

The Cold War and its Impact on the Evolution of the Kashmir Crisis, 1947-48

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Introduction

This paper is neither meant to be a history of the Kashmir conflict nor of India-Pakistan antagonism. The aim is to look in a new way at this old dispute by examining the role of the emerging Cold War concerns in determining Anglo-American behaviour during the evolution of the crisis. As John Lewis Gaddis puts it in his latest work on the Cold War, 'The Cold War was fought at different levels in dissimilar ways in multiple places over a very long time'.¹ This paper, then, aims to look at one such level in one particular place over a short period of time. To echo Adam Zamoyski, 'the principal aim has been to place the conflict in its wider context and to touch on its deeper significance'.²

Nationalist passions and political imperatives make writing on Kashmir a formidable challenge. The period 1947-48 was not just one of any conflict. It was simultaneously a culmination of the process of transfer of power in the Indian subcontinent and the introduction of a seemingly unending foundation of mutual hatred, hostility and bloodshed between India and Pakistan. It was also representative of the ideological clash between two politico-religious traditions; that of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, in turn symbolic of the tensions latent in the socio-political fabric of a region where a syncretic and composite cultural tradition competed with ideological fundamentalisms. It involved interests which went beyond the immediate context. Coinciding with the crystallisation of the Cold War, it involved Great Britain, the Islamic World and the Soviet Union's presence in Central Asia. Its repercussions, therefore, were widespread and long-lasting. While its scale was not impressive, it was a peculiar war in terms of participation and strategy. An awareness of the depth and breadth of these interrelated elements is important to make sense of the conflict.

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. ix

² Adam Zamoyski, *1812- Napoleon's Fatal March on Moscow* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. xxiii

The central argument of this paper is that 'Power Politics' made a large contribution to the evolution of the Kashmir crisis. While the dispute emerged for local, regional and religious reasons its evolution and eventual 'internationalisation' bears the stamp of concerns which had nothing to do with the individuality of the crisis and the merits of the cases of the two protagonists. In other words, while the events in and around the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir from August 1947 to January 1949- a period which saw an entire range of conflict, from local skirmishes to full-fledged invasion to pitched defensive warfare- were manufactured by a set of circumstances, personalities and concerns, which were all essentially local or regional and subcontinental or religious in nature, once the crisis erupted it was manipulated by the British-led Western Block, as far as possible, in the pursuit of its own vital interests stretching from the Middle East to Central Asia to the Far East. These vital interests can be broadly categorised as defensive, strategic and geo-political (aimed at the former Communist USSR) and ideological or religious (aimed at the Islamic Middle East).

The imminence of transfer of power had prompted the penultimate Viceroy Lord Archibald Wavell to understand the value of India in a specific manner. In a long and articulate note sent to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India (1945-47), Lord Wavell had written that 'the whole crux of the matter is whether we can secure an orderly transfer of power to a stable India and satisfactory defensive arrangements with the new India'.³ India was vital to Britain strategically (air communications and sea travel in the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the oil-rich Persian Gulf), economically (as a military base for the Far East), industrially and in terms of manpower. For Wavell, the greatest danger was clear- 'the domination of Russia' over an independent India. The British policy on Kashmir in 1946-47 naturally reflected Britain's concerns to safeguard these interests. They dominated its behaviour not only until the transfer of power, but even after 15th August 1947, and throughout the Kashmir crisis during which British interests overshadowed those of both India and Pakistan.

