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The Great Game

THE AGREEMENT TO PARTITION INDIA WAS ANNOUNCED IN DELHI ON 3 June 1947. The following week the British Labour Party's Annual Conference was held in Margate in Britain. There, addressing the delegates, Ernest Bevin, the British foreign secretary, stated that the division of India 'would help to consolidate Britain in the Middle East.'[1]

On the day Bevin spoke, Krishna Menon was staying with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru at 7, York Road in Delhi. Settled in London, Menon then headed the India League in the UK, was a member of the British Labour Party and the sole interlocutor on behalf of Nehru with the British socialist leaders. He was the first Indian whom Lord Louis Mountbatten sought out on being appointed the viceroy of India in March 1947. Menon's ego had then not inflated to the extent that was to warp his thinking and judgement after Nehru made him defence minister. Referring to Bevin's remark, Menon wrote to Lord Mountbatten at the Viceroy's House on 14 June, in long hand, as follows (whether or not he did so after consulting Nehru is not clear from this letter):

> Is this frontier [the northwest of India abutting Afghanistan and Iran] still the hinterland of the Imperial strategy? Does Britain still think in terms of being able to use this territory and all that follows from it? There is considerable amount of talking in this

way; and if Kashmir, for one reason or another, chooses to be in Pakistan, that is a further development in this direction. I do not know of British policy in this matter. I do not know whether you would know it either. But if this be the British intent, this is tragic.... As it becomes more evident, the attitude of India would be resentful and Britain's hold on Pakistan would not improve it. I think I have said enough. Perhaps a bit too much.[2]

Menon was raising two important questions. One, whether the British strategy was to use West Pakistan and the princely state of Kashmir as bases to contain the perceived Soviet ambitions towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf, as the northwestern region of undivided India had been used for the same purpose for over a century. And two, whether British policy in this regard was so subterranean that even the viceroy of India was kept in the dark about it.

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After the czars had incorporated the Muslim sultanates of Khokand, Bokhara and Khiva, including the cities of Tashkand and Samarkand, into their empire in the 1860s and 1870s, that brought Russia's frontier to within a few hundred miles of India (in Kashmir). The northwest frontier of India had become, for the British, the most sensitive of all the frontiers of their vast Empire. And it was here that the pick of the British Indian Army was quartered (and where, incidentally, Winston Churchill had served with the Malakand Field Force in 1898). The British had fought three wars in Afghanistan, incorporated in the 1880s parts of eastern Afghanistan into the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan (now in Pakistan), built a railway network to the Khyber and Bolan Passes leading to Afghanistan, helped the Dogra Rajput ruler of Jammu under their paramountcy to extend his rule into Kashmir right up to the Sinkiang border, constructed a road from Gilgit in Hunza in northern Kashmir through the 13,000-feet-high Mintaka Pass in the Karakoram mountains to Kashgar in Sinkiang, posted agents there to monitor Russian activities across the border in Uzbekistan and the Pamirs,

and bribed and threatened the Shahs of Persia – all in order to keep the areas of India's western approaches from slipping under Russian influence.

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The British conquest of India, from Bengal (in the east) to the west and north in the nineteenth century, had matched the Russian advance in Central Asia from their heartlands, to the south and east, towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Each of them raised the bogey of the other's expansion to press on further and further, till they stopped on either side of Afghanistan, which, by the beginning of the twentieth century, became the buffer between the two empires. According to one source: 'The Indian revolt or the Great Mutiny of 1857 had heightened British fears of rebellion, conspiracies, whole wars and possible foreign provocations. Amongst likely foreign culprits in the 1860s there was but a single important suspect, the Empire of Russia.'[3] For strategists such as Sir Henry Rawlinson, president of the Royal Geographical and Asiatic Societies, Member of Parliament and holding a lifetime seat in the new five-member India Council: 'If the Czar's officers acquire a foothold in Kabul the disquieting effect will be prodigious. Every native ruler throughout northern India who either has, or fancies he has, a grievance, or is even cramped or incommoded by our orderly Government, will begin intriguing with the Russians; worse, Afghanistan possesses a machinery of agitation singularly adapted for acting on the seething, fermenting, festering, mass of Muslim hostility in India.'[4] (The Muslim was then the British enemy in India, not the Hindu, as later. It was after all the Mughal Empire that the British had smashed while conquering India.)

