26. TOP, Vol. II, p. 477. Churchill to Roosevelt, 9 August 1942.
27. US FR 1942, Vol. I, pp. 726–27. Hull's conversation with Halifax, 24 August 1942.
28. Ibid., p. 733. Hull's conversation with Halifax, 17 September 1942.
29. Ibid., pp. 740–71. As related by Bajpai's to Adolf A. Berle, US State Department, 13 October 1942.
30. British Embassy's appreciation on 'American Attitude towards India', Paras 33 to 42, pp. 21–24 (OIC, British Library, London).
31. US FR 1942, Vol. I, p. 735, Bajpai's conversation with Berle, US State Department, 2 October 1942.
32. *South Asia*, University of Canberra, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 2000, pp. 63–68.
33. Survey of American opinion on India, dated 8 May 1943, by Sir Frederick Puckle (OIC, British Library, London).
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. R. Moore, *South Asia*, University of Canberra, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 2000, pp. 66 and 76.
38. US FR 1942, Vol. I, p. 746. Roosevelt's instructions to William Phillips contained in telegram to Ambassador Winant, 20 November 1942.
39. US FR 1943, Vol. IV, pp. 196–97. Phillips to Roosevelt, 19 February 1943.
40. Ibid., p. 199. Hull's conversation with Halifax, 20 February 1943.
41. Ibid., pp. 180–83. Phillips to Roosevelt, 22 January 1943.
42. Ibid., p. 193. Sir Reginald Maxwell's talk with American correspondents, 15 February 1943.
43. Ibid., p. 212. Wallace Murray, US State Department's memo to Sumner Wells, 6 April 1943.
44. Ibid., pp. 213–14. Phillips to Roosevelt, 7 April 1943.
45. Ibid., pp. 217–22. Phillips' reports to Roosevelt, 19 April 1943 and 14 May 1943.
46. Ibid., pp. 223–24, Merrell to Hull, 27 May 1943.
47. Ibid., p. 301. Merrell to Hull, 25 September 1943.
48. Ibid., p. 230. Merrell to Hull, 8 October 1943.
49. Ibid., p. 231. Merrell to Hull, 18 October 1943.
50. Ibid., pp. 304, 306 and 307. Hull to Merrell, 9 and 13 October 1943.

# 7

# Wavell Plays the Great Game

IN THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM, THE MAN ON THE SPOT traditionally enjoyed considerable authority. This was more so for a person appointed the viceroy of India and who occupied the most important post in the British Empire, outside the British Isles at that time. We have seen in an earlier chapter how the viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, in 1942 blocked certain proposals made by a British minister, and one as eminent as Sir Stafford Cripps, by appealing directly to the prime minister. Due weight was attached to the viceroy's views also because he had at his beck and call a team of tried officials with vast experience of India. This team was made up of secretaries of the various departments of the government, the governors of British provinces and the residents in the princely states – largely drawn from the prestigious Indian Civil Service – and his efficient Directorate of Intelligence. Moreover, the commander-in-chief in India, who controlled the British Indian Army, sat as a member in the Viceroy's Executive Council. The prestige and authority that the British Parliament and Government sought to bestow on the viceroy were evident from the magnificent building in which he was housed – the largest dwelling for a couple in the entire world at that time – and from the other trappings of pomp and pageantry to fit the status of one standing in for the King Emperor.

It is necessary to provide such a background because a viceroy with definite views had the means to influence high-level policy back

home and, indeed, create realities on the ground in India that could not then be ignored. A viceroy running away with the bit between his teeth absolved the ministers of direct responsibility for actions that might involve them in controversy in Parliament and the press and sometimes from taking hard decisions. If Linlithgow took the initiative in 1940–41 to build up Jinnah as the sole spokesman of the Muslims of India and forge an alliance with his Muslim League Party, his successor, Lord Archibald Wavell, in February 1946, produced the blueprint detailing the areas of British India that should go to Pakistan. This blueprint was implemented at the time of the British withdrawal from India in 1947, even though it was kept secret to avoid any impression of a British initiative or hand in the division of India.

Secret archives cannot be depended upon to reveal the entire picture. Many decisions that are taken by governments are never committed to paper or, if so committed, are not revealed, even after the prohibitionary period for keeping them under wraps has lapsed. For instance, Lord Mountbatten's reports to London, sent after 15 August 1947, while he was the governor-general of India, have not been unsealed even after almost sixty years, thereby depriving us from information surrounding British policy on Kashmir.

While going through the actual files – with the first drafts and the corrections made in them, all retained – I came across top-secret dispatches that were supplemented by private or demi-official letters that contained the real views of the writer; these do not figure in the transfer of power documents series that have been published. Ministers and officials were careful not to commit to paper, even in top-secret documents, views that dealt with sensitive matters at variance with the government's public posture or those that could be judged as 'unprincipled'. Moreover, the influence exerted on decisions by powerful individuals unconnected directly with the issue – say, a Lord Beaverbrook, the press baron and Churchill's ally – may never be recorded. Therefore, the true course of policy can, at times, only be fathomed by taking into account the action taken by the concerned officials and from circumstantial evidence. The partition of India was a particularly sensitive issue. The Britishers of the post-war generation – particularly the Labour



Party leaders – sought to live down their country's reputation for 'divide and rule' and HMG had also to reckon with American public opinion that was against the division of India, because they felt this might help the communists.

*

Field Marshal Wavell was not a member of the aristocracy, from whose ranks most of the viceroys were drawn. He belonged to a class of society – the upper middle class – which, according to a British historian 'was the mainstay of the British Raj and largely responsible for its character'.[1] Wavell was the first soldier to hold the office of the viceroy after the British Crown took over the governance of India from the East India Company in 1858. Before his appointment to the viceroyalty in September 1943, he was commander-in-chief in India and had supervised the defence of the British Empire in South-east Asia against Japan. Earlier, he had been the commander of the British forces in the crucial front of the Middle East, where his victories over the Italians in Abyssinia and Cyrenica, in North Africa, at the start of the war had made him quite a popular hero in Britain. On coming to power Churchill had removed him from the Middle East command and sent him to the relatively calm waters – before the Japanese attack – of India and Asia. And after the British defeat at Japanese hands in South-east Asia, kicked him upstairs, in an honourable way, to the viceroyalty. Churchill considered Wavell overcautious and defeatist, 'eminently suited to run a provincial golf club',[2] he once said. Churchill expected him to take no political initiatives in India during the course of the war. Wavell, on the other hand, remained in awe of his chief, 'the bigger man than either Roosevelt or Stalin', he noted in his diary,[3] but he used to complain that 'Churchill was always expecting rabbits to come out of empty hats'.[4] The irony is that one whom Churchill considered so mediocre has come to be acknowledged by several historians as the most important viceroy of India since Lord Curzon. His forte was his lack of illusions; and his achievement, the division of India.

Before Wavell left London to take up his post in India, Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts, the prime minister of South Africa and

Churchill's trusted counsellor, sought him out. And, according to Wavell, confided in him what was in Churchill's mind about India that he did not wish to express to him directly when he had offered him the viceroyalty at a tête-à-tête dinner in the basement of 10, Downing Street. As Smuts put it: 'The PM is not thinking beyond the end of the war – about India or anything else – and is alarmed lest by raising the Indian issue I should split the Conservative Party in Parliament and cause him trouble.'[5] Therefore, for the first year in office Wavell did not make any political move, even though he had come to firmly believe that to let things slide in India was not in Britain's best interests.

Wavell profoundly disagreed with his predecessor's view, expressed to him just before Linlithgow left Delhi, that Britain 'would have to continue responsibility for India for at least thirty years' and that 'the country was in pretty good trim...[with] Gandhi and the Congress leaders out of the way in prison and the Muslims immensely strengthened during the last three or four years'.[6] Wavell's assessment was that the British position was deteriorating fast and that a plan was needed for an organized and orderly retreat that would, nevertheless, protect Britain's most important asset in India, which he saw as the military base that it provided to control the Middle East and the vast Indian Ocean region and from where fighting manpower was recruited. One would do well to bear in mind what an Indian scholar has stated in a recent study:

> The growing role of strategic airpower and the vital importance of Middle Eastern oil had transformed British policy in Asia. For over a century, British policy in the Gulf had largely been shaped by the strategic interests of her Indian Empire. This was no longer the case.... By 1947, the tables had been turned – Britain's strategic interests in the Gulf and Middle East had become a major factor in her South Asia policy.[7]

Only on one point was Wavell in complete agreement with Linlithgow (and Churchill): that the British position in India depended on the goodwill of the Muslims and could be salvaged by the cooperation of Jinnah's Muslim League Party.