³ Nicholas Mansergh, E.W.R. Lumby & Penderel Moon (ed.), *The Transfer of Power (TOP), 1942-7* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970) Vol. VIII, item no. 26; Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 13.07.46

For Attlee's Government the best instrument for the pursuit of its strategic aims was a strong, united, friendly India, within the Commonwealth and willing to allow the continued presence of key British personnel in its armed forces. Accordingly, the Prime Minister's letter of instructions to the Lord Louis Mountbatten stressed, 'the importance of ensuring that the transfer of power is effected with full regard to the defence requirements of India...the great importance of avoiding any breach in the continuity of the Indian Army ...of maintaining the organization of defence on an all-India basis... [and]... the need for continued collaboration in the security of the Indian Ocean area...' ⁴ Attlee had based these instructions on a note prepared in early 1946, concerning the safeguarding of strategic interests in the event of the transfer of power. It had concluded that 'the fulfilment of our strategic requirements would be improbable if the demand for withdrawal were to include all British personnel' ⁵, from the service of the Indian Government.

However, once partition became imminent, the Attlee government was forced to reassess its priorities and the best ways to achieve them in the region and it concluded that this required close military-diplomatic links with Pakistan. The ports of Karachi and Chittagong and the airbase of Peshawar were important for the as yet incipient Anglo-American desire to create a *cordon sanitaire* around the USSR. A strong and stable Pakistan, within the Commonwealth, was looked upon as the eastern sheet anchor of an arc which stretched from NATO via Turkey to Sinkiang in Central Asia.

In a note sent to Lord Ismay on 04th October 1947, Lord Mountbatten voiced this concern clearly as he said, 'If we expelled Pakistan [out of the Commonwealth], Russia would obviously step in...' ⁶ An extremely interesting, insightful and prophetic note sent by Winston Churchill to Mountbatten around this time shows a remarkable awareness of the emerging Cold War implications. It reflects upon the desirability of Turkey and Pakistan as Muslim anti-Communist bastions in the West and East respectively. It envisages an Anglo-American defence pact with Turkey and Pakistan against the Soviet Union and proves to be a blue-print for the defence pacts of the mid-1950s. ⁷

⁴ H. V. Hodson, *The Great Divide* (Oxford: OUP, 1985) Appendix 1, p. 546

⁵ Nicholas Mansergh et al. (ed.), TOP 1942-7, Vol. VIII, item no. 254

⁶ F200/75, Mountbatten Papers, India Office Records (IOR), British Library, London

⁷ *Ibid.*, F200/39

Throughout 1947-48, during the heights of the transfer of power and then the Kashmir dispute, the Attlee Government was motivated by the two inter-linked desires of the maintenance of effective opposition to the USSR and effective relations with the Middle East. Pakistan was potentially of key importance for both these aims. As Ernest Bevin observed in the House of Commons in January 1949, 'The Middle East includes Afghanistan and now stretches to Pakistan...[which]...as a great Moslem power takes a vital interest...in the Middle East. The United Kingdom has interests, obligations and responsibilities in maintaining security and stability in the Middle East and we intend to be faithful to them'.⁸ Around the same time, the Prime Minister was receiving advice along the lines that the UK, as the only country which realised the need to create a Middle Eastern buffer against Russia, should give moral and material support to the 'great Moslem block lying between the Bosphorus and the Indus'. The 19th Century 'Great Game' was then duly invoked, which shows the deep-rooted continuities of the strategic concerns which ran through the entire period from Pax Britannica to the Cold War, 'It is the same struggle that our fathers and grandfathers fought last century...[against] the direct territorial expansion of Russia. Now it is the ideological conflict'.⁹

'The New Great Game': British Interests in the Indian Subcontinent and the Importance of Pakistan

The first Indo-Pakistan war in Kashmir (27th October 1947- 5th January 1949) cannot be understood only in terms of the political objectives, military capabilities and moral ideological position of the protagonists. Three factors introduce Great Britain as a crucial player. First, the role of the British at the helm of civil and military affairs, viz. Lord Mountbatten and Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, Sir Frank Messervy and General Douglas Grecey (Pakistan army) and Sir Rob Lockhart and Sir Roy Bucher (Indian army); second, the external dependence of India and Pakistan for military supplies, economic assistance and diplomatic support; finally, British influence and interests in South Asia and the Middle East which saw her shaping international responses to them.