There was, however, another view, which, along with natural British caution, had kept those subscribing to the forward school in check. 'The less the Afghans see us, less they will dislike us',[5] observed General Frederick Roberts, the conqueror of Kabul. 'India's security lay in the quality of British rule and the contentment of the Raj's subjects and not in foreign adventures',[6] contended Sir John Lawrence, the future governor-general.

In Russia too there was no dearth of believers in a forward policy. 'The position of Russia in Central Asia', declared Foreign Minister Prince Aleksandr Mikaylovich Gorchakov (in St. Petersburg), 'is that of civilized States which are brought into contact with half savage, nomad populations, possessing no fixed organization, or border security and trade relations with whom impel the civilized States to exert a certain authority...they respect only "visible and palpable force".'[7] And Fyodor Dostoyevsky, writing in the *Citizen*, a Petersburg journal, in 1881, exulted: 'Not only did Russia need markets and lands but she would bring science and railroads to a backward people. Asia was to Russia what undiscovered America was to Europe. In Europe we are Asiatics whereas in Asia we too are Europeans. Civilizing mission in Asia will bribe our spirits and drive us thither. It is only necessary that the movement should start. Build only two railroads: begin one in Siberia and then to Central Asia. And at once you will see the consequences...if one fears England then one should sit at home and move nowhere.'[8] Russia had actually gone into Uzbekistan for its cotton, the supplies of which commodity from the southern states of America had been blocked due to the hostilities in the American Civil War.

The intense rivalry between the two most powerful empires in Asia in the nineteenth century was termed by Count K. V. Nesselrode, the foreign minister of Russia, as the '*tournament of shadows*', because there was no direct Anglo–Russian clash of arms. Rudyard Kipling used the phrase 'the Great Game' in his novel *Kim*, which passed into common usage.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the German eastward thrust, symbolized by the attempt to establish the Berlin–Baghdad railway. This move brought Britain and Russia together in the Entente of 1907 for a while. Even so, the British had to foil Russian attempts to annex northern Persia and to persuade the Persians not to let them build a railway line from Tabriz (now in Iran) to Baluchistan (now in Pakistan) or accept the Russian demand to secede territory 100 miles wide on either side.

After taking over power in Russia in 1917, almost the first thing the communists did in the field of foreign policy was to call a 'Congress of Eastern Peoples' at Baku (situated on the Caspian Sea) in 1920. There they spread the message of fraternity to the non-European people of their neighbouring countries to the south: Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan. Thereafter, the Soviet Union withdrew territorial claims against these countries; in fact, Moscow offered them economic cooperation and signed treaties of friendship and non-aggression with each of them. Only Afghanistan under King Amanullah was influenced by this policy. And a direct air link was established in 1927 between Tashkand and Kabul. Amanullah fell in 1929 after he tried to go too far in emulating Mustafa Kemal Ataturk of Turkey in modernizing Afghanistan's Islamic society. This resulted in a backlash by conservative forces that helped the British.

The First World War (1914–18) resulted in the destruction, at Allied hands, of the most powerful Muslim state, the Ottoman Empire, the seat of the Khalifa, the titular head of the Muslims. This Muslim Empire had acted as a rampart against Russian influence spreading southwards. The British now decided to recruit the Arabs freed from Ottoman rule for the Great Game. The exploits of T.E. Lawrence provide a glimpse into how British agents rallied the desert Arabs. Britain carved out the states of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Jordan from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire and established more direct control over the territories on the southern side of the Persian Gulf, then known as the Trucial States (now called the Emirates). The British presence in the Trucial States was partly financed by the British Government of India, to which the British political agents posted in these territories also reported. To create the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi family was brought from the Nedj desert and installed in power to rule a large part of the Arabian Peninsula and also to guard the holy places. The sons of the Sheikh of Mecca, Faizal and Abdullah, were made the kings of Iraq (the old Mesopotamia), and the newly created state of Jordan, respectively, Kuwait being detached from the former.