Wavell was convinced that the leaders of the Congress Party would not cooperate with Britain on defence matters as rulers of an independent India. His distrust of this party, which he considered the fountain of all mischief, he expressed in a letter to the King as follows:

> I can never entirely rid my mind of the recollections that in 1942 at almost the most critical period of the war in India, when I was endeavouring as Commander-in-Chief to secure India with very inadequate resources against Japanese invasion, the supporters of the Congress [Party] made a deliberate effort to paralyse my communications to the eastern front by widespread sabotage and rioting.[8]

In the same letter, he cautioned: 'The loyalty of the police and the Indian Army in face of a really serious challenge to British rule is problematic.'[9]

Wavell had been shocked that, on the fall of Singapore in 1942, so many Indian officers, who had sworn allegiance to the King Emperor, as well as thousands of soldiers of his Army, had so easily switched sides to join the Japanese, much to the acclaim of the nationalists of the Congress Party in India. Subhash Chandra Bose had arrived in Singapore, in early 1943, dispatched by the Germans from Europe by submarine, as recounted in Chapter 5. Bose's charismatic personality, energy and organizing ability made themselves immediately felt amongst the 60,000 Indian prisoners of war in Japanese hands and amongst the Indian residents in the region who pledged him support and money. His call *'Dilli Chalo'* (on to Delhi), after the cry of the Meerut mutineers of 1857, enthused the prisoners, and despite strict British censorship, began to find echo in India. Whereas the British Military Intelligence put the figure of the officers and men of the British Indian Army who joined Bose to form the Indian National Army (INA) at 20,000, Bose's officers later claimed their strength was nearly 50,000. At the beginning, British Military Intelligence underestimated and belittled Bose's movement, but later admitted that the soldiers who had changed sides had been deeply affected by Bose's 'inspiring and courageous leadership'. They fought

the British Indian Army bravely and regarded themselves as 'liberators of their motherland'. Moreover, 'there was substantial popular support from the public in India for the INA'.[10]

Even more shocking to Wavell had been the defection of some soldiers belonging to the forward units of the Indian Army to Bose's Indian National Army (INA) and to the Japanese in the fighting in Burma. Churchill blamed the sudden expansion of the Indian Army and the intake of Hindu recruits for this state of affairs. There was no point, he pointed out, in having an army 'that might shoot us in the back'.[11] The fact was that with the modernization of warfare and with the introduction of tanks, aeroplanes and other mechanized instruments of war, higher standards of education had become necessary among the rank and file, and educated Indians of all communities were more nationalistic. What part racialism might have played in switching loyalties, now that for the first time British and Indian officers in such large numbers were thrown together, is discussed later.

★

Wavell's apprehensions on taking over as viceroy could not be ascribed to pessimism or defeatism, and were confirmed when mutinies took place in several branches of the armed forces within a couple of years. Indian naval ratings first mutinied in strength in the port of Bombay in early 1946, an insurrection that soon spread to other ports such as Karachi and engulfed other services as well.

The naval mutiny is said to have been provoked by the behaviour of the commanding officer of HMIS *Talwar* (a shore signals school in Bombay) who commonly called his men 'black buggars' or 'coolie bastards' and by the refusal of the commanding officer, Bombay, to replace him. The mutiny quickly spread to other ships in the port; over 7000 sailors joined in, and some of the warships involved threatened to fire at British barracks and at the bastions of the European community on the Bombay seafront, such as the Yacht Club and the Taj Mahal Hotel. In Karachi port a two-hour duel took place between the shore batteries and a Royal Indian Navy sloop,



HMIS *Hindustan*, before its crew surrendered. The unrest was not confined to the Indian Navy. The personnel of the Royal Indian Air Force at Madras, Karachi, Poona, Allahabad and Delhi, the Royal Indian Army Signals Corps at Jabalpur and other towns and 1600 Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at Madras also revolted. In all these units, better educated Indians were to be found.

The naval mutiny in Bombay was suppressed after over 200 persons, mostly demonstrators in Bombay city who had joined them, were shot and over 1000 injured. The fact that it spread like wildfire showed that the bullying by a few British officers could not be the only cause, and that the disaffection was part of a deeper malaise. Could, under these circumstances, the British rely on the loyalty of the officers of the Indian Army to suppress a renewed mass agitation or an armed struggle by the nationalists? According to the newly released documents, neither the Joint Intelligence Committee in London nor the officials in Delhi thought so by 1946. Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, who had replaced Wavell as commander-in-chief, was to record in a top-secret appreciation: 'It is no use shutting one's eye to the fact that any Indian soldier worth his salt is a Nationalist though that does not mean...that he is anti-British.' And added that: 'Wholesale defections and disintegration of the Indian Army was [*sic*] possible.'[12]

Wavell's judgement of the capabilities of Indian leaders also influenced his assessment of their value as Britain's future partners. Except for Vallabhbhai Patel, whom he considered 'the most forceful character among them' and 'more of a man...though communal',[13] Wavell had little time for the others. Maulana Azad, he noted, was a 'gentleman but against Gandhi like a rabbit faced with a stoat'; Ghaffar Khan 'stupid and stubborn'; and Gandhiji 'shrewd but devious and malevolent'. Nehru was 'sincere and intelligent and personally courageous but unbalanced', according to Wavell's opinion of the future prime minister. The epithets he used for Jinnah were: 'unhappy', 'arbitrary', 'self-centred', 'lonely', 'but straighter and more sincere', which apparently did not disqualify him in the same sense as they did the Congress Party leaders.[14]

Some officers of the Indian Army, while recounting their exploits of chivalry in the Middle East and Burma, told me that they were

surprised how racist the British were, though they shrugged this off as 'one of those things'. So, when writing this book, it became necessary to explore a little further if racism had indeed played a part in creating mutual Anglo–Indian antipathy in the British Indian Army. Fears about the loyalty of this Army, perhaps more than any other factor, shook the foundations of the Raj.

Major General Udey Chand Dube, now in his nineties, is probably the oldest King's Commissioned Officer alive in India today. Commissioned from the British Military Academy at Sandhurst in 1928, he is still fit. David Niven, the famous actor, was his roommate at the renowned British War College and John Hunt, who led the team that climbed Mount Everest, and Mohammad Ayub Khan, who became the president of Pakistan, were his contemporaries there. When asked whether he ever faced racial discrimination in the Army, Major General Dube replied as follows.

After Sandhurst he was attached for a period to the Black Watch, a British regiment, in which he found absolutely no discrimination. But after he joined the Gurkha Regiment of the Indian Army, he found some. For example, on guest nights, when the local British community members, including ladies, were invited, Indian officers were separated and had to take their meals in the card room or the billiard room. One of his colleagues, Captain Mohammad Ali, he recalled, lost his commission for being 'politically minded', or 'maybe because he had married an English girl'. His British colleagues at times made snide remarks about Indian officers. Some British officers tried to create friction between the Indian officers to keep them apart.

Major General Dube then said: 'During the fighting in the Buthigong jungles in Burma, while bullets were flying from all sides, some Indian officers bumped off those British colleagues who they considered bullies', thereby suggesting that some Indian officers at least had been strongly affected by real or imagined racialism or anti-Indian sentiments of certain British officers. Dube also said that 'Wavell and [his successor] Mountbatten must have heard of these incidents'. He then stated: 'I must not give you the impression that these problems prevented us, the Indian and the British, from fighting together against the enemy; but facts are facts.'



General Stan Menzes has mentioned in his book* only one case known to him when a British CO was shot. Another Indian major general gave the following picture: 'By 1941 the majority of Indian officers serving in units would have been under ECOs (Emergency Commissioned Officers, i.e., those commissioned during the war) and they did not suffer so greatly at the hands of the "Koi Hais", as we regulars did pre-war. Most British officers would have been by 1942 uninhibited by colonial prejudices. It was the pre-war British Officer who was the enemy...I cannot imagine an Indian officer killing his superior officer just to settle a racial grudge! Can you?'[15]

D.K. Palit was commissioned into the Indian Army in 1938 in the Baluch Regiment. He had spent his earlier years in England and was a keen polo player. He observes: 'There was almost no social contact between British and Indian officers in the army...I was never asked by my commanding officer, my second in command or my company commander for a meal or a cup of tea in his [*sic*] house. There was just no contact even though the one army fought the same enemy and carried the same weapons. But we never mixed.'[16] Khushwant Singh, the acclaimed writer, who has been an admirer of England all his life, has said: 'If they [the British] ever made any friends, it was in a benign attitude towards their servants. Most of them hated this country when they were here.'[17]

Lord Mountbatten, in one of his earliest weekly top-secret reports to the secretary of state in April 1947, states that he had to address the governors of British provinces, after he heard some English ladies talking offensively about his Indian guests at a reception at the Viceroy's House, requiring them to absolutely ensure that such practices ceased forthwith. How much of such behaviour was the result of British hatred of people who were on the verge of snatching away from them the brightest jewel in the British Crown and how much pure racism is difficult to say. What, however, was clear was that an overwhelming majority of Englishmen in India by this time

---

* *Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-first Century* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1993, p. 357).

considered the Congress Party and the Hindus generally their enemy and the Muslims their friend. 'The immense gulf between the Hindu religion and mentality and ours and the Moslem is the real core of all our troubles in India,'[18] wrote Wavell in his diary.