⁸ 26.1.49, MS Attlee dep. 77, Attlee Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford

⁹ 29.1.49, Philip Price to Attlee, MS Attlee dep. 77

A series of five military documents establish the strategic and ideological concerns of Britain in the subcontinent, as she prepared to relinquish formal control. On 19th May 1945, the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff of the War Cabinet reported to Churchill that Britain must retain its military connection with the subcontinent in view of the ‘Soviet menace’ for four strategic reasons: first, India was a valuable base for force deployment within the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and the Far East; second, it was a transit point for air and sea communications; third, it was a large reserve of manpower; fourth, it had air bases in the northwest from which Britain could threaten Soviet military installations.¹⁰

On 18th April 1946 the British Chiefs of Staff (Field Marshal Viscount Allanbrooke, Air Marshal Arthur William Tedder and Admiral Rhoderick McGrigor) repeated to the Attlee Cabinet that ‘it would not be possible to fight Russia - our most probable potential enemy - without India... [because] airfields in northwest India are, except for those in Iraq, the nearest we have to certain important Russian industrial areas in Ural and Western Siberia’.¹¹

On 13th July 1946 Field Marshal Auchinleck, wrote to the Viceroy Lord Wavell that, ‘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’.¹²

A united India was clearly what the Attlee Government sought, but once the Cabinet Mission failed and partition became inevitable the British became apprehensive about how to safeguard their strategic interests in a divided, mutually hostile Indian subcontinent. In particular, Congress was not looked upon as amenable to British concerns. This apprehension had earlier been the basis of Wavell’s ‘breakdown plan’, of November 1945, in which he had proposed that, in case an interim government could not be formed, the British government and personnel could be moved to the Muslim-dominated northwest and northeast parts of the country leaving the

¹⁰ 19.5.45, PHP (45) 15 (0) Final, L/WS/1/983-988, Pinnell Files, IOR, British Library

¹¹ 18.4.46, Chief Of Staff (COS) Report No. (46) 19 (0), PRO, Kew

¹² 13.7.46, Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, Mansergh et al. (ed.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-7* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970), Vol. VIII, item no. 26

Congress to run its own provinces. The plan represented two considerations: one, if India had to be partitioned, then Pakistan was the likelier of the two to be Britain's reliable ally; and second, geographically, ideologically and defensively the northwest and northeast suited British needs better.¹³

These opinions were widely held among the British bureaucracy. P. J. Griffith (Head of the European Association in Bengal) wrote to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Labour Secretary of State for India, in November 1946 that Britain should abandon its old philosophy of a united subcontinent and instead be sympathetic to the strong emotional demand for Pakistan, since the Muslims could be relied upon in the pursuit of the vital interests of the Commonwealth.¹⁴ Similarly, Pethick-Lawrence wrote to Wavell on 13th November 1946: 'There is surely no doubt that in several provinces...the [British] governors do in fact have valuable influence on the ministers...the same surely applies at the Centre especially now that the Muslims have come in'.¹⁵

Clearly, military analysis about India's importance to Commonwealth strategic and military interests was complicated when (in April-May 1947) partition became a certainty and as concerns emerged about Congress' Commonwealth commitment. To quote Lord Salisbury: 'India's continued association with the Commonwealth does not help us in any way...She will not agree to any coordinated foreign policy. She is definitely hostile to our colonial policy'.¹⁶ With respect to the Muslim League, however, assumptions differed. First the India Office and then the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office expected 'the Moslems to try and enlist British support by offering us all sorts of military and political facilities... [and] be anxious to remain in the Commonwealth'.¹⁷ In January 1947 Lord Pethick-Lawrence observed that the Muslim League, guided by expediency and influenced by defence considerations, would favour a tie with the British Commonwealth.¹⁸ Mountbatten's interviews with Nehru, Liaquat and Jinnah in

¹³ Mansergh et al. (ed.), *The Transfer of Power, 1942-7* (London: H.M.S.O., 1970), Vol. VIII, item nos. 286, 501

