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“It is time for the British to act,” wrote William Phillips to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “words are of no avail.” In this private report Phillips, as the President’s personal representative to India, summarized his experiences and reactions to the four and a half months he spent touring wartime India under the rule of the British Government. Phillips came to the conclusion that all Indians had one goal: “freedom and independence from British domination.” Equally significant, Phillips reported:

“I feel strongly, Mr. President, that in view of our military position in India we should have a voice in these matters….If we do nothing and merely accept the British point of view that conditions in India are none of our business then we must be prepared for various serious consequences in the internal situation in India.” [[1]](#footnote--1)

Phillips believed that the British needed to actively demonstrate their commitment towards India’s independence. On an even deeper level, Phillips judged that not only did the United States had a legitimate right to have an opinion on the issue of Indian independence, but the U.S. also held a degree of responsibility for the potential increasing instability of India.

Phillips was entitled to share his opinion with President Roosevelt, and not only because of his title as the President’s personal representative. Phillips was a career diplomat and had been stationed in England, China, the Netherlands, Canada, and from 1936 to 1941 acted as the U.S. Ambassador to Italy. After he married the President’s second cousin Caroline Astor Drayton in 1910, Phillips was even a distant member of Roosevelt’s family.[[2]](#footnote-0) Both his professional and personal background made in natural for Phillips to express his views on the situation in India in a forthright and pointed manner. Yes, Roosevelt was Phillips’ superior, but he was also William Phillips’ friend. Roosevelt, however, did not end up being Phillips’ only audience. Thanks to the efforts of multiple members of the India Lobby, political columnist Drew Pearson published the candid and critical Phillips report in the *Washington Post* on July 25, 1944, more than a year after Phillips submitted the report to the President. Though Pearson described Ambassador Phillips as being “generally considered pro-British,” Pearson felt that Phillips delivered a blunt assessment of British policy in India. In turn, Pearson was inclined to publish Phillips’ report because “the whole India picture is so vital to Allied success in Asia.”[[3]](#footnote-1) With the exception of two phrases, the version of the report Pearson published was verbatim. Pearson’s column made an official document that came from the heart of the Roosevelt administration and was deeply critical of British policy in India, free for all to read.

How did Pearson, an increasingly widely read, infamous, corruption-exposing journalist, acquire such a document? Who in the middle of World War II had connections to mainstream American news sources, the U.S. government, and possessed a strong desire to see India achieve its independence from the British? The simple answer is the India Lobby, a group of individuals in the United States who expressed a specific public opinion by advocating for Indian independence. The Lobby itself, however, was not quite as straightforward as it might seem. The path of the Phillips’ report before it reached Pearson reveals the complex nature of the Lobby and the network of individuals it was composed of.

Robert Crane worked as a desk officer in the South Asia section of the Division of Cultural Relations in the State Department. In a symposium paper published in 1988, Crane revealed that after reading Phillips’ report multiple times as a desk officer, and being “impressed and pleased by its contents,” he passed it along to “two…close Indian friends in Washington.” Unbeknownst to Crane, one of these friends copied the report, a copy that later found its way into Pearson’s capable hands.[[4]](#footnote-2) Meanwhile, the British Security Coordination (the British intelligence agency headquartered in New York) was trying their hardest to identify the source of the leak. Though they never identified Crane, the BSC did believe they found two of the culprits: Major Altaf Qadir, a staff member of the Indian Agent General stationed in Washington, and Indian journalist Chamal Lal. The British reassigned Qadir to the warfront in Burma while Lal was hastily deported.[[5]](#footnote-3) Other accounts of the leak point to the involvement of additional members of the India Lobby. One source described the leak as a chain involving three intermediaries, including an Indian member the Government of India Supply Mission to the United States, an owner of a Bombay import-export company, and a press officer at the Indian High Commission.[[6]](#footnote-4) To further confuse matters, Dr. Anup Singh, a central member of two India Lobby organizations—the India League of America and the National Committee for India’s Independence—, claimed full credit for getting the report from Crane and giving it to the press officer who in turn leaked it to Pearson.[[7]](#footnote-5) When taken all together, members of the U.S. State Department, the British government of India, of both the Indian and American press, as well as international businessmen, academics, and lobbyists possibly handled a report written by the personal representative to the President that was unforgiving of British policy in India. By 1944, the India Lobby had developed a network that encompassed all of these individuals and their connections, a feat which reflects the transformation of the lobby during World War II from a handful of concerned Indian-American into a modern body of public opinion-wielding champions of Indian independence.

1. Phillips to Roosevelt, May 14, 1943, *FRUS, 1943*, 4:221-222. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. Caroline H. Keith, "Phillips, William," *American National Biography Online* Feb. 2000,

   <http://www.anb.org/articles/07/07-00234.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. Drew Pearson, “Washington Merry-Go-Round,” July 25, 1944, *The Washington Post*, pg. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. Robert I. Crane, “U.S.-India Relations: The Early Phase, 1941-1945,” *Asian Affairs* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1988/1989): 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. Richard Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 149-150. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. Harold Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies* (2006), 373-374. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. K.S. Venkataramani, *Roosevelt, Gandhi, Churchill: America and the Last Phase of India’s Freedom Struggle* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1983), 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)