There have been changes in the British perception of Indian Muslims from one century to another – 'humours turning with chimes and principles with times'. Up to the 1857 Mutiny, as recounted in Chapter 3, the Muslim had been Britain's enemy number one. That year, Sir Henry Rawlinson, a member of the India Council in London, had spoken of the 'seething, fermenting, festering mass of Muslim hostility in India'.[19] But for much of the twentieth century the Muslim was Britain's friend. Sir Olaf Caroe (once the governor of NWFP) rationalized that the Muslim had better absorbed Western values and was more dependable than the Hindu in India. Western opinion again turned against the Muslims in the twenty-first century after the Al-Qaida terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001.

☆

There were other reasons for Wavell's view that the game was up. When he took up his post in 1943, famine was raging in Bengal. Over three million people died. Wavell wired to Leopold Amery a few months after assuming the viceroyalty:

> Bengal famine was one of the greatest disasters that has befallen any people under British rule and damage to our reputation here...is incalculable.[20]

The situation was obviously not at all 'trim', as Linlithgow had imagined.

There had been several famines in the 1930s, which clearly indicated the growing weakness of the administrative machinery and the impoverishment of the masses, because famines occur as much from faulty management of food stocks as from their scarcity. Essential services such as the police, posts and telegraphs, railways, courts



of justice and land tax collection were impeccably maintained till the end of British rule. But there was minimal capital expenditure on developing the economic infrastructure after the First World War. Agriculture was the main source of revenue, but there was no construction of new canals and dams for irrigation or roads to carry produce. The expansion of industries was not encouraged to preserve markets for British goods. Revenue from raw material exports was depressed in the 1930s because of worldwide recession. There was hardly any middle class to yield income-tax. The inevitable periodic jacking up of the tax on land to meet the rising civil and military budgets was the main cause of increasing poverty and rural indebtedness. For fifty years before independence (in August 1947), the per capita income in real terms in India had been rising only at 0.6 per cent per annum, whereas the increase in population was well over 3 per cent annually. A splendid new capital had indeed been built and British officials continued to live extraordinarily comfortably, with the governors of provinces maintaining summer retreats in the hills matching Scottish castles. But, by the end of the Second World War, there were neither the funds, nor the forces, nor the confidence – despite the brave words of Churchill and the British Tories – to sustain British rule in India.

☆

By 1944 a possible solution to the problem Britain faced had taken shape in Wavell's mind. He believed that one way to retain the military base in the subcontinent, as Britain bowed out, would be to build up the ambitious Jinnah and, with his cooperation, to withdraw the British forces from the Congress Party-dominated parts of India into the Muslim-majority provinces. These territories would include the strategic northwest of India – and the port of Karachi – as they were the most suitable areas to counter any Soviet expansionist designs. Pakistan would become a *dominion* in the British Empire, while the rest of India would be left to its own devices, indeed, its potential for mischief neutralized by the Anglo–Pak alliance. This objective was achievable, considering the close cooperation his predecessor, Linlithgow, had developed with Jinnah

during the war and keeping in view the promises the latter had made with respect to cooperation on defence matters.

But Wavell felt that there was no point in consulting London, since Churchill was dead set against any move on India. He therefore began methodically and quietly to create the realities on the ground for the fulfilment of his objective at a later date. The first task he saw in this context was to build up Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

The position of the Muslim League in India did not appear as comfortable to Wavell as Linlithgow had pronounced it to be at the time of his departure. In the east, the Muslim League Government in Bengal had fallen because of internecine quarrels and the Muslim League chief minister in Assam had to come to an arrangement with the Congress Party in order to survive. With regard to the west, Wavell noted in his diary: 'The Sind Government seems to be revolting from League control, the NWFP (Muslim League) Government [is] likely to fall [and it fell in 1945] and the Unionists (the anti-Jinnah coalition) Ministry in the Punjab [is] consolidating itself.'[21] This last development was the most galling to the viceroy, for, without the Punjab fully in Jinnah's grip, Wavell could not possibly proceed with his plans to detach northwest India from the rest of the country.

Linlithgow had been able to block the loyalist premier of the Punjab, Sikandar Hayat Khan, from opposing Jinnah on the wider Indian scene, but had been unable to supplant Sikandar Hayat Khan's Unionist coalition of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs with a Jinnahite government. And even after Sikandar Hayat Khan's death in 1941, the old Unionist coalition under Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana continued to hold. The NWFP, another crucial province for the creation of Pakistan, was also outside Jinnah's control. Indeed, the 'Hindu Congress Party' was in power in this totally Muslim province – 'a bastard situation', as Lord Hastings Ismay, Mountbatten's chief of staff, was to describe it.[22] But this was largely because of the traditional Pushtoon antipathy to foreign rule: once the British departed, they could be expected to turn against the control of the plainsmen from Hindustan. It was the Punjab that held the key to Pakistan. How was Jinnah's supremacy to be established there?

In the eight British provinces, where the Congress Party Governments had resigned at the beginning of the war, namely, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Orissa, Bihar, Bombay, Madras, Assam and the NWFP, British governors continued to rule. In all these provinces, and particularly in the United Provinces, the Muslim League strength was rising and rising fast. In the Muslim-minority provinces, the slogan 'Islam in danger' worked. It did not work in the Muslim-majority provinces, such as the Punjab or the NWFP, where it was the Muslims who ran the governments and dominated political life.



The general attitude to the growing communalism in the United Provinces and the other British-ruled provinces was one of laissez-faire and certainly not of crushing it with an iron hand.

Then, an event took place that provided Wavell the ideal opportunity to move Jinnah to the forefront in the Punjab. Gandhiji, still behind bars, had been impatient to stem the growing communalism, and had tried to contact Jinnah, in vain, from jail. After he was released on grounds of ill health at Wavell's behest in mid-1944, the Mahatma decided to call on Jinnah. Their much-publicized meetings over several days took place in Jinnah's villa on Bombay's fashionable Malabar Hill. Hoping to curb the growing Hindu–Muslim cleavage, Gandhiji offered to appease Jinnah by promising to persuade the Congress Party to agree to district-wise referendums in the British provinces claimed by Jinnah and give these districts the option to opt out of India, with the proviso, that this opting out should take place only after the British quit India. Jinnah was emphatic that Gandhiji's proposal would mutilate the boundaries of the Punjab, Bengal and Assam provinces, which he claimed in their entirety for Pakistan, thereby leaving the Muslims, as he put it, with 'no more than a husk'. And, under Gandhiji's scheme, even this truncated Pakistan was to be delayed till the British departed from India, with no statutory guarantee that it would be fulfilled. 'This offer made to me is an insult to our intelligence', Jinnah told a representative of the *London News Chronicle*.

There was an episode during the talks that Hector Bolitho, Jinnah's biographer, has recorded as follows:

> One day when Mahatma Gandhi went to see the Quaid-i-Azam ['the great leader'] they ended their arguments and talked, simply, of their daily life. They were weary a little like exhausted boxers,

finding relief in their parting handshake. Jinnah mentioned that, among his ills, one of his feet was troubled with a nervous rash. The Mahatma sank to the floor and insisted on removing Jinnah's shoes and socks. The scene of Jinnah in his immaculate clothes, and Gandhi, robed in bare simplicity is at first amusing, and then touching. The Mahatma held the troubled foot in his hands and said, "I know what will heal you. I shall send it tomorrow morning." Next day, a little box of clay mixture arrived. Jinnah did not use it, but he thanked Gandhi when he came that evening, for one more talk, and told him that the medicine had already relieved the pain.[23]

Jinnah had exhibited exemplary manners, but Gandhiji's gesture made no difference to his course. Indeed, Gandhiji's attempt to reach out to Jinnah had the opposite effect of that intended. It convinced anti-Jinnah Muslims that partition in one way or the other was coming and therefore to oppose Jinnah was futile and attracted many opportunist Muslim leaders and job seekers to the Muslim League. Side by side, it reinforced the views of those in the League who believed that fanning communalism was the best way to pressurize the Mahatma. 'This meeting must surely blast Gandhi's reputation as a leader', wrote the viceroy that night in his diary.[24]

This was not the only result that flowed from this meeting. To Wavell, Gandhiji had, willy-nilly, accepted the principle of Pakistan, whatever the differences on its area and the timing of its coming into being. So, taking courage in both hands – for he had been warned not to take any initiative on his own in India – he wired directly to the great man:

> I think the failure of the Gandhi–Jinnah talks has created a favourable moment for a move by HMG...[25]

Wavell argued that the British administrative machinery had become too weak to control nationalists' pressure and that prolonging British rule by repression would not be acceptable to the British public or to world opinion. He sought permission to return home for consultations, which he felt would help in working out a fresh



British initiative. To convince Churchill, however, was not that simple. The prime minister had no intention of presiding over a reform packet for India. Wavell's request was turned down, with Churchill wiring back: 'These very large problems require to be considered at leisure and best of all in victorious peace.'[26] Although rebuffed, Wavell persevered and, after five months and many more telegrams, was summoned home in early 1945.