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, item no. 249

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. IX, item no. 34

¹⁶ Wm. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 417

¹⁷ Monteath to Hollis, 31.10.46, Mansergh et al.(ed.) *The Transfer of Power, 1942-7*, Vol. VIII, item 537; Sargeant to Monteath, 7.12.46, Vol. IX, item 173

¹⁸ Pethick-Lawrence to Dominion High Commissioners, 9.1.47, *Ibid.*, item 268

March-April 1947 only served to strengthen these beliefs about Indian reluctance and Pakistani enthusiasm.¹⁹

With the changed material situation in mind, on 12th May 1947, after a meeting of the British Chiefs of Staff (Air Marshal Tedder, Sir John Cunningham and Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery), General Leslie Hollis reported to Attlee that from the strategic point of view 'western India' (post-1947 Pakistan) was crucial for British and Commonwealth interests. He elaborated on the need to obtain strategic air bases in northwest India and the port of Karachi; to maintain the independence and integrity of Afghanistan; to increase prestige and improve relations with the Muslim world by assisting Pakistan via the Commonwealth; to maintain Britain's reputation in the Muslim world and the continued cooperation of the Middle Eastern block.²⁰

On 26th May 1947 two US diplomats, Ely E. Palmer (envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Afghanistan) and R.S. Leach of the State Department met Sir Olaf Caroe at Peshawar. A record of their meeting documents that, 'the Governor first spoke about the "correct" British policy looking towards a united India', but then he had 'spoken more frankly' and had emphasised 'the great political importance of the NWFP 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 added: 'He would not be unfavourable to the establishment of a separate Pakistan' [to] 'show the way for reconciliation between the Western and Islamic models'.²¹

On 4th June 1947, a day after the approval of the Partition plan, Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, stated that the division of India 'would help to consolidate Britain in the Middle East'. On 07th July 1947 the Chiefs of Staff prepared another report and concluded, 'The area of Pakistan 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

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. X, 24.3.47 (item 11), 11.4.47 (item 126), 17.4.47 (item 165)

²⁰ 29.11.46, COS (46-47) L/WS/1/1030, Tp (46), PRO, Kew

²¹ 2.6.47, File 845-00/2-2647, National Archives, Washington

consider that failure to obtain the [defence] agreement with India would cause us to modify any of our requirements...'²²

Thus, Britain had concluded by August 1947 that certain vital interests were better served by Pakistan, with regard to which while India remained valuable, it was not crucial. The decisive considerations were the strategic location of the air bases in Pakistan and the port of Karachi; the defence of the oil supplies of the Middle East; the ideological question of Middle Eastern Muslim solidarity; and the traditional Russian threat via Central Asia and Afghanistan. '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... 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'.²³

For all this to happen, the most important concern was the survival and stability of Pakistan. Two briefings prepared by the CRO in the immediate aftermath of the transfer of power are particularly revealing about British manoeuvrings with respect to both partition and Kashmir. Prepared within a week of each other on the 14th and 22nd of October 1947, simultaneous to the emergence of the Kashmir dispute, these notes are representative of the British Governments' thoughts on the matter and provide a crystallisation of its position.

In the first note, the CRO observed that a weak Pakistan was facing a materially stronger India with an aggressive intent. It envisaged the possible downfall of Pakistan with the probable participation of the frontier tribes, Afghans and Soviet Russia. It foresaw two potential outcomes: at best, the emergence of another Palestine situation on a greater scale or, at worst, the disappearance of Pakistan. In both cases it warned of the considerable effect on the Middle East. The CRO was unambiguous about the impact of either eventuality on British interests: 'In neither case, would the object of Her Majesty's Government be achieved'. It readily identified the