The First World War had demonstrated the indispensability of oil in fighting a modern war. Within British reach lay only two areas

with big oil fields: Mesopotamia and Persia. After Faisal was installed as king in Iraq, the Iraq Petroleum Company was formed. It contained the predecessors to Exxon and Mobile, Shell, BP and Total (a French company). The great depression that engulfed the world in the 1930s discouraged investment generally. The discovery of oil in Texas, after the war, led to a further postponement in developing Iraq's oil fields. In 1961, the nationalist coup in Iraq resulted in the nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company. After Saddam Hussein came to power in in the late 1970s, he diverted the country's funds to build a military machine rather than use them to develop Iraq's oil resources. According to a recent estimate by the Italian oil company, ENI, Iraq's oil reserves may be nearly 300 billion barrels rather than the generally accepted figure of 125 billion barrels.

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Persia lay along the soft Muslim underbelly of the Soviet Union. During the course of the Second World War, Britain entered southern Persia and the Soviet Union northern Persia to jointly provide a route by which war material could be supplied by the Allies to the USSR and also to check a possible German thrust beyond the Caucasus. But at the end of the war in 1945 the Soviet Union, while withdrawing from the country, left behind a puppet regime in the Azai area of northern Persia along its border. The territories further north, where the Baku oil field is situated, had already been seized by the czar in the nineteenth century itself. British fears of Soviet ambitions were further fuelled when Joseph Stalin announced in 1946 that his country's requirement of oil had doubled since 1941. 'British interest in southern Persia was centred around oil', Ardershir Zahedi, the son-in-law of the Shah Reza Pahlavi, who became the foreign minister of Iran, once explained to me. 'In the 1920s they had wanted to detach the Iranian province of Khuzestan on the Shat-al-Arab where the British Petroleum Company held concessions and its Abedan refinery is situated and place it under a separate ruler, as they ultimately succeeded to do in Kuwait. Your [Indian] troops led by British officers were used in the region during wars.' Zahedi added: 'It was only after

Mossadeq* nationalized the British Petroleum Company that the British grip on Iran was shaken. After Mossadeq turned pro-communist and was overthrown, a consortium of American and Dutch oil companies together with the British company was formed. This reduced British influence. John Foster Dulles, the US secretary of state (1953–59) was sympathetic to Iran and after that country joined the USA and Britain together with Pakistan, Iraq and Turkey in the CENTO military pact, the nibbling away of Iran's frontiers by the other great powers stopped.'

At the end of the war this is how a venerable British player of the Great Game viewed the prospects:

> The strategic movements of the Allies in Iraq and Persia in the Second World War were made possible from the Indian base.... The importance of the Gulf grows greater, not less, as the need for fuel expands, the world contracts and the shadows lengthen from the north. Its stability can be assured only by the close accord between the States which surround this Muslim lake, an accord underwritten by the Great powers whose interests are engaged.[9]

In 1943 an Indian scholar had put the British dilemma in a larger perspective:

> The victory of the Allies will see the Soviet Union established as the mightiest power on the Eurasian continent. With her enemy in Europe crushed beyond recovery for a generation and Japan with her continental ambitions foiled for a time, Russia will find it easy to resume her southward march, which was interrupted in the nineties of the last century. The Indian Ocean gives her not merely the outlet to the sea for which she has been working for two centuries, but a commanding position on one of the oceanic areas.... Russia no doubt has no desire to annex the territories of other nations; but integral alliances with other

* The prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadeq, in the 1950s.

