

BOOK REVIEW

SHASHI THAROOR PRETENDS TO BE A CRITIC OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA BUT SERVES UP ITS PROPAGANDA

An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India

By Shashi Tharoor. Aleph Book Company/with Rupa. 333 pages

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Shashi Tharoor

In May 2015 Shashi Tharoor spoke at an Oxford Union debate for the proposition “Britain owes reparations to her former colonies.” Two months later, when the video of his speech went viral, he claims to have been “pleasantly surprised but also a bit perplexed,” because “I honestly did not think I had said anything terribly new. My analysis of the iniquities of British colonialism was based on what I had read and studied since my childhood, and I thought the arguments I was making were so basic that they constituted what Americans would call ‘Indian Nationalism 101 – the fundamental, foundational arguments that justified the Indian struggle for freedom. Similar things had been said by the likes of Romesh Chunder Dutt and Dadabhai Naoroji in the late 19th Century and by Jawaharlal Nehru and a host of others in the 20th.” The popularity of the speech led his editor, David Davidar, to propose the

book as something easily accessible to the lay reader but also a “valuable source of reference to students and others looking for the basic facts about India’s experience with British colonialism.”

Knowing the author and being familiar with his other writings, I would say that the Beauty Queen stuff about “It all came nachural!” is nonsense. So is the stuff about the book being an afterthought. Tharoor’s semi-official English riposte was predictable after Madhusree Mukerjee published *Churchill’s Secret War* in 2010 (an excoriating look at how the British precipitated the 1943 Bengal Famine in response to the nationalist “Quit India Movement”). And the book is far from being a basic reference to facts about colonialism: it is shallow, dishonest, meretricious and profoundly anti-Indian.

I refer to the book as “semi-official” because Tharoor was born in Britain when his father was sales manager for the Calcutta Statesman there, and although a citizen of India he is, I can say on the basis of some four decades of observation, British by attitude and affection. Kofi Annan recruited him out of Tufts University to help the UN High Commission for Refugees with the Vietnamese Boat People and he rose with his mentor to the post of Under-Secretary-General in New York. The British then proposed to Sonia Gandhi his candidacy for the UN’s top job, blindsiding the Foreign Ministry. He paid for that after the American veto when he had to settle for Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in Delhi. Things became much worse after he fell out with his wife and she died in circumstances that interested the Delhi Police. The book is now a re-election bid.

Empire in a Turban

Tharoor isn’t the only one the Brits have in Delhi. They command top figures in mass media, in publishing, in politics. Their most impressive catch was the former Army chief who asked to have his retirement postponed claiming to be younger than the paperwork, and when that was turned down during his final days in office, scuttled off to London on an “official visit.” The Defense Ministry prevented another last-minute trip – to Israel – and in the ensuing investigations discovered that he had an Army surveillance unit monitoring the Minister and top aides. The government changed before he could be packed off to prison and he found a place in the new cabinet as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

That strange outcome had something to do with another odd British catch, a yoga guru selling herbal potions, who received a British military training camp as a “gift,” and developed such a swelled head he threatened war against the Indian State. He is also said to have procured British funding for the BJP, probably the only reason the ex-General is not breaking rocks.

Other British acquisitions include the “Indian” novelists led by Salman Rushdie who won the £50,000 Booker prize by writing novels slanging India and Mahatma Gandhi. The prize was established at the advice of Ian Fleming, the psy-ops Intelligence parent of James Bond, and was undoubtedly an MI-6 operation. All this background is by way of letting readers know that the British Empire is not dead but merely shrunk to the size of a malicious turban on David Davidar’s head. For those who do not know, Davidar was the founding head of Penguin India which he turned into an anti-India propaganda shop; like Tharoor and the present writer, he is a Malayali.