²² 7.7.47, COS Tp (47) 90, PRO, Kew

²³ Unsigned Memorandum- '*The Strategic and Political Importance of Pakistan in the event of War with USSR*', 19.5.48, Mountbatten Papers, IOR, British Library

inviting weakness of Pakistan as one of the root causes of this dangerous and unfortunate situation, for 'if Pakistan was strong and/or showed signs of strong backing, her potential enemies would hesitate before thinking in terms of offensive actions'. The first real problem, therefore, was to stabilise the newly established Pakistan. The note then continued, 'up to the present, Her Majesty's Government's policy has been one of strict impartiality towards each of the new Dominions. Can this achieve the object?' By way of providing an answer, while the CRO ruled out an unlimited military commitment in Pakistan, it argued for financial and military assistance, including the services of some British Officers, ' [for] this assistance may go far towards removing one of the main threats in the present menacing situation. It may enable the HMG's object to be achieved'. With respect to India, the note conceded that 'any change from a purely impartial policy to a more defined one may result in India leaving the Commonwealth', but it sceptically remarked that 'this may happen in any case'.²⁴

The second note, firmer and more decisive, after confirming the administrative weakness of Pakistan, the hostility of India and the burden of the defence of the northwest frontier, provided clear policies. First, even at the risk of suspicion and hostility in India, HMG would have to help Pakistan, because otherwise its chances of survival were very poor. More so as no other country was likely to assist it on any considerable scale. Second, 'India's hostility will inevitably lead to Pakistan's collapse, if it is not helped, and it would be embarrassing [to put it mildly] for HMG as partition plan was sponsored as a British Act of Parliament. Hence, it would be understood as HMG's failure to do what it could to help the new dominion to live'. Third, 'collapse and chaos along the north west frontier will profoundly affect questions of imperial strategy'. Fourth and finally, in the light of the above considerations, 'we must adopt the policy of assisting Pakistan, so far as our own pressing difficulties permit and that we must do so even at the risk of ruining our present entirely friendly relations with the Indian Government'.²⁵

²⁴ 14.10.47, F200/102, Mountbatten Papers

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.10.47, F200/103, Mountbatton Papers

The Kashmir Crisis and the Immediate British Response: ‘Developing an Official Mind’

Throughout 1947-48, as Britain withdrew its formal control, it sought to safeguard its political and strategic interests in both India and Pakistan, either through the Commonwealth or through bilateral relations. While India was an influential player because of its size and resources, Pakistan emerged as the more promising strategic, military and ideological ally with her willingness to join defence arrangements, crucial geopolitical location and proximity to the strategically vital Middle East. So, although Britain had more extensive, complex and long-term politico-economic interests in India, it was Pakistan which in the context of the developing Cold War, best served its immediate defence, strategic and energy concerns.

The outbreak of limited hostilities between the two dominions occurred in a region often referred to as the ‘fulcrum of Asia’ and its emergence coincided with the emergence of the Cold War. From the outset, Great Britain’s strategic concerns, the context of the emerging Cold War, vis-à-vis the Islamic Middle East and the Communist USSR determined its response to the conflict. An inter-dominion conflict was the last thing the Attlee Government needed, as it could only complicate its simultaneous pursuit of contrasting British interests in both the dominions, one emerging as a partisan accessory, the other as a mutual partner.

The CRO was acutely sensitive to British interests in the subcontinent and to Pakistan’s importance in the pursuit of them. It was also aware of Kashmir’s importance for Pakistan. For Pakistan to remain a politically viable pivot for Britain’s strategic interest in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, Kashmir was vital as a buffer between the volatile NWFP and a potentially hostile India. Pakistan’s lack of geographical depth was a cause of concern for Britain as was the presence of a resourceful and unfriendly neighbour; its vulnerable defence, transport and communication links and industrial infrastructure and the dependence of her irrigation and energy systems on rivers flowing through Kashmir.