> nations organized on the basis of Soviet republics, is her policy in Asia as well as in Europe.... If India passes into the orbit of the Soviet Union and finds a stable position in that alliance, the latter, already dominant in the Balkans and Central Europe, will become a world organization, such as Lenin could not have dreamed of: irresistible in its power, unequalled in its economic resources and manpower, and having a territorial basis spread over practically the whole of Asia and Europe. The eclipse of the British Empire would be the natural and inevitable outcome.[10]

Germany surrendered on 5 May 1945. The same day, Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered an appraisal of 'the long-term policy required to safeguard the strategic interests of the British Empire in India and the Indian Ocean' by the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff of the War Cabinet. And, on 19 May, this top-secret appraisal report was placed before him. The central point of this report was that Britain *must* retain its military connection with the subcontinent so as to ward off the Soviet Union's threat to the area.

The report cited four reasons for the strategic importance of India to Britain:

> Its value as a base from which forces located there could be suitably placed for deployment both within the Indian Ocean area and in the Middle East and the Far East; a transit point for air and sea communications; a large reserve of manpower of good fighting quality; and from the northwest of which British air power could threaten Soviet military installations.[11]

The report also mentions the possibility of detaching Baluchistan from India. (The Baluchistan coast lies to the north of the Gulf of Oman that leads to the Persian Gulf.)

In each and every subsequent appreciation of the British chiefs of staff from then on till India's independence that is available for examination, the emphasis was on the need to *retain* the British military connection with the subcontinent, irrespective of the political

and constitutional changes there. Equally, they stressed the special importance of the northwest of India in this context.

It may be noted that the idea of partitioning India in some form, to safeguard British strategic interests, had started to circulate in Whitehall in Churchill's time. Defence and security considerations were therefore uppermost in the minds of British leaders as they considered withdrawal from India. However, sufficient attention has not been paid to this vital factor by historians and political analysts, perhaps because security matters were not debated publicly in Britain.

On 18 April 1946, the British chiefs of staff, namely, Field Marshal Viscount Allenbrooke, Air Marshal Arthur William Tedder and Admiral Rhoderick McGrigor, again reported to the British cabinet: 'Recent developments made it appear that Russia is our most probable potential enemy.'[12] And, to meet its threat 'areas on which our war effort will be based and without which it would not be possible for us to fight at all would include India'.[13] Moreover, since Soviet 'policy at present appears to extend her influence to further strategic areas by all means short of major war...we should on no account weaken ourselves by surrendering our influence in the areas of major strategic importance'.[14] Another reason for not totally evacuating from India, they noted, was that 'air fields in northwest India are, except for those in Iraq, the nearest we have to certain important Russian industrial areas in Ural and western Siberia'.[15] They referred to the development of guided missiles that further augmented the menace of the Soviet Air Force operating from the Central Asian plateau. They also mentioned the importance of India as an essential air link to the Far East as, at that point of time, 'few existing types of aircraft [had] sufficient range for long hops'.[16]

The increase in the range and destructive capacity of air power over naval power was demonstrated by the sinking of the British battleships *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* by shore-based Japanese aircraft immediately after they left the Singapore naval base for the high seas at the start of the war with Japan. As such the Soviet control of the landmass of Central Asia, where its air power could

be based, had acquired much greater significance in strategic calculations.

The commander-in-chief in India, Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, expressed similar views in a note, which Lord Archibald Wavell, the viceroy, forwarded to the secretary of state on 13 July 1946. Among other things, this note emphasized: 'The principal advantage that Britain and the Commonwealth derive from control of India is strategic.'[17] The C-in-C's note further stated that the greatest asset was India's contribution of two million soldiers. It added that naval bases in India were indispensable for the protection of oil supplies from Persia and the Persian Gulf and its air bases there a necessary link in the Commonwealth air communications to the Far East. The note concluded: 'We [ought to] consider should independent India get influenced by hostile powers such as Russia we could not maintain our power to move freely by sea and air in the northern part of the Indian Ocean areas which is of supreme importance to the British Commonwealth.'[18]

The only difference between these reports and the report of the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff of Churchill's War Cabinet was that the assumption, in the latter, that Britain could continue to be responsible for India for another decade was absent. Soon after, General Lord Hastings Ismay, Churchill's chief of staff during the Second World War (at that time attached to the British Cabinet Secretariat), declared at a meeting of the chiefs of staff: '[It was] tolerably clear that if we evacuate India nothing would remain to prevent Russian infiltration with the consequent possibility of total disruption of the country very soon afterwards.' General Mosley Mayne, who chaired the meeting, 'agreed entirely'.

