relied on intelligence. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru*, 77-82.; Nair, *Inside IB and RAW*, 94.; Kulkarni, *Sin of National Conscience*, 368.

⁸³ Kulkarni, *Sin of National Conscience*, 368.

⁸⁴ There are varying interpretations on the real motive for the creation of the R&AW. For the two differing interpretations, see Nitin A. Gokhale, *R.N. Kao: Gentleman Spymaster*, (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2019).; Jairam Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N Haksar and Indira Gandhi*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

⁸⁵ K.L. Mehta, *In Different Worlds: From Haveli to Head Hunters of Tuensang*, (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1985), 168.; K. Subrahmanyam, 'Nehru and the India-China Conflict of 1962', in B.R. Nanda, *Indian Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years*, (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976), 123.

⁸⁶ A former chairman of the JIC told this author that the only time the JIC had been effective was under the leadership of K. Subrahmanyam – a renowned bureaucrat and a strategic thinker. This, once again, proves the argument of this article that 'proximity' and strong leadership are critical factors in Indian intelligence-policy relationship. Personal interview with a former JIC chairman, 24 October 2018.

here is that purged intelligence officials have always had an organisation to find them a new placement.⁸⁷

Conclusion

This article aimed to understand the utility of ‘proximity’ as a tool of politicisation in post-independence Nehru’s India. To date, Nehru is India’s longest serving prime minister whilst Mullik is the longest serving intelligence chief. To outsiders, Mullik appeared a ‘sycophant’ while intelligence professionals to this day consider Mullik as the ‘father of Indian intelligence’. The narrative offered above clearly suggests that ‘proximity’ was used in a positive sense to generate acceptability of intelligence, whilst avoiding organisational and individual purges. Despite being a liberal democracy in this period, India’s top political office generally exuded authoritarian tendencies.⁸⁸ This has required a degree of subservience by all officials who occupy top positions, with the intelligence services being no exception.⁸⁹ Mullik established the tradition of clubbing professional honesty with realism. The mantra that was generated as a result was “say, but do not insist”.⁹⁰ This has been observed in several instances during India’s contemporary history. Some notable examples include, R.N. Kao’s disapproval of the Emergency and the Khalistan conspiracy,⁹¹ S.E. Joshi’s disbelief in the potential of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord to succeed,⁹² and the R&AW’s doubts regarding the prospects of

⁸⁷ The best illustration of this can be seen in 1987 with the appointment of Govindarajan, the then Additional Secretary of R&AW, as the Chairman JIC. As a result of the fallout between Govindarajan and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi over the handling of the Bofors scandal, the former was denied the position of Secretary (R) – chief of R&AW – and instead made the chairman of JIC. Coomi Kapoor, ‘Inside Track: Maintaining Secrecy’, *The Indian Express*, June 26, 2016, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rahul-gandhi-kerala-gst-bill-raghuram-rajan-chhattisgarh-ajit-jogi-2876174/>

⁸⁸ K. Subrahmanyam, *Shedding Shibboleths: India’s Evolving Strategic Outlook*, (New Delhi: Wordsmith, 2005), 28.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ This represents a departure from colonial intelligence practices, which were marked by considerable debate and discussions within the Indian Civil Service between advocates and opponents of strong intelligence. See Dheeraj Paramesha Chaya, ‘Strategic Intelligence in India through the Case Studies of the 1962, 1971 and 1999 Wars’, (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2020), 300-301.

⁹¹ G.B.S. Sidhu, *The Khalistan Conspiracy*, (Noida: Harper Collins, 2020), 159.

⁹² Personal interview with a former R&AW Additional Secretary, 25 October 2018.

the peace initiative between India and Pakistan under Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee.⁹³ In all these instances, the agencies spoke the truth as they saw it. But they also knew well not to insist on the acceptance of their assessments.

Failing to do so has resulted in several purges. The best example is that of the resignation of Sankaran Nair and the dismissal of several officers from the R&AW in 1977.⁹⁴ The Janata government under Morarji Desai succumbed to the myth of the R&AW's role in the Emergency. The agency stood firm on its innocence and its guilt remains disproven to this day.⁹⁵ The IB, on the other hand, was not only involved in rounding up Indira Gandhi's political opponents during the Emergency, but also immediately chose to switch sides following the regime change.⁹⁶ Such practice of showing regime loyalty was etched in the IB during the Nehru years.

Although 'proximity' was developed primarily to generate Nehru's acceptance of intelligence, it has subsequently become a route for career advancement. The classic illustration of this is the dismissal of the communist government of E.M.S Namboodiripad in 1957. A young IPS officer named M.K. Narayanan, who had stood first in the police academy, earned his reputation in successfully unseating the Namboodiripad government.⁹⁷ In the later years, this officer became so close to the Nehru family that he was promoted as the DIB under Rajiv Gandhi (1987-1989) and as the National Security Adviser (NSA) during the tenure of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (widely believed to be a decision taken by Sonia Gandhi).⁹⁸ At no rate should this be taken as a derision of the officer's professional capability, given his

⁹³ Personal interview with former Secretary (Research) Vikram Sood, 22 October 2018.

⁹⁴ B. Raman, *The Kaoboy of R&AW: Down Memory Lane*, (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2013), 74.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 67.

⁹⁶ Mahadevan, *The Politics of Counterterrorism in India*, 245.

⁹⁷ Sanjaya Baru, *The Accidental Prime Minister: The Making and Unmaking of Manmohan Singh*, (New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2014), 38.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

outstanding reputation and career.⁹⁹ However, the fact that merit does not negate the necessity for ‘sycophancy’ makes India’s decision-making culture of a particular kind where ‘proximity’ has its advantages – both at an individual and organisational level.

This article has also highlighted how the concept of ‘proximity’ has produced varying outcomes in countries like the UK, US, Korea and Sweden, but has shown distinct results in the Indian context. Differences in individuals, regimes, decision-making cultures have varying impacts on how intelligence-policy relationships evolve. Most recently, the debates surrounding the ideal intelligence-policy relationship have been reignited in the US owing to the disputes between former President Donald Trump and the US intelligence community. Against the backdrop of these disputes, Richard K. Betts, an American intelligence scholar, appealed to uphold the principles of checks and balances in order to “save USA from the excesses of an ignorant, dishonest, impulsive and reckless president, whenever she or he may happen into office”.¹⁰⁰ Although Nehru may not entirely fit the description of a dishonest, impulsive and reckless leader, this article has argued that he was intelligence ignorant and intellectually arrogant. How Mullik navigated through these challenges should be of particular interest to intelligence scholars across the world and pave the way for future studies through critical analysis of intelligence-policy relationships in other non-western cultures.

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⁹⁹ M.K. Venu, ‘M.K. Narayanan: Bouncing Back Into Limelight’, *The Economic Times*, July 29, 2006, accessed November 29, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/mk-narayanan-bouncing-back-into-limelight/articleshow/1822942.cms>

¹⁰⁰ Richard K. Betts, ‘Professionalism, Politics and Truth’ in John A. Gentry, ‘An INS Special Forum: US Intelligence Officers Involvement in Political Activities in the Trump Era’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 35, no. 1 (2020): 1-19.

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