On 12th October 1947, even before the conflict began, the CRO wrote to its High Commissioners in India and Pakistan to ‘look after United Kingdom’s interests in Kashmir and other Indian

States in Pakistan sphere'.²⁶ Britain was also concerned about Indian intentions with regard to Pakistan's survival, stability and security. In a letter to Attlee, Auchinleck wrote, 'I have no hesitation whatsoever in affirming that the present Indian cabinet are implacably determined to do all in their power to prevent the establishment of the dominion of Pakistan on a firmer basis. In this, I am supported by the unanimous opinion of my senior officers, and indeed, by all responsible British officers cognisant of the situation'.²⁷ In the light of this, once the conflict began in Kashmir, Britain became preoccupied with the survival of Pakistan. An internal note in the CRO dated 22nd October 1947 betrays, an initial indecisiveness, 'are we going to treat both Dominions in precisely the same way in every respect, or alternatively, are we going to treat any request that we may receive from either of them on their strict merits?', followed by desperation, 'it seems fantastic that Pakistan should be prevented from having any assistance, merely because India does not require [it]...Indeed, it would be only too easy for India to prevent Pakistan having anything at all by [this logic]'.²⁸

On 29th October, a week after the invasion and two days after India accepted Kashmir's accession and flew its troops into Srinagar, the British High Commissioner in Karachi, L. Graffety-Smith, wrote to (the then Secretary for Commonwealth Affairs and later the leader of the UK delegation to UN), Philip Noel-Baker, 'Indian government's acceptance of accession of Kashmir to the Dominion of India is the heaviest blow yet sustained by Pakistan in her struggle for existence'. Smith gave four arguments to support his claim and these were the themes which recur throughout 1947-48 as the pivots around which Britain shaped its subcontinental policy. First, 'strategically, Pakistan's frontiers have been greatly extended as a hostile India gains access to NWFP and tribal areas and Pakistan's hopes of friendly accommodation with tribes disappear with this re-establishment of direct contact between Delhi and tribes. This will lead to heavy defence budget and a redefinition of the Afghan policy for worse. Second, Russian interests will be aroused in Gilgit and NWFP which creates a new international situation which HMG in the UK and the US government can not overlook. Third, there is a serious threat to Pakistan's

²⁶ CRO, London to Delhi & Karachi, 12.10.47, File no. L/PS/13/1845 b, no. 210, Pinnell Files

²⁷ Auchinleck to Attlee, 28.09.47, F 200/102, Mountbatten Papers

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Archibald Carter to Geoffrey Scoones, 22.10.47, F 200/103

irrigation systems; hydro-electric projects from the accession'²⁹ [all five rivers draining the Pakistani Punjab flow from India, three through Kashmir] and finally, three million Kashmiri Muslims will worsen the already massive refugee problem with five-and-a-half million Muslims having been driven out of East Punjab. Sir George Cunningham put forward the same argument about 'two million more Muslims' [refugees] to justify the 'Muslim invasion of Kashmir'.³⁰ A day later, Philip Noel-Baker wrote to Lord Ismay that the 'Kashmir situation gravely menaces the future stability of Pakistan'.³¹

By 31st October, the CRO had prepared an early note on their appreciation of the Kashmir situation which made it clear that it would have been natural for Kashmir to have acceded to Pakistan [Cunningham expressed the same sentiment - 'unnatural accession to India' - in his diary entry dated 11th December 1947] given its Muslim population, transport and communication links and the trade relations with Pakistan established by the 1870 customs agreement. Crucially, it concluded that the British Indian army in 1931 had been unable to prevent the Muslims of West Punjab and NWFP from joining in the Kashmir disturbances even though it had many more troops than what the independent dominion of Pakistan could currently deploy. It also noted that Pakistan had been heavily weakened by the refugee problem and it had considerable difficulty in imposing its authority over local officials.³²

By 07th November, as the early attempts at conciliation failed, the CRO had become concerned on two counts. First, the collapse in the subcontinent of either India or Pakistan would lead 'other Great Powers [to] begin fishing'. Second was the possibility that the British officers who remained in the Indian and Pakistani armies would become involved in combat. If this happened Britain would have to instruct them to 'stand down' which 'would weaken Pakistan much more than it would India'. Sir George Cunningham was also concerned about 'Pakistan's relative disadvantage'.³³