Eight Chapters

Of the eight chapters in Tharoor's book two focus on Indian concerns: the looting of the country and the havoc Britain's divisive policies created in Indian society. The others cater to British obsessions: their role in Indian political unity, their contribution to Indian democracy, Press, parliamentary system and rule of law; the "myth of enlightened despotism" and other imperial claims. Tharoor is suitably scathing about their pretensions but the fact is, without his reprise only the dorky historians MI-6 pays to remember the Raj would know of those fatuous claims.

Also, the most dismissive arguments against bombastic British claims are missing from the book. On Britain's boast to have unified India he does not mention that from the time the East India Company took proxy power in Bengal in 1757 until the uprising of 1857 its formal role was that of Mughal tax-collector. Nowhere does he say that at its peak the British Empire in India controlled a Swiss cheese assembly of territories adding up to about 3/5th of Aurangzeb's domain and that its claims to "Paramountcy" over the remaining 2/5th were steadfastly refuted by the Princely States.

How Long Did the British Rule?

Tharoor repeatedly credits Britain with ruling India for 200 years. Consider the following dates. In 1757, Robert Clive at the head of 2,000 men (1200 of them Indians) "won" the so called "Battle of Plassey" by bribing the general leading the 20,000-strong force of the Nawab of Bengal. Over the next century, the East India Company expanded its territories as opportunity allowed, taking Punjab in 1849 after Maharaja Ranjitsingh's death left the Sikhs leaderless, and in 1856 annexing from the widowed Begums of Oudh the land of ancient Ayodhya. The uprising of 1857 then brought in direct rule by the British government, which lasted 90 years during most of which it was backing up from the rising nationalist movement. From beginning to end, British rule in India – not of India – lasted 190 years, and for all of that period it only controlled bits and pieces of the country.

The publisher's blurb for Jon Wilson's revisionist *India Conquered* (Simon & Schuster, 2016) sums up the reality of that rule: "Britain's Indian empire was built by people who wanted to make enough money to live well back in Britain, to avoid humiliation and danger, to put their narrow professional expertise into practice. The institutions they created, from law courts to railway lines, were designed to protect British power without connecting with the people they ruled. The result was a precarious regime that oscillated between paranoid paralysis and occasional moments of extreme violence." Imperial propagandists sought to present that desperate existence as if it were a grand and stable "Raj" on par with the Mughals. Loyal Tharoor shores up that image in many ways. He declares Plassey a "famous victory," he repeatedly reinforces the overblown two-century timeline of empire and even counters Wilson frontally by declaring (page 60) that a few thousand British civilians "ruled 19th Century India with unshakeable self-confidence."

Getting Basics Wrong

The parts of the book genuinely critical of the British are a precis of the work of other writers; Tharoor's own contribution is a rewrite of British propaganda. For instance, he thinks it is "to the credit of the

British Raj that it faced an opponent like Mahatma Gandhi and allowed him to succeed.” (page 284). A little later comes this: “The ultimate tribute to the British Raj might lie in the quality of the ‘Great Soul’ who opposed it” (page 287). He owes readers an explanation: when exactly did the British allow Gandhi to succeed, and how does his greatness redound to their credit? If it was merely that the British did not kill Gandhi, they deserve no “credit” for they tried repeatedly. How do we know? Because their Police took no action after blatant attempts at murder. For instance, on 25 June 1934, an unknown assailant threw a bomb at a car in which Gandhi was supposed to be traveling. As Tushar Gandhi (the Mahatma’s great-grandson), noted in his 2007 book *‘Let’s Kill Gandhi!’* the bomb injured several policemen, but “surprisingly, there [was] no record of any investigations or arrests.”

The bomb attack occurred in Pune, where the British had settled a paroled nationalist terrorist, Damodar Vinayak Savarkar (1883-1966). He had been serving a 50-year sentence for murder in the penal settlement in the Andamans when, in the wake of Gandhi’s first great Civil Disobedience Movement in 1920, the British moved on his various appeals for clemency. They shifted him to Ratnagiri in 1923 and had him write a book – *Hindutva* – setting out the “two-nation” theory of Hindu-Muslim relations that would be used to split the country. Three years after releasing him in 1924 they allowed Savarkar to violate the terms of his release and engage in political activity. He became head of the *Hindu Mahasabha*, the political foil to the *Muslim League* the British had created in the first decade of the 20th Century, after splitting Bengal on Hindu-Muslim lines.