Wavell reached London on 23 March 1945, about a month and a half before the German surrender and the end of the war in Europe. The bonhomie engendered by the Yalta Conference between the British and Americans on the one hand and the Russians on the other had begun to flounder on the differences on the future government of Poland. In April 1945 Stalin accused the British and US generals of reaching an agreement with the Germans in neutral Switzerland that would 'permit Anglo–American troops to advance to the east and the Anglo–Americans in return would ensure milder peace terms for Germany'.[27] This charge infuriated the US president, Roosevelt, who, in a telegram to Stalin, termed it 'a vile representation of my action or those [*sic*] of my trusted subordinates'.[28] In the Middle East too the first chill of the Cold War became apparent in Anglo–Soviet relations, as Moscow tried to prize Azerbaijan away from Persia. Stalin's announcement that the USSR's production of oil was insufficient for its purpose further exacerbated British anxiety about a possible Soviet push towards the oilfields of the Persian Gulf and even into Afghanistan.

The concern that the British military felt about future Soviet intentions emerges clearly from a top-secret report on 'the Security of India and the Indian Ocean', prepared by the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff of the War Cabinet on Churchill's orders. This report, which has been alluded to in Chapter 1, states: 'The USSR is the only major power which would be capable of seriously threatening our interests in India and the Indian Ocean area by 1955–1960.' The report also points out: 'It is of paramount importance that India should not secede from the Empire or remain neutral in war.' The

strategic importance of India, according to this report's analysis, were attributed to the following factors:

(1) "Its value as a base" from where forces "would be suitably placed for deployment within the Indian Ocean area and in the Middle East and the Far East";
(2) "its position in relation to our air and sea communications; from the UK and the Middle East to Australia and the Far East"; and
(3) the contribution which India is "capable of making to the war effort of the British Empire in consequence of its large reserve manpower (part of which is of high fighting quality)".

The report notes that: 'Soviet oilfields in the Caucasus would be vulnerable to attacks from airfields in (northwest) India' since the 'sea communications in the Persian Gulf and in the Arabian Sea carry a major portion of the oil produced in the Middle East and are therefore of great strategic value'. The report then hinted at the possibility of detaching a part of India to achieve British objectives:

> We must ensure that whatever constitutional changes occur, we retain the right to station military strategic reserves in India.... There might be political objections to stationing the strategic reserve in India proper after she has been granted Dominion Status.... Central Headquarters India have suggested Baluchistan as an alternative to India proper, on the ground that it may be relatively easy to exclude this territory from the Dominion of India.

The report also touched upon the role of the USA: 'In the event of Soviet aggression early support from the US is essential to the security of our interests.' It suggested how this support could be secured: 'A World Organization might well result in the USA assuming definite military responsibility in the Indian Ocean area despite the fact that she has few direct interests there.' However, it added: 'It would be necessary to ensure that the USA would not regard participation in regional defence measures as a pretext for intervention in questions involving the relationship between Great Britain and India.' The seeds of some form of partition of India and setting up of multinational defence arrangements – CENTO – can be discerned in this report as also the British anxiety to keep India away from the influence of its main partner, the USA.[29]



The records do not show that Wavell was associated in any way with this assessment. However, his view that Britain's prime interest in India was strategic because of its usefulness as a military base, transit point and contributor of fighting manpower, was exactly the same as in the report. Only on one point did his views differ: Whereas the report envisaged the possibility of the continuation of British control over India till 1955, Wavell had no such hope.

Wavell's most important meeting in London was with Churchill, which was held on 29 March 1945. A record of this meeting is unavailable. But one can get some idea of what was discussed from a cryptic entry made by the viceroy in his diary that night:

> The PM then launched into a long jeremiad about India which lasted for about forty minutes. He seems to favour partition of India into Pakistan, Hindustan and Princestan.[30]

On whether there was any talk on how such a goal was to be achieved, the viceroy's diary is silent.

Wavell's talks with the members of the India Committee of the War Cabinet, headed by Clement Attlee, were spread over two months. They revolved round his proposal to hold a conference of Indian leaders to discuss the formation of a politically representative executive council that would contain an equal number of 'caste Hindus and Muslims' and would function with minimum interference from the viceroy. Further, Wavell felt that before the conference was called, those Congress Party leaders still in jail should be released. The War Cabinet finally agreed to the proposal but it was understood that Jinnah's assent to the composition of the proposed executive council was a prerequisite. Initially, Churchill hesitated to take the plunge but later yielded after he was assured that he need have no fears that a government in India would result from the proposal and, indeed, the conference was destined to fail.[31]

Despite these assurances, Churchill may not have given his consent to such experiments but for the necessity to trump pressure mounting once again from across the Atlantic. While Wavell was holding consultations in London, the British foreign secretary, Sir Anthony Eden, had travelled to the USA in April 1945 to attend the San Francisco conference to launch the United Nations. Taking advantage of this visit, the Americans decided once more to tackle the British on India. Both the US secretary of state, Edward R. Stettinius, and the assistant secretary of state, Joseph Grew, spoke to Eden on the necessity for constitutional advance in India. The gist of the conversations was recorded by Grew (on 17 May 1945) as follows:

> I had an opportunity to say [to Eden] that I thought that Mr Stettinius had already spoken to him of our feeling that our prestige in the Far East would be greatly improved whenever a solution to the problem of India is found and that we must always reckon with the future development of "Asia for the Asiatics Movement". I added that progressive steps in India would tend to offset the strengthening of such a movement. Mr Eden made no comment except to say that he did not believe that the Indian problem would be settled as long as Gandhi lived.[32]

Despite Eden's stiff response, Britain, within a few days, was able to inform the Americans that arrangements had been made to set free the members of the Congress Working Committee (kept in detention since 1942) and that Lord Wavell had been authorized to make a fresh proposal to the Indians. Churchill had successfully trumped Roosevelt's pressure tactics for granting self-government to India after the fall of Singapore by playing the Muslim (or the Pakistan) card through the Cripps mission. A Hindu–Muslim disagreement in a conference as proposed by Wavell would help to again quieten down the Americans.

The Americans had continued their 'friendly pressure' on the British for granting self-government to India in accordance with the policy laid down by the president, as described in Chapter 4. In July 1944, John G. Winant, the US ambassador to the UK, on instructions



from Washington, informed London 'that a satisfactory solution of the Indian problem should contribute much to the successful prosecution of the war in the Far East and is of great importance to the future peace of the world'.[33] However, Churchill ignored the advice. But in November 1944 the Americans got an opportunity to hit back. Drew Pearson, the well-known journalist, published a piece alleging that Ambassador William Phillips, the special representative of the US president to India, had sent the following report:

(1) The morale of the Indian Army (which he termed a "purely mercenary force") was low;
(2) Britain had no intention to play much of a role in the war against Japan; and
(3) Churchill did not wish to apply the Atlantic Charter to India.[34]

This report made Churchill see red. Despite numerous urgent representations made by the British ambassador, Lord Halifax, that the White House or the State Department deny the report, the Americans refused to oblige, President Roosevelt concurring with the acting secretary of state that 'we share in general the view expressed in the Ambassador's letter'.[35]



The conference of Indian leaders called by Wavell on 25 June 1945 was a charade from the beginning to the end. Delegates from all the major parties, the representatives of the Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes and premiers of British provinces present and former – including the Congress Party premiers who had resigned in 1939 – were invited to meet the viceroy in the Viceregal Lodge in the Raj's summer capital of Simla, up in the Himalayas. It would transport the Indian leaders from the sweltering heat of the Indian plains in summer, some from jails, to a climate approximating summer in Scotland or Gstaad in Switzerland, amongst hillsides covered by pine, oak and deodar trees, with spectacular views of snow-clad mountains to the north. In Simla they would either walk to the

Viceroy's Lodge or be carried there in a rickshaw, for no car except that of the viceroy was permitted on the roads of this hill station. The rickshaw was a light wooden contraption with a double seat suspended over two wheels, which was pulled and pushed by five men with the help of poles attached to its front and rear. The lodge itself was a replica of a Scottish castle with towers and gabled windows, surrounded by sloping lawns, gravelled paths and miles of hedges of English summer flowers. Gandhiji also came to Simla, but did not attend the conference; Nehru was not invited because he did not fall within any of the categories for participation designated by Wavell. It was Jinnah, in his London suits, who was the star.