Lord Wavell, viceroy from 1943 to early 1947, was among the first of the British strategists to grasp the following interrelated factors:

1. India's primary usefulness to Britain was in the field of defence and not any more as a market.
2. Because of its fading power in India, Britain would have to withdraw from India sooner than later after the Second World War.

3. The Congress Party leaders, who would rule India after the British withdrew, were unlikely to cooperate with Britain on military matters and foreign policy, whereas the Muslim League Party, which wanted a partition of India, would be willing to do so.
4. The breach to be caused in Britain's capacity to defend the Middle East and the Indian Ocean area could be plugged if the Muslim League were to succeed in separating India's strategic northwest from the rest of the country, a realizable goal considering the close ties that Lord [Victor Alexander John Hope] Linlithgow, Wavell's predecessor, had built up with the Muslim League leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah during the Second World War.

Lord Wavell had a long discussion with Prime Minister Churchill in March 1945 in London. What was discussed between the two was not recorded except that Wavell noted in his diary that the prime minister had visualized the division of India. That this discussion reinforced his own inclinations in the matter is evident from the course he followed in India immediately thereafter.

Field Marshal Auchinleck had a different view. He held that the unity of the British-built Indian Army, led by British officers, was the surest guarantee against any potential Soviet mischief in the region. Having experienced firsthand the satisfactory cooperation between British and Indian officers, despite some racial problems, as well as the lack of communal animosity among men of various faiths in the Army, he was confident that the British, the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims could pull together in a united India. The chiefs of staff in London supported Auchinleck's view. But this view did not take into account the fact that the Indian National Congress leaders, who would form the government of independent India, were determined to work out their own foreign policy and defence priorities, unhampered by British concerns. In these circumstances, how could the Army of a united India be of any use to Commonwealth defence? As 1946 went by, Wavell's point of view was being increasingly accepted in British military circles. Nehru's oath in the Constituent Assembly to declare India

a sovereign independent republic (i.e., to cut off its connection with the Commonwealth) helped in opening their eyes.

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By early 1947 the British chiefs of staff had become enthusiastic proponents of a Pakistan that would cooperate with Britain in military matters. On 12 May 1947 General Leslie Hollis wrote to Prime Minister Clement Attlee highlighting the views of the chiefs of staff, who wanted 'to deal with...western India* first of all. From the strategic point of view there are overwhelming arguments in favour of a western Pakistan remaining in the Commonwealth [i.e., maintaining defence ties with Britain].'[19] He put forward the following points to buttress his views:

1. We should obtain important strategic facilities [such as] the port of Karachi and air bases in North West India and the support of Muslim manpower.
2. We should be able to ensure the continued independence and integrity [of] Afghanistan.
3. We should increase our prestige and improve our position throughout the Muslim World, and demonstrate, by the assistance Pakistan would receive, the advantages of links with the British Commonwealth.
4. Our link with Pakistan might have a stabilizing effect on India as a whole, since an attack by Hindustan on Pakistan would involve Hindustan in war, not with Pakistan alone, but [also] with the British Commonwealth.
5. The position on the Frontier might well become more settled since relations between the tribes and Pakistan would be easier than they could be with a united India.[20]

* Parts of pre-1947 northwest India that were incorporated into West Pakistan.