²⁹ 29.10.47, Graffety-Smith to Noel-Baker, no. 158, File no. L/PS/13/1845 b, Pinnell Files; *Ibid.*, Pol 134/48, L/WS/1/1148

³⁰ 17.12.47, Cunningham to Halifax, MSS Eur D670/9, Cunningham Papers, IOR, British Library

³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 374/36, Noel-Baker to Ismay, 30.10.47

³² File no. L/PS/13/1845 b, no. 1158, Pinnell Files; MSS Eur D670/6, 11.12.47, Cunningham Papers

³³ *Ibid.*, no. 1198, Rumbold to Patrick and Carter, 07.11.47; *Ibid.*, 07.11.47 and 12.11.47

Throughout the fighting in Kashmir, from 22nd October 1947 to 01st January 1949, Britain was, particularly concerned about two key areas of the state: the Northern territories of Gilgit and Hunza, along the Afghan, Soviet and Chinese frontiers and the western territories of Muzaffarabad and Mirpur, along the border with Pakistani Punjab. The northern region, consisting of the Gilgit Agency, the dependencies of Hunza and Nagar and the principalities of Swat and Chitral, stood to the north and east of the NWFP. It stretched to the Chinese province of Sinkiang in the west and north, and only a narrow strip of Afghan territory (the Wakkhan corridor beyond the Durand line) separated it from the Soviet Union. While the USSR was obviously hostile, by late 1947 Sinkiang was poised to fall to Mao's Red Army which at the time was closely allied with the Soviet Union. Hence, both the Soviet and Chinese borders were a concern to Britain. Further, as General Sir Douglas Gracey, the C-in-C of the Pakistan Army pointed out, any Indian push in the northwest 'would have established a physical link with the leaders of the anti-Pakistan movement for independent Pathanistan...opened the opportunity for a pincers movement against Pakistan by India and Afghanistan, the latter having shown a suspicious interest in the Pathan movement'.³⁴ These were not entirely unfounded concerns - Afghanistan was the only Muslim country which had refused to formally recognise the dominion of Pakistan.

With respect to the western territories, from Naushera to Muzaffarabad, their importance can be gauged from General Gracey's detailed presentation on the subject which concluded that if this area went to India, it would mean facing 'the Indian army on the long Pakistan border within 30 miles of strategic railway leading from Peshawar through West Punjab to Lahore...Occupation of Bhimber and Mirpur will give India the strategic advantage of...sitting on our doorsteps, threatening the Jhelum bridge which is so vital for us. It will also give them control of the Mangla headworks placing the irrigation in Jhelum and other districts at their mercy...Furthermore, loss of Muzaffarabad-Kohala would have the most far-reaching effect on the security of Pakistan. It would enable the Indian Army to secure the rear gateway to Pakistan through which it can march in any time it wishes...It will encourage subversive elements such as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his party, Ipi and Afghanistan. If Pakistan is not to face another serious refugee problem...if civilian and military morale is not to be affected to a dangerous

³⁴ Quoted in Josef Korbel, *Danger in Kashmir* (New York, Karachi: OUP, 2002) p. 138

extent; and if subversive political forces are not to be encouraged and let loose in Pakistan itself it is imperative that the Indian army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Naushera'.³⁵

As Ernest Bevin was, later, to say to George Marshall, the American Secretary of State, 'the main issue was who would control the main artery leading into Central Asia. The Indian proposals would leave that in their hands.'³⁶ Throughout, the Kashmir conflict more was at issue than either the legality or the morality of the affair or the conduct of the parties involved. The strategic 'main artery' referred to was the Gilgit-Kashgar track, through the 4709-metres high Mintaka pass across the Karakoram, which was built and maintained by Britain.

The CRO had been aware of the events in Kashmir from early 1947. First through W.F. Webb (the British resident in Srinagar), in February, and later through Brigadier Henry Scott, in September, it had