The conference failed as it was planned to fail, because Wavell refused to veto Jinnah's pretensions to represent *all* the Muslims of India. According to Durga Dass, a journalist of great integrity, Jinnah told him in the lift of the Cecil Hotel, Simla (towards the end of the conference) that he had been assured by friends in England, through a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, that 'if he remained firm on the demand [of exclusively representing the Muslims and thus breaking the conference] he would get Pakistan'.[36] One of the two secretaries of the Simla Conference has written: 'Hossain Imam, who attended the conference in his capacity as the leader of the Muslim League Party in the Council of States, stopped me on my way to the Cecil Hotel and said that a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council was advising Jinnah to stand firm.'[37] These British counsels to Jinnah were merely by way of abundant caution, because Jinnah was already playing the British game. He used the Simla Conference to make a long statement, arguing fully the case for Pakistan and highlighting Hindu–Muslim differences, which provided enough material to London to pass on to the Americans. According to the US State Department secret documents, Wavell's officers briefed the American Commissariat in Delhi on eight separate occasions during and after the conference.

Providing parity to the Muslims in the envisaged Viceroy's Executive Council could be understood as ensuring a safeguard for a minority. But sustaining Jinnah's claim as the sole spokesman of all the Muslims of India, when in both the Punjab and the NWFP, ministries of Muslims opposed to Jinnah were in office and



commanded majorities in the legislatures, demonstrated that the British aim was not to instal a new government in India but something different. Wavell had before him the top-secret and personal telegram sent by Sir Bertrand James Glancy, the governor of the Punjab, dated 3 July 1945, stating: 'Jinnah's claim to nominate all Muslims appears to me in light of League's meagre hold on Muslim-majority Provinces, to be outrageously unreasonable. If he is given three nominations out of, say, five Muslim seats he should account himself [*sic*] fortunate indeed.'[38] And, on the same day, the governor of Bengal, Lord Richard Casey (who later became the foreign minister of Australia) warned Wavell in a top-secret, personal message that Khwaja Nizam-ud-din (the ex-Muslim League Bengal premier) had informed him that 'he believed Jinnah would accept a Punjabi Muslim who is neither a member of the Congress nor of [the] League'.[39]

Wavell knew all along that Jinnah would stick to his guns, a stand that would be unacceptable to the Congress Party. He also knew that London would never agree to overrule Jinnah's demand, however absurd it may be; or let the Congress Party enter his 'cabinet', without the countervailing presence of the Muslim League in it. Therefore, 'enacting' the Simla Conference had no other purpose except to build up Jinnah against his Muslim rivals in the Punjab and to head off renewed American pressure for Indian self-government. And in this, Wavell succeeded brilliantly. The results of Simla were recorded by the Punjab governor as follows: 'Since Jinnah succeeded by his intransigence in wrecking the Simla Conference his stock has been standing very high with his followers and with a large section of the Muslim population. He has openly come out that the [coming] election will show an overwhelming verdict in favour of Pakistan. The uninformed Muslim would be told that the question he is called on to answer at the polls is – Are you a true believer or an infidel or a traitor? Against this slogan the Unionists have no spectacular battle cry.'[40]

Glancy then warned: 'If Pakistan becomes an imminent reality we shall be heading straight for bloodshed on a wide scale.'[41]

H.V. Hodson, the former reforms commissioner and main adviser to the viceroy, concurs with Glancy: 'Mr Jinnah's demonstration of imperious strength at the Simla Conference was a shot in the arm

for the League and a serious blow for its Muslim opponents especially in the Punjab...Lord Wavell's sudden abandonment of his plan [to set up a representative executive council] was a decisive move that made the partition of India inevitable.... To twist Mr Jinnah's arm, it is clear, was not part of the plan that he had so laboriously agreed with His Majesty's Government.'[42]

After Simla, Muslims with political ambitions, including those from other Muslim formations, began to switch sides to the League in large numbers, though, in the Punjab, Tiwana held his ground. Soon after the conference, the secretary of state, Leopold Amery, in a personal telegram to the viceroy, congratulated him: 'The Congress Party, after all by coming into the Conference, abandoned their claim that they are only people to take over from us.'[43] The same Amery who, in 1940, had warned Linlithgow of the dangers of Pakistan, had by now become an enthusiastic supporter of the partition of India. A Britain greatly weakened by the war needed allies in the subcontinent to help it to resist Soviet pressure in the fresh *chukker* of the Great Game, which was about to begin. For the British to listen to warnings of massacres and blood baths would be similar to the Americans denying support to the Mujaheedins against the Soviets in Afghanistan some forty years later, despite the ever-present danger of fuelling Islamic fundamentalism.



Two unexpected developments took place soon after the breakdown of the Simla Conference that gave a jolt to the British in India. First, Churchill's Conservative Party lost the general elections and a Labour Party Government, with Clement Attlee as prime minister, took office on 23 July 1945. This was a defeat for Churchill at the very moment of his triumph and attested to the changing mood of the British public against war and the Empire, which the new government could not possibly ignore. The second was the dropping of atom bombs by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that brought about the unconditional surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945. This military feat increased America's confidence to follow its own agenda and, among other things, to insist on the application of the Atlantic



Charter to European dependencies in Asia and see them freed from European control. Attlee frankly admits in his autobiography that Britain could not continue to hold on to India because of 'American pressure against Empire'.[44]

The trumpet for the British retreat was sounding from another quarter as well. John Maynard Keynes, the economist, warned the Labour Cabinet members soon after they assumed power that the British debt had risen to £3000 million. He also pointed out that 'the expenditure which is wholly responsible for our financial difficulties is the 2000 million pounds on policing and administering the Empire', a situation that another commentator described as one of the most outstanding examples of strategic overextension in history. Keynes concluded that 'British financial independence from the US (so dear to some Labourites of the day) was impossible without substantial cuts in future spending'.[45] And the harsh reality was that India could no more help to recoup the losses. British exports to India had declined from £83 million in 1930 to less than £40 million by the start of the great war (in 1939). The downfall was the result of competition from American and Japanese goods.

Attlee, whatever his reservations about the Congress Party and its leaders, was anxious to retain, if possible, the goodwill of a future independent Hindustan, which even if India was partitioned, would emerge as one of the largest nations in the world, abutting a still-unsettled China and resource-rich South-east Asia. He and Sir Stafford Cripps also felt it in their bones that, if judiciously handled, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Harrowian, could be won over into some kind of a partnership. On his visits to England, they found that he shared the same Fabian ideals they themselves had been influenced by and they understood his anger at the beginning of the war as directed against Neville Chamberlain's 'reactionary' government rather than at England as such. Had he not, in 1940, said that England's difficulties should not be India's opportunities, even though sometimes his actions did not match his words? And had he not maintained a channel of communication with Attlee and Cripps through the Labourite Krishna Menon, in London? They believed that Nehru's 'tireless energy' could be diverted into 'constructive channels' and his 'delusions' curbed if he was saddled with responsibility. And whatever the viceroy's views

about him, they were unwilling to quarrel with a man with whose help they hoped to possibly reconstruct British–Hindustani relations.

On the other hand, after the Labour Government took over power, Wavell became more assertive on his policy in favour of Jinnah and the Muslim League, probably believing that with Churchill dislodged, the Labour Government might 'mishandle' the India situation. For example, he wrote in his diary on 6 August 1945: 'I know nothing of the new Secretary of State [Frederick William] Pethick-Lawrence. I fear he may have fixed ideas derived from Congress Party contacts.'[46] On 20 August he alerted his new masters as follows: 'HMG must be most cautious in any immediate announcement [on India] they wish to make. It is easy to say that the Muslims cannot be allowed to hold up the settlement; but they are too large a proportion of the population to be bypassed or coerced without very grave danger.'[47] And when summoned to London for a policy review by the cabinet, he spoke as follows:

> There was no possibility of a compromise between the Muslim League and the Congress (Party) and we...have to come down on the side of one or the other.... It was most unlikely that Mr Jinnah would now enter into discussions without a previous guarantee of acceptance in principle of a Pakistan. While it was possible to overestimate the importance of any individual political leader [his] own judgment [was] that Jinnah spoke for 99 per cent of the Muslim population of India in their apprehensions of Hindu domination.... Before further progress could be made, we should face up to the root cause which was the problem of Pakistan.[48]

Wavell further clarified his views in a note for the cabinet's consideration (on 31 August 1945). In this note, he stated: 'The draft declaration of 1942 [the Cripps offer] proceeded on the assumption that partition in the last resort provided solution of the Hindu–Muslim question.' But, in 1945, the Cripps offer would not any more be acceptable to Jinnah because the Muslim majorities in the Punjab and Bengal were too slim and he could not be sure whether these two provinces would definitely vote for Pakistan. 'If a plebiscite was held of the whole population, the Punjab would quite possibly not vote for Pakistan.' Further, Jinnah would not welcome the idea of a Constituent Assembly as envisaged in the Cripps offer at the end of hostilities, unless Pakistan was accepted in principle.