General Hollis added:

> Quite apart from the positive arguments in favour of this course we would draw your attention to the sorry results of refusing an application by Mr Jinnah – which would, in effect, amount to ejecting a numerous and loyal people from the British Commonwealth. We should probably have lost all chance of ever getting strategic facilities anywhere in India (the subcontinent); we should have shattered our reputation in the rest of the Muslim world and could not look for the continued cooperation of Middle Eastern countries. From the military point of view such results would be extremely bad.[21]

To give a flavour of the discussions that resulted in the aforementioned recommendations, are quoted below remarks made by the British Air, Naval and Army chiefs of staff at their meeting. Air Marshal Tedder observed:

> We required certain strategic facilities in India, no matter how small these facilities ultimately were. Some were better than none.[22]

Next, Sir John Cunningham, the Naval chief, speaking on whether or not Britain should retain a military link with Pakistan, if India walked out of the British camp, asserted:

> It would be insidious to refuse the application of people who had been loyal to the Commonwealth for many years...the result of such a refusal would extend throughout the whole Muslim world.[23]

And Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, the chief of the Imperial General Staff, expressed the following views:

> From the broad aspect of Commonwealth strategy it would be a tremendous asset if Pakistan, particularly the northwest, remained within the Commonwealth. The bases, airfields and ports in

> northwest India would be invaluable to Commonwealth defence. Moreover our presence would make for better civil administration, since British advisers, both civil and military, would ensure the efficiency of the [Pakistan] Provinces and might well attract Hindu States [India and independent princely states] into adopting a similar relationship with the Commonwealth. In addition we should be in a stronger position to support the integrity of Afghanistan...and the sooner this happened the better.[24]

Shortly afterwards, the chiefs of staff prepared another report, which emphasized that British strategic interests in the subcontinent should be focused on Pakistan:

> The area of Pakistan [West Pakistan or the northwest of India] is strategically the most important in the continent of India and the majority of our strategic requirements could be met...by an agreement with Pakistan alone. We do not therefore consider that failure to obtain the agreement with India [Hindustan] would cause us to modify any of our requirements...[25]

At this stage, the hope that some large princely states would become independent was still being entertained by the British military:

> At first sight it might appear that there would be little object in obtaining air transit rights from Pakistan if we have no similar rights in India [Hindustan]. It may however be possible...to use the territory of independent [princely] Indian States. We will in any case require the right for military aircraft to use bases in Hindustan.[26]

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Ernest Bevin's remarks, referred to in Krishna Menon's letter to the viceroy (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), show that the British Labour Party Government, with Clement Attlee as the prime minister, had closed ranks as far as the policy to partition India was

concerned. Generally more sympathetic to India and the Congress Party than Churchill's Government, Attlee and his Government, nevertheless, swung around to support the partition of India basically to ensure the defence of Britain's vital interests after the war.

The following unsigned document reflects views that had been gaining ascendancy as India's independence approached. The crux is contained in the following summary:

> The Indus Valley, western Punjab and Baluchistan [the northwest] are vital to any strategic plans for the defence of [the] all-important Muslim belt...the oil supplies of the Middle East. If one looks upon this area as a strategic wall (against Soviet expansionism) the five most important bricks in the wall are: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
> Only through the open ocean port of Karachi could the opponents of the Soviet Union take immediate and effective countermeasures. The sea approaches to all other countries will entail navigation in enclosed waters directly menaced by Russian air fleets...not only of the sea lanes of approach, but also the ports of disembarkation.
> If the British Commonwealth and the United States of America are to be in a position to defend their vital interests in the Middle East, then the best and most stable area from which to conduct this defence is from Pakistan territory.
> Pakistan [is] the keystone of the strategic arch of the wide and vulnerable waters of the Indian Ocean.[27]

Who can say that this assessment was not prescient? For, after partition, Pakistan, together with Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Britain first joined the Baghdad Pact and later CENTO (which the USA also joined) to form the brick wall against Soviet ambitions. Later, Pakistan entered into a bilateral military pact with Britain's closest ally, the USA, and provided an air base in Peshawar in the North West Frontier Province to the CIA to enable U2 planes to keep a hawk's eye on military preparations in the Soviet Union. (The existence of this secret base came to light only in 1961 after the US pilot, Gary Powers, who took off from there, was shot down over the Soviet Union.)