With Savarkar in Pune was his henchman Nathuram Godse, who would make three attempts to kill the Mahatma (details below), before succeeding on 30 January 1948. What other attempts the British made to kill Gandhi are not known, but there is a top secret encrypted cable from Winston Churchill to the Viceroy in Delhi, asking why Gandhi was not dead yet. Tharoor has described that cable several ways, once misrepresenting it to an audience as a “comment on a file” and characterizing it in the book as a “peevisish” response to “officers of good conscience” (whatever that is), on the 1943 Bengal Famine. Whatever he was up to, Churchill was certainly not trying to facilitate Gandhi’s success.

Death of Key Aides

It is also good to keep in mind that Gandhi’s assassination was preceded by the deaths of three key aides he had especially groomed to continue his work. Thomas Weber in *Gandhi, Gandhism and the Gandhians* (2006) is perhaps the only researcher to place their deaths in close and meaningful conjunction. The first to go was Maganlal Gandhi, a relative who had been with the Mahatma from his early days in South Africa. He had set up Sabarmati Ashram in 1915 and was firmly in charge of it, giving Gandhi freedom to travel across India knowing that his base was secure. Weber notes: “Gandhi’s later secretary and biographer, Sabarmati Ashram resident Pyarelal, records that the Mahatma was grooming Maganlal ‘as his heir’. Gandhi himself made this explicit in a letter to his wife when he requested her to be a mother to one who had trained himself to carry on his work.”

After Maganlal’s death Gandhi no longer wanted to continue living at Sabarmati, and when he set off on the “Salt March” to Dandi in 1930, it was with a pledge not to return until India was free. His headquarters after that was at Sevagram, the ashram founded for him at Wardha by the business

magnate Jamanlal Bajaj, one of Gandhi's earliest and most committed followers. Bajaj lived the Mahatma's ideal that wealthy people must be trustees for the welfare of society. An exceptional individual who combined the strengths of a Satyagrahi with those of a businessman, he became someone on whose support Gandhi counted heavily; when he died suddenly of a supposed cerebral hemorrhage in February 1942, it was, in Mahadev Desai's words, "a staggering blow" the like of which the Mahatma had not felt since the death of Maganlal.

Desai himself died just six months after Bajaj. Indian researchers have not made much of the loss of these three lives, each of which represented a serious loss to Gandhi's political legacy and thus to the country as a whole. It is also notable that each death took place at a critical time. Maganlal died at a time Gandhi was moving towards declaring the aim of *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence) the next year; both Bajaj and Desai died the year of the Quit India Movement. Sushila Nayyar's prison diary of Gandhi's last imprisonment (1942-1944) leaves little doubt that Gandhi looked on the deaths of those close to him as political. On 2 March 1944 he is quoted as saying, "One after the other, you may all be taken away and I may be left alone. That will be a pathetic state."

Kasturba's Custodial Death

Gandhi suffered yet another demoralizing loss during his final imprisonment: eighteen months after losing Mahadev Desai, his wife of 62 years, Kasturba, died of bronchitis. British propagandists immediately took the line that she died because Gandhi, in one of his anti-modernist fads, refused to let her get a penicillin injection. Sushila Nayyar's prison diary reflected an altogether different reality: the British used Kasturba's illness to impose petty conditions on who could treat her and how as a way of mentally torturing Gandhi. Usually the Mahatma never complained about personal inconveniences but this time he did not let it go. Citing the numerous petty restrictions that had made his wife miserable, he wrote to the authorities in Mumbai, saying, "It would be wrong on my part if I suppressed the fact that the facilities being allowed to the patient has been sadly lacking."