Wavell then called attention to the fact that since no agreement between the parties was likely to be reached, 'the nature of the secession safeguard...to the Muslim majority' may have to be the acceptance by HMG of the Pakistan scheme. However, Wavell put in a rider that not all the territories demanded by Jinnah could be conceded because the Punjab and Bengal would need to be divided: for the entire Punjab to go to Pakistan would be totally unacceptable to the Sikhs and to award the Hindu-majority Calcutta and West Bengal to Pakistan would be patently unfair to the Hindus.[49]

It becomes obvious from the foregoing discussion that Wavell was relentlessly pursuing the policy he had had in his mind soon after he became viceroy. It is also noteworthy that while Labour ministers in their public pronouncements and briefings to the Americans were singing the tune of a united India, they were seriously contemplating the least controversial way of dividing the country. And all these events occurred *two years before* India's independence and subsequent partition and long before Lord Louis Mountbatten, who is generally blamed for partition and the Punjab bloodbath that followed partition, appeared on the scene.

While in London, Wavell, on 31 August 1945, called on Churchill. According to Wavell's account: 'He warned me that the anchor [himself] was now gone and I was on a lee shore with rash pilots.... His final remark, as I closed the door of the lift was: "keep a bit of India."'[50]

Britain's position at this stage could be summarized as follows:

(1) The British military was emphatic on the value of retaining its base for defensive and offensive action against the USSR in any future dispensation in the subcontinent;
(2) Wavell was quite clear that this objective could only be achieved through partition – keeping a bit of India – because the Congress Party after independence would not cooperate with Britain on military and strategic matters; and

(3) while Labour leaders did not agree with Wavell that all was lost with the Congress Party, Attlee was, nonetheless, ready to support the division of India as long as the responsibility could not be attributed to Britain.

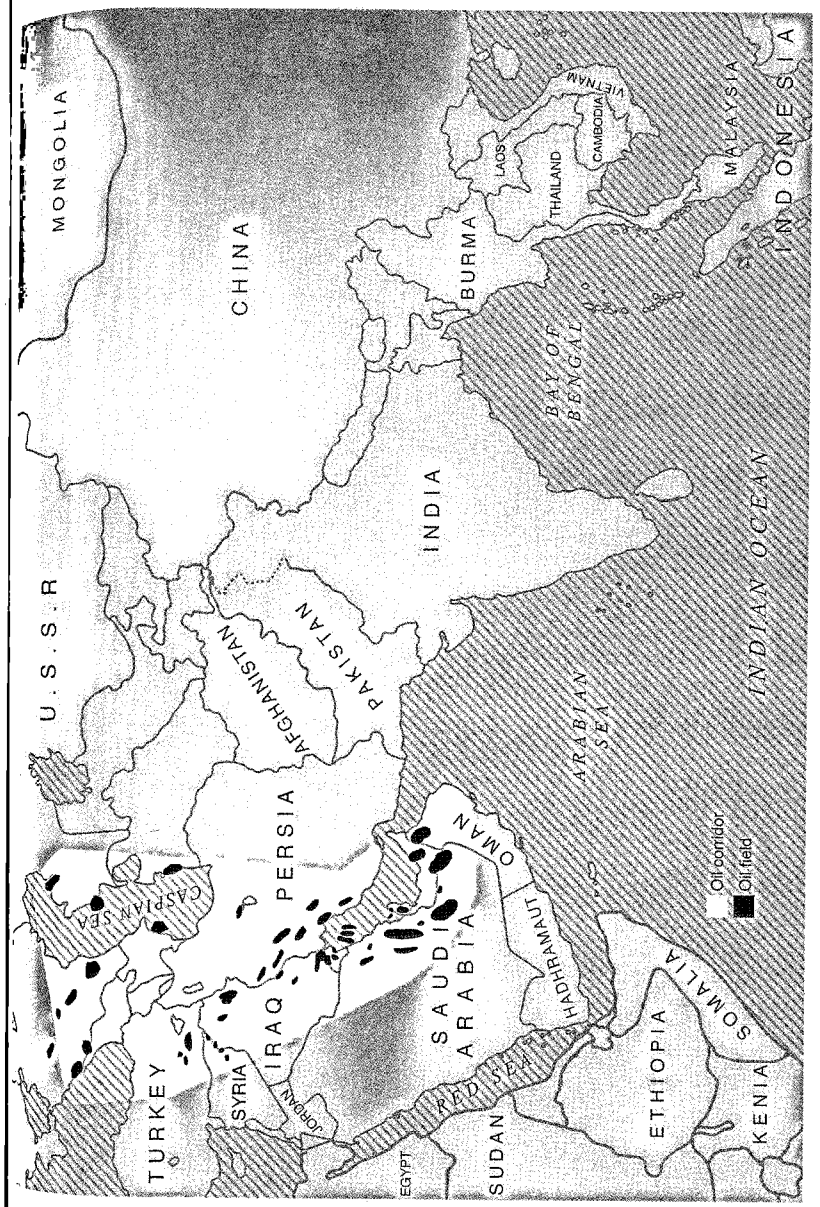
Significantly, Gilbert Laithwaite, the former private secretary of Lord Linlithgow and a strong supporter of Jinnah, was appointed the secretary of the India Committee of the British Cabinet and Lord Ismay, the alter ego of Churchill during the war, became a senior member of the British Cabinet Secretariat. It was the latter who provided the liaison between Attlee and the British chiefs of staff.

★

Elections in India to the Central and Provincial Legislatures had been announced for the winter of 1945. These elections were to be held on the basis of the franchise as hitherto, i.e., only 14 per cent of the population voting, with separate electorates for the Muslims. It is amazing that the Congress Party did not object to such a low franchise in an election that would be considered by the rest of the world as a sort of referendum on the question of India's division. It was also announced that, after the elections, a constitution-making body would be convened and, in the meantime, an executive council having the support of the main Indian parties would be formed to help run the government and 'to enable India to play her full part of working out a new World Order'.[51] The last formulation was expected to make the scheme attractive to Nehru, who, Cripps and Attlee knew was waiting breathlessly like a runner at the start of a race to enter office and win laurels for India in the international arena.

★

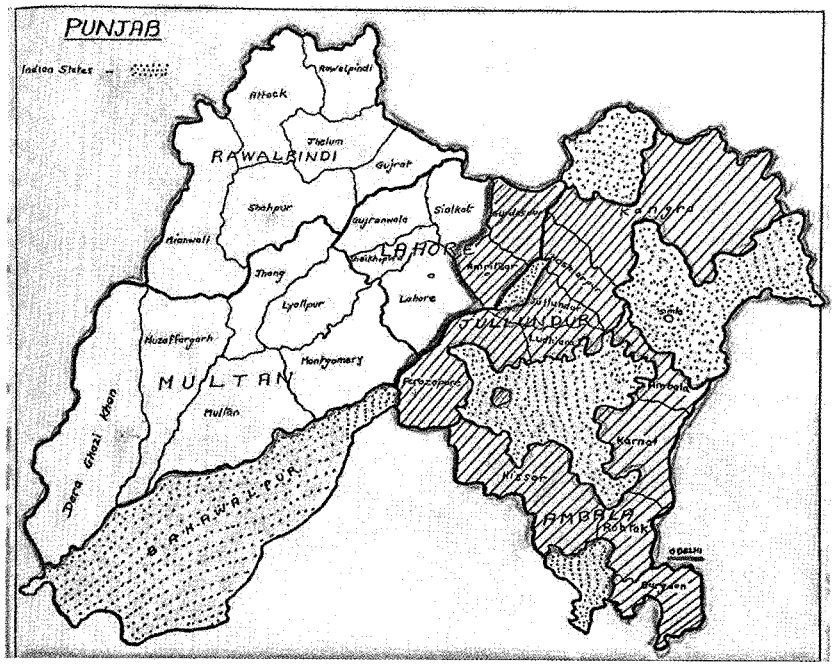
Subhash Chandra Bose was believed to have been killed in an air accident in Formosa in 1945, soon after the British forces reconquered Rangoon. However, the trial of the three INA officers – one Hindu, one Muslim and one Sikh – at the Red Fort in Delhi