In a later and very important 'chukker' of the continuing Great Game, Pakistan, in the 1980s, provided the base from which the US could eject the Soviet forces from Afghanistan, precipitating the break-up of the Soviet Union. If with the establishment of American forces in strength in the Persian Gulf and the prospects of the same happening in the former Muslim territories of the USSR, Western dependence on Pakistan to check Russia has diminished, a half a century's run is all one can reasonably hope for, from the best of strategies.

Krishna Menon, writing in June 1947 to Lord Mountbatten, had wondered whether Britain was following a hidden agenda, whose lid had been slightly raised by Bevin in Margate. Two weeks before Menon wrote to the viceroy, two US diplomats, Ely E. Palmer (envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Afghanistan) and R.S. Leach of the State Department, passed through Peshawar, the capital of the North West Frontier Province of British India. They were invited to dine with Sir Olaf Caroe, the British governor of the province. On 26 May 1947 Palmer and Leach reported to the State Department in Washington the substance of their conversation with Sir Olaf. Their report said that the governor asked them to come a little before dinner 'so that they could have a quiet chat'. During this chat, according to the diplomats, 'the Governor first spoke about the "correct" British policy looking towards a united India' but then had 'spoken more frankly' and had emphasized 'the great political importance of the North West Frontier Province and Afghanistan', which he described as 'the uncertain vestibule' in future relations between the Soviet Union and India. He also spoke 'of the danger of Soviet penetration of Gilgit, Chitral and Swat' (all situated on Kashmir's northern border) and then significantly added: 'He would not be unfavorable to the establishment of a separate Pakistan.'[28]

Sir Olaf, before his appointment as governor of the NWFP, had been foreign secretary in Delhi from 1939 to 1946 and hence the principal adviser to two viceroys, Linlithgow and Wavell, on British

India's policy to forestall Soviet expansionism in Afghanistan, Sinkiang and the region of the Persian Gulf. Sir Olaf was really trying to use the Americans' presence in Peshawar to 'educate' the State Department on the usefulness, from a Western point of view, of the creation of Pakistan and Kashmir's adherence to it, as seen by a person with experience in that region. And, in the process, he had let the cat out of the bag.

After his retirement, the British Foreign Office sent Sir Olaf on a lecture tour of America. This tour was, in his own words, an 'attempt to catch and save a way of thought known to many who saw these things from the East, but now in danger of being lost, in the hope that new workers in the vineyards may find in it something worth regard'.[29] In America he lectured on the theme (later collated and published in his book *Wells of Power*) that the Karachi port and the coastline of Baluchistan standing at the mouth of the Persian Gulf were 'vital to its [British] reckoning'. The British base in India – now in Pakistan – had maintained stability in the Middle East since 1801, when Tsar Paul's ambitions first blew the whistle. Russian pressure – 'silent, concentrated, perpetual' – had predated communism, 'the Indian anchor' had been lost, but Pakistan – 'a new India' – had emerged, a Muslim state that could help to establish a defence community of Muslim states and 'show the way for reconciliation between the Western and Islamic models'. Caroe then posed the question: 'Will Islam stand up to communism?' The former foreign secretary of the British Government of India was later to boast that the US secretary of state, John Foster Dulles' phrase 'the northern tier' and his own 'the northern screen' were 'the same idea really'.

It was midway during the Second World War that the British authorities realized that they would have to quit India, their military base for over fifty years, sooner than later. Their thoughts then turned to closing the gap that would result in a Commonwealth defence against a Soviet move to the south, towards the 'the wells of power' and the Indian Ocean. To find a solution, they looked for available opportunities and openings in India in the hallowed British tradition described by Churchill as follows:

> We [British] do not think that logic and clear-cut principles are necessarily the sole key to what ought to be done in swiftly changing and indefinable situations.... We assign a larger importance to opportunism and improvisation, seeking rather to live and conquer in accordance with the unfolding events than to aspire to dominate them by fundamental decisions.[30]

So now our attention must turn to the ground realities in India as they obtained at the beginning of the war, which set in motion the events that led to Indian independence and partition.

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