As to his attitude to penicillin, the diary noted that Dr. Nayyar had requested it, not for the first time, on 20 February; Colonel Bhandari said none was available. Two days later, as Kasturba was at death's door Bhandari produced penicillin. "Are you and Dr. Gilder convinced that it should be given? Are you sure it will help her?" Gandhi asked. Nayyar "could not say yes. Ba's condition was so grave that we could not be very sure it would help her. Bapu then told us not to give her any more pain by giving her injections."

After Kasturba's death, the Viceroy (Wavell) made a statement pretending that she had been provided the best medical care. Gandhi felt it necessary to write to him pointing out the many "pinpricks" the old couple had endured while at the regime's mercy. Despite those attempts at setting the record straight British "historians" have continued to repeat the canard that Kasturba's death resulted from Gandhi's refusal to permit the use of penicillin. In David Attenborough's Oscar-winning movie *Gandhi*, Kasturba dies cleanly of a "massive thrombosis."

Murdering the Mahatma

Gandhi himself could easily have died in custody. Few things could tip Churchill into a rage as easily as mention of Gandhi, who he considered a “charlatan” and “hated almost as much as Hitler or Tojo.” In February 1943, when Gandhi decided to go on a 21-day fast in prison, Churchill sent a “most secret encrypted message” to the Viceroy (Linlithgow) urging him against “any show of leniency.” Linlithgow assured the Prime Minister he would “feel no compunction” in letting Gandhi die. That he survived probably had something to do with the interest Franklin Roosevelt took in the matter; at one point he had the British Ambassador summoned to the State Department and told bluntly, “Gandhi must not die in prison.”

During the 21-day fast, and when he came down with malaria in 1944, the prison authorities brought in stocks of wood to prepare for his cremation. On the latter occasion, the regime even alerted its diplomatic missions of the possibility of the Mahatma’s demise. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan happened to be at the British Mission in Chungking when Foreign Minister Anthony Eden’s cable arrived. It said: “In case of Gandhi’s death do not diminish his moral stature, acknowledge his uncompromising allegiance to unworldly ideals, express regret that his unrivalled influence was not at the service of the Allied Nations, especially China and India.” Tharoor not only continues to follow Eden’s instructions to label Gandhi unworldly, he even suggests a touch of insanity, saying (page 84) “that he was an eccentric seems beyond doubt.”

When Gandhi did not die after release from prison, and seemed to be making a recovery, there was an attempt to assassinate him. It happened in July 1944, at the small resort of Panchgani near Pune where he had gone to recuperate. The assailant, who rushed at him with a dagger, was none other than Nathuram Godse, Savarkar’s acolyte. The police disarmed and questioned Godse but let him go; Gandhi invited him to talk but he stalked off. In September 1944, Godse, once again armed with a dagger, joined a group at the entrance to Sevagram Ashram protesting Gandhi’s intention to hold talks with Jinnah in Mumbai; the police disarmed him but took no other action.

These incidents took place well before the cataclysmic events surrounding Partition that, according to the accepted narrative of the assassination, supposedly enraged Godse into killing Gandhi in 1948. That’s nonsense, especially if we consider the circumstances under which the British freed Savarkar from prison and made use of him politically; there is no avoiding the conclusion that Gandhi’s assassination was the result of a British conspiracy.

The Bloody Slide to Partition

Tharoor’s book gives no hint of any of the murky goings on during the last years of British rule that led to what Gandhi called the “vivisection of India.” His account of Partition is straight from the British playbook. Consider, for instance, the statement (page 153) that “In October 1939, Jinnah persuaded Lord Linlithgow, the viceroy, to enlist the League as an interlocutor equal to the Congress and as the sole representative of India’s Muslims, a position to which its electoral results did not yet entitle it.”

To suggest that Jinnah “persuaded” the Viceroy to do anything is absurd. As a member of the Indian National Congress Jinnah had been a credible Muslim leader but after eloping at the age of 42 with the 18-year old daughter of a party colleague he suffered a general loss of credibility, was booed off the podium at the 1920 Congress session and escaped total political eclipse only because the British made him President of the Muslim League, the small party created by rich land-owners at the Viceroy’s behest in 1906.

With a membership so small its annual general meetings had a quorum of 10 through the 1930s, the League was little more than a British sock-puppet, and Jinnah tired of its make-believe politics in a few years. He retired from Indian affairs to settle in London where he stayed during the Great Depression, practicing law, investing in properties, and trying unsuccessfully to win a seat in parliament. After the British created a separate electorate just for Muslims and made him “President for Life” of the Muslim League, Jinnah returned to India for the 1939 elections but the poll results were disastrous. Even of the sequestered Muslim electorate the party only got a little over 4 per cent of the vote.

Tharoor’s description of the change in Indian politics after the League’s 1939 debacle is straight British propaganda: “Congress rule in many provinces had unwittingly increased Muslim concerns, even alarm, about the implications of democratic majoritarian rule in a country so overwhelmingly Hindu. Many Muslims began to see themselves as a political and economic minority, and the League spoke to their insecurities. Jinnah had begun to come to the conclusion that the only effective answer to the Congress’s political strength would be separation – the partition of the country to create an independent state in the Muslim-majority areas of the northwest and east.”

What actually happened was that in the wake of the League’s humiliating electoral showing the British began to foment violence between Hindus and Muslims. For no reason at all, “Hindus” suddenly began to make scores of unprovoked attacks on Muslims, and the incidents were reported with Dickensian bathos in a series of written reports from the League. The victims were invariably pictured as pious people at prayer or celebrating some happy holiday; the attacking mobs came to their bloody business shouting “Gandhi ki jai.” Suspicion that it was all a command performance was widespread.

Chicago Tribune correspondent William Shirer noted in his book on Gandhi that it was difficult to find out how many of the communal riots “were incited by the British in their effort to keep both communities at each other’s throats so that they could not unite in their drive for self-rule.” He reported that the “British Chief of Police in Bombay once told me – almost as a joke – that it was very easy to provoke a Hindu-Muslim riot. For a hundred dollars, he said, you could start something really savage. Pay some Muslims to throw the carcass of a cow into a Hindu temple, or some Hindus to toss a dead pig into a mosque, and you could have, he said, a bloody mess, in which a lot of people would be knifed, beaten and killed.” It was such violence that prepared the ground for the Muslim League’s March 1940 “Pakistan resolution” and not, as Tharoor puts it, the “implications of democratic majoritarian rule.”

The imperial end run that ripped India apart is portrayed in the book with little detail. The now declassified plotting of Partition is not included, and there is not even a mention of how the Kashmir

issue was created so as to prevent peace after the British left. There are just three passing references to Kashmir in the book, two of them concerning its pre-British history.

The formal process leading to the British decision to create Pakistan involved two strategic assessments in July 1946, one by senior military officers in India and the other by the brass in London. Both underlined the need for Britain to continue manipulating the country. "If India was dominated by Russia with powerful air forces it is likely that we should have to abandon our command of the Persian Gulf and the Northern Indian Ocean routes," said the group in Delhi, which also pointed out that the country was vital to air links with Australia and New Zealand.

The group in London pointed out that India "provides important bases for offensive air action and for the support of our forces in the Indian Ocean and neighboring areas." After the transfer of power Britain would "require the right to move formations and units, particularly air units, into India at short notice, in case of threatened international emergency." If an independent India demanded the withdrawal of all British personnel from its government, "the fulfillment of any of our strategic requirements would be improbable. It is in our view essential that the Indian government should be persuaded to accept the assistance of the necessary number of British personnel."

David Monteath, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the British Foreign Office, summed up the situation in a note for the file: Congress leaders were unlikely to agree to such close military linkage, but there was confidence that "the Muslims" would welcome it; indeed, that they would be "anxious to remain in the Commonwealth. If India falls apart we may, I suppose, expect the Muslims to try and enlist British support by offering us all sorts of military and political facilities, to commit ourselves to what would be in effect the defense of one Indian state against another."

That was exactly what happened after the creation of Pakistan, which was kept under Britain's firm control through the *Inter-Services Intelligence* agency (ISI) created by a serving British officer during the war in Kashmir immediately after independence.

The Great Calcutta Killing

The first step to make India "fall apart" was the Great Calcutta Killing initiated by the Muslim League on its "Direct Action Day," 16 August 1946. On that day a League mob made up of the city's most hardened goondas dispersed after Friday prayers at the base of the Ochterlony Memorial (now Sahid Minar), and went on a murderous rampage around the city, killing Hindus and Sikhs indiscriminately and setting fire to their houses and shops. The Police stayed in their barracks; the Army had withdrawn all its outposts in the city the previous day and remained firmly ensconced in Fort William.

The killings went on for three days – estimates of deaths range from 4,000 to 20,000 – and yet the authorities did not move a muscle. Winston Churchill probably had a direct hand in what happened, for he was in secret correspondence with Jinnah at the time, getting letters routed through his private secretary, Miss E.A. Gilliat, at 6 Westminister Gardens in London. Without Churchill's input it is unlikely that Jinnah's fastidiously lawyerly brain would have conceived of mass murder as a political tactic; or that the British would have facilitated the killings so actively. Rationed petrol was freely available to the

“hooligans” (as The Statesman labeled them) and the city’s two British-owned gun shops were thrown open to the mob on the first day. Retaliatory killings of Muslims did not get under way in the city until the third day, when some Indian money men who traditionally helped the British finance clandestine operations paid their own set of goondas. With both Hindu and Muslim communities thus blooded, the Police came back into the streets of Calcutta and the Army finally emerged from the seclusion of Fort William.

The events in Calcutta set off a murderous rampage in the Muslim-majority area of Noakhali in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), and that led to mayhem in Bihar, and across North India. Descriptions of this spread of violence have commonly used the phrase “communal madness,” as if it were a natural contagion; but that is not an adequate explanation. Events in distant places do not set people to indiscriminate murder unless they are organized, armed and given a sense of impunity. Those who witnessed the 1946-1947 riots up close have invariably reported that the killings were organized, and that goondas, hardened criminals, men of no faith, were always in the forefront of action.

“Perhaps the only thing that can be quite positively asserted about this orgy of arson and violence is that it was not a spontaneous uprising of the villagers,” wrote peace activist Muriel Smith who ran a relief center at Noakhali. “However many goondas may live in Bengal, they are incapable of organizing this campaign on their own initiative. Houses have been sprayed with petrol and burnt. Who supplied this rationed fuel? ... Who supplied the weapons? The goondas seem to think that they really are the rulers of this beautiful area of Bengal. One sees no sign of fear ... anxiety as to future punishment does not seem to exist.”

Once initiated in an area, the “communal riots” set off mindless and messy wars of neighbors and neighborhoods in which the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha fielded gangs of paid killers. While acknowledging that there must have been a multiplicity of paymasters, it is likely that the British, given their clearly set strategy, had the primary role. As a penny-pinching bureaucratic system, the British government in India must have kept voluminous records of expenditures to pay for the mayhem, evidence of criminality that would need to be destroyed before the transfer of power to Indians. In early June 1947, weeks before Independence Day, British officials throughout India were personally engaged in a simultaneous burning of records. The destruction was supposedly ordered directly by London without the knowledge of the Viceroy (Mountbatten), and the documents destroyed were said to pertain to the Princely states. Indian historians will have to dig for surviving records to get at the truth.

Tharoor’s treatment of the Great Calcutta killing is strangely tepid, incoherent in parts. Consider this series of non sequiturs: “‘What is the good of our forming the Interim Government of India’ Nehru wrote indignantly to Wavell about conditions in Bengal in the wake of the Calcutta killings, ‘if all that we can do is to watch helplessly and do nothing else when thousands of people are being butchered...?’ But he went too far in insisting upon visiting the overwhelmingly Muslim, though Congress ruled North-West Frontier Province. The British connived in League organized demonstrations against him at which stones were flung and Nehru was bruised. More importantly, the fiasco suggested that Nehru, as a Hindu, could never be acceptable to the province’s Muslims as a national leader.”

From a writer of Tharoor's fluency that broken narrative must be immediately suspect. He seems to be trying to create the impression that the Congress was in power in Bengal. It was not: the Muslim League was nominally in charge, with the British, of course, holding the reins of both Police and Army.

Messy Colonial Afterlife

The worst part of the book is the final chapter. It tells of modern Britain's amnesia about its Empire, British historian Niall Ferguson's contemptible effort to present imperialism as admirable, the Kohinoor diamond, the unreality of "Gandhism" and the "residual problems of colonialism." The chapter is more reprehensible than any of the others because of the extent of lying aimed at keeping Indians in their current torpor about history. Examples range from the simple lie, "there is a statute of limitations on colonial wrongdoings," to the complex obfuscation in, "the power of nonviolence rests in being able to say, 'to show you that you are wrong, I punish myself.'" Beyond that is the major historical distortion of presenting the post-colonial miseries of Africa and Asia as rooted in history and unrelated to contemporary British strategy. Specifically, the Britain's creation of an international system of money-laundering "tax havens" and its use to support organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism. That system has sucked wealth from the poorest countries into a global black market of uncounted trillions of dollars, resurrecting the Empire as an unseen evil force that is playing havoc with world affairs.

Real-life Sauron/Voldemort

It is fascinating that while British journalists and political scientists have been willfully blind to and silent about the baneful work of their country's corrupt elite, two great writers of fiction in modern Britain have told of it in stark moral terms. It is good that they see the final defeat of Sauron/Voldemort at the hands of Frodo/Harry Potter, but it would be foolish for Indians to take more than passing comfort from that. The all too obvious willingness of members of our own intelligentsia and political elite to put at risk the freedom won with bitter and bloody sacrifice coincides with growing evidence that Britain is carrying forward a plan to resume its overt dominance.

News of that plan comes from a member of Britain's House of Lords, former media mogul Conrad Black whose properties once included *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Daily Telegraph of London*, *The Jerusalem Post* and small papers across the United States and Canada. He lost his empire after falling afoul of American law and spending three years in prison for corporate swindles, an experience that led him after release to reveal a future in which the United States would be absent. In Black's preferred future, except for "regional powers like Brazil and Turkey, ... the only other coherent force that could arise and occupy a role somewhat analogous to a great power of old would be some cohesive bloc of Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, India, New Zealand, Singapore and perhaps a few other Commonwealth countries."

That Alice in Wonderland future is more than a revenge fantasy. The steps Britain and Canada have taken to merge their diplomatic services, the appointment of a Canadian to head the Bank of England, the visibly closer British relations with Kenya, the growing British capabilities in Delhi, and of course, the perennially close relations between the MI-6, Pakistan's ISI and their flock of terrorists, all point to a growing strategic reality.

In the context of Brexit, the interest Nigel Farrage took in Donald Trump's campaign and the shadowy role of MI-6 in the travails of the United States since the 2016 election, can all be seen as British moves to disable both Brussels and Washington. The recent expansion of BBC services targeting four different states in India – during a period of deep austerity in Britain – further underlines that Black's expectations are not entirely a pipedream. If China's economic problems careen out of control and set off a global depression, and the British "help" for India to deal with a "Superbug" their researchers discovered do not stave off the predicted pandemic, we could very well witness a period of global chaos in which the trillions made in the global black market could be used to rebuild the oppressions of the British Empire.

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