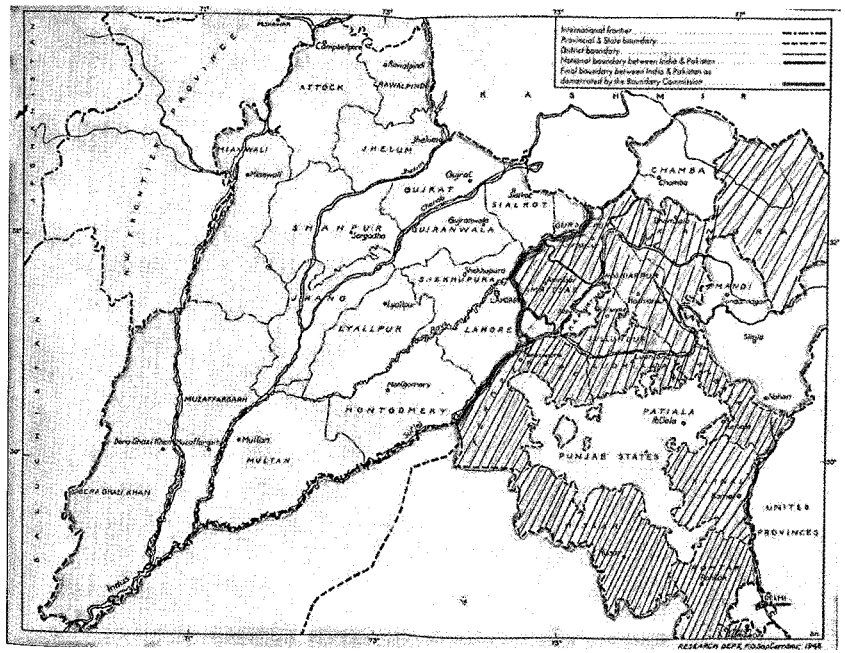



The (oil) *wells of power* around the Persian Gulf.
(*Note:* Borders depicted on the map are notional. The map is neither accurate nor drawn to scale; it is merely indicative of the geographical area.) (*Courtesy: India Today.*)

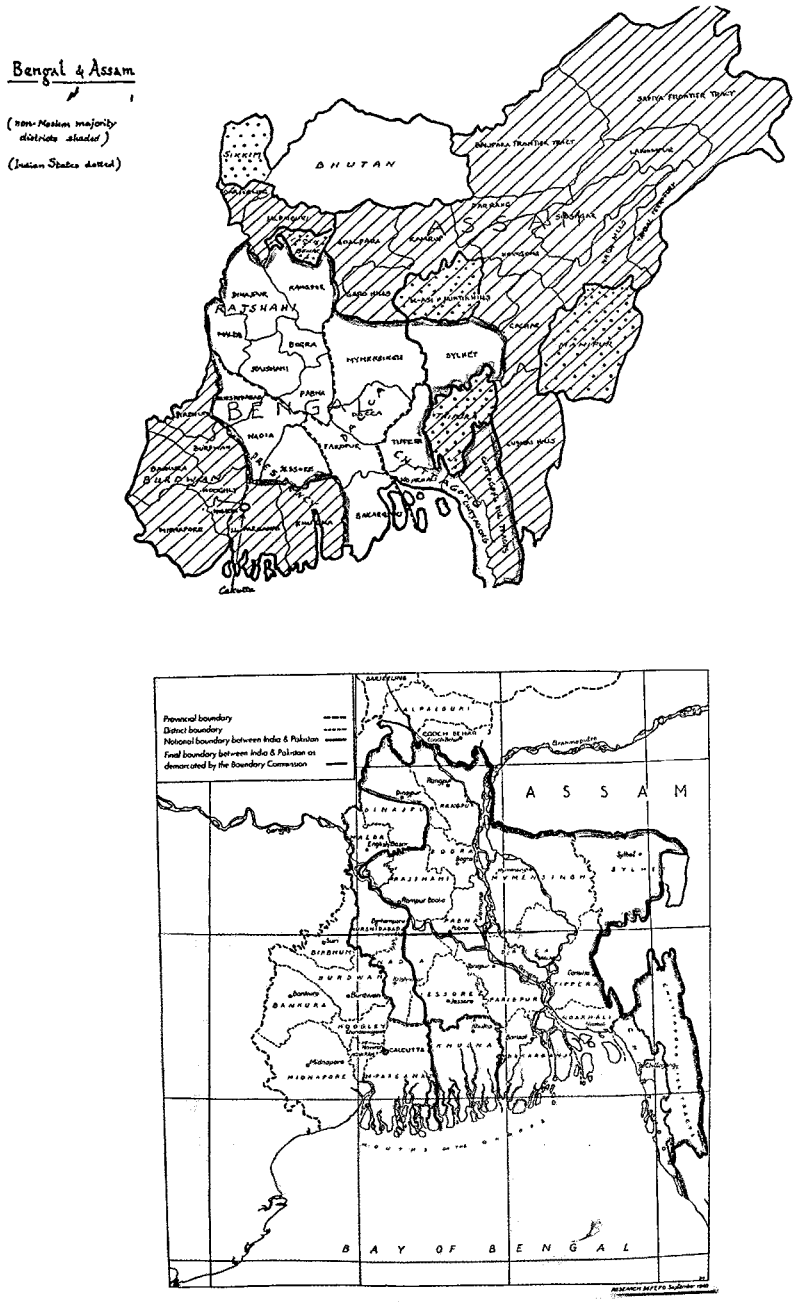
Lord Linlithgow, viceroy of India from April 1936 to September 1943 on a picnic.
(*Courtesy*: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.)

The US president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the British prime minister, Winston Churchill (both seated) among others. Standing behind Roosevelt is General George Marshall, the US secretary of state at the time of India's independence.
(*Courtesy*: US Embassy, New Delhi.)




*Top*: Lord Wavell's proposed demarcation line for the Punjab of February 1946.
*Bottom*: Sir Cyril Radcliffe's award of August 1947 for the same province.
(The maps are neither accurate nor drawn to scale; they are merely indicative.) (*Courtesy*: Transfer of power documents.)




*Top*: Lord Wavell's proposed division of Bengal and Assam of February 1946.
*Bottom*: Sir Cyril Radcliffe's award of August 1947 for the same two provinces.
(The maps are neither accurate nor drawn to scale; they are merely indicative.) (*Courtesy*: Transfer of power documen



for treason in 1946 excited so much emotion around the country that, after being sentenced, these officers had to be pardoned and the trials of the others more or less abandoned. The rebellion in the British Indian armed forces soon erupted and many nationalists felt that the moment to 'do or die' was now, when the British were exhausted after the war and demoralized in India, a moment more opportune than the one Gandhiji had chosen in 1942. 'Our struggle was gradually affecting the Indian Army...there would have been a fight, many of us would have died, but there would have been far less bloodshed than in 1947', claimed one of the leaders of the naval mutiny.[52] The Intelligence Bureau's view was that communal disorders were an antidote to the agitation taking an anti-British course. Conversely, the launching of a full-blown revolution by the nationalists might have been an antidote to Jinnah's threats of starting a civil war and may have possibly headed off his flashing of the sword – in the form of the historic 'direct action' – a few months later.

While the new Labour Party ministers cogitated on the next step, in India, Wavell launched a frontal attack to make them accept the principle of partition and foreclose the issue. On 6 November 1945 he sent a top-secret memorandum to the secretary of state:

> We are now faced in India with a situation of great difficulty and danger.... The Congress leaders intend to provoke or pave the way for mass disorder...counting on the INA as a spearhead of the revolt. They would suborn the Indian Army if they could, and hope that their threats will impair the loyalty and efficiency of the Police.... They have been encouraged by events in French Indo-China and Indonesia which they are watching carefully, and a good deal may depend upon what happens there and in Syria and Palestine.... There is no doubt about the growth of Hindu enthusiasm for the Congress.... The British members of the ICS [Indian Civil Service] and IP [Indian Police] are dispirited and discontented...while the Indian subordinates on whom the administration so largely depends are naturally reluctant to make enemies of the future masters of India.[53]

He followed up this cannonade with another telegram on 27 December 1945, recommending that Britain should base itself on the following two principles:

(1) If Muslims insist on self-determination in genuinely Muslim areas this must be conceded; and
(2) on the other hand there can be no question of compelling large non-Muslim populations to remain in Pakistan against their will.[54]

*

Jinnah, meanwhile, was working independently to achieve the recognition of the principle of Pakistan. Woodrow Wyatt, a Labour Member of Parliament, records that Jinnah told him emphatically on 8 January 1946 that he 'will not take part in any Interim Government without a prior declaration accepting the principle of Pakistan, though he would not ask at that stage for any discussion or commitment on details'. Jinnah then added: 'Hindus would accept it [Pakistan] as it would give them three-quarters of India, which is more than they have ever had before.'[55]

The Congress Party Working Committee in its resolution of September 1945, while forcefully reiterating its demand for independence and unity, had, nevertheless, declared that 'it cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in [the] Indian Union against their declared and established will'. This rider in regard to the right of secession was roundly attacked at the All-India Congress Committee and not passed. But it gave an indication to the Muslim League (and the British) that the Congress Party's objections to some sort of partition could be overcome by further manoeuvring and by applying pressure. The Congress Party's preoccupation with appearing to uphold lofty principles more than once led to their being hoist by their own petard. In any case, the Congress Party leaders did not threaten to revolt.

On 29 January 1946, the secretary of state in London finally reacted to Wavell's messages by sending the following telegram: 'It would help me to know when I may expect to receive your



recommendations as regards definition of genuinely Muslim areas if we are compelled to give a decision on this.'[56] It was in response to this telegram that Wavell, on 6/7 February 1946, forwarded the blueprint of the future Pakistan, which was implemented almost to the letter when India attained independence eighteen months later. This was one of the most important communications sent by any viceroy of India ever since the inception of that office, though ignored by most historians:

(1) If compelled to indicate demarcation of genuinely Moslem areas I recommend that we should include:
  (a) Sind, North-West Frontier Province, British Baluchistan, and Rawalpindi, Multan and Lahore Divisions of Punjab, less Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts.
  (b) In Bengal, the Chittagong and Dacca Divisions, the Rajshahi division (less Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling), the Nadia, Murshidabad and Jessore districts of Presidency division; and in Assam the Sylhet district.
(2) In the Punjab the only Moslem-majority district that would not go into Pakistan under this demarcation is Gurdaspur (51 per cent Moslem). Gurdaspur must go with Amritsar for geographical reasons and Amritsar being sacred city of Sikhs must stay out of Pakistan...
(5) We should make it clear in any announcement that this is only an indication of areas to which in HMG's view the Moslems can advance a reasonable claim, modifications in boundary might be negotiated and no doubt the interests of Sikhs in particular would be carefully considered in such negotiations. Some such saving clause is indicated by importance of preventing immediate violence by Sikhs.
(6) In Bengal the three Moslem-majority districts of Presidency division must I think be included in Pakistan, though this brings frontier across the Ganges. The demarcation includes in Pakistan all Moslem-majority districts and no Hindu-majority districts.
(7) There is no case, consistent with the principle suggested in [the] breakdown plan, for including Calcutta in Pakistan.

> The Moslems will probably try to negotiate for its being made a free port. If negotiations fail Eastern Bengal's prospects as a separate autonomous State will be seriously affected. But Moslems, if they insist on Pakistan, must face up to this problem.[57]

About two years after leaving India, Wavell addressed the Royal Central Asia Society in London (June 1949):

> There are two main material factors in the revolutionary change that has come over the strategical face of Asia. One is air power, the other is oil.... Oil, which is the source of air power, concerns very deeply that part of Asia with which this society deals, since the principal known oil reserves of the world lie in the Persian Gulf. The next great struggle for world power, if it takes place, may well be for the control of these oil reserves. It may centre on Western Asia, the Persian Gulf, the approaches to India.... This may be the battleground both of the material struggle for oil and air bases, and of the spiritual struggle of at least three great creeds – Christianity, Islam, Communism – and of the political theories of democracy and totalitarianism. In such a struggle the base of the Western Powers must surely be in the Middle East...[58]

He did not, of course, even hint that he had played a part in laying the foundation of a state that would help buttress the British military position in the Middle East.

## Notes and References


1. See Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal* (Oxford University Press, London, 1977, p. 463).
2. Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division* (HarperCollins, London, 1995, p. 173).
3. Wavell, op. cit., p. 111.





4. French, op. cit., p. 171.
5. Wavell, op. cit., p. 24.
6. Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*, Vol. 2 (India Research Press, Delhi, 1999, p. 1129).
7. C. Dasgupta, *War and Diplomacy in Kashmir: 1947–1948* (Sage, New Delhi, 2002, p. 18).
8. Wavell, op. cit., p. 499.
9. Ibid.
10. TOP VI, p. 532, dated 13 August 1945.
11. Penderel Moon, op. cit., p. 1127.
12. TOP VII, S. No. 286.
13. Wavell, op. cit., p. 245 and TOP VII, S. No. 641, Appendix.
14. Ibid.
15. From a letter to me from Ms Talbot Rice, military researcher, London, dated 17 August 2001. (She withheld the name of the officer.)
16. Trevor Royle, *The Last Days of the Raj* (John Murray, London, 1997, p. 269).
17. Ibid., p. 271.
18. Wavell, op. cit., p. 271.
19. Henry Rawlinson, *England and Russia* (John Murray, London, 1875, pp. 279–80).
20. TOP IV, S. Nos. 706–07.
21. Wavell, op. cit., pp. 185–86.
22. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (Atheneum, New York, 1986, p. 54).
23. Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah* (John Murray, London, 1954, p. 25).
24. Wavell, op. cit., p. 91.
25. Ibid., p. 99.
26. TOP V, S. No. 111.
27. Winston Churchill, *Memories of the Second World War: Triumph and Tragedy* (Cassell & Co., London, 1950, pp. 105–06).
28. Ibid., pp. 107–08.
29. All extracts from Post-Hostilities Planning Staff report dated 19 May 1945, top secret PHP (45) 15 (O) [Oriental and Indian Collection (OIC), British Library, London].
30. Wavell, op. cit., p. 120.
31. Penderel Moon, op. cit., p. 1137.

32. US FR 1945, Vol. VI, p. 251.
33. US FR 1944, Vol. V, p. 240.
34. US FR 1943, Vol. IV, pp. 220–22.
35. US FR 1944, Vol. V, p. 242.
36. Durga Dass, *India from Curzon to Nehru and After* (HarperCollins India, New Delhi, 2000, p. 216).
37. V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power in India* (Longman Green, London, 1957, p. 241).
38. TOP V, S. No. 565.
39. Ibid., S. No. 566.
40. TOP VI, S. No. 29.
41. Ibid.
42. H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan* (Oxford University Press edition, Delhi, 2000, p. 127).
43. TOP V, S. No. 598.
44. Clement Attlee, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (Heinemann, London, 1961).
45. TOP VI, S. Nos. 484 and 486.
46. Wavell, op. cit., p. 161.
47. TOP VI, S. No. 47.
48. Ibid., S. No. 78.
49. Ibid., S. No. 82.
50. Wavell, op. cit., p. 168.
51. TOP VI, S. No. 99, Annexure II.
52. C.R. Das, quoted in Minoo Masani, *Our India* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1953, p. 126).
53. TOP VI, S. No. 194.
54. Ibid., S. No. 316.
55. TOP IV, S. No. 323, Enclosure.
56. TOP VI, S. No. 387.
57. Ibid., S. No. 406.
58. Quoted in Olaf Caroe, *Wells of Power* (Macmillan, London, 1951, p. 184).

# 8

# Attlee's 'Smoke Screens'

LORD WAVELL'S RECOMMENDATION THAT HMG MAKE AN AWARD TO divide India was thoroughly unwelcome to Prime Minister Attlee. Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mountbatten's press attaché, once told me: 'Attlee was decisive, but supersensitive to the charge of dividing India, especially in the face of the US Government's view that the partition of India may give a fillip to the leftist forces in the subcontinent.' Further, such an award would mean a clean break with the Congress Party, which the British Labour Party leaders were anxious to avoid. Attlee broadly agreed with the thrust of Wavell's policy to create the smaller Pakistan to safeguard British strategic purposes but wanted this done, if possible, with the assent or at least the acquiescence of the Congress Party. It is important to bear in mind that Attlee was throughout his own secretary of state.

Attlee, later in life, admitted: 'You might have got a united settlement at the beginning of the 1930s',[1] thereby implying that, in his view, a united India was no longer possible by 1946. As deputy prime minister and chairman of the India Committee in Churchill's War Cabinet from 1942 to 1945, he was fully aware of the steps that had been taken by Britain on India's partition, though the matter was kept locked in a closet. The British secretary of state, Leopold Amery, had written to the viceroy, Linlithgow, in 1942 (as recounted in Chapter 4) that Attlee was facing pressure from his party to adopt a more liberal stance on India, meaning that if left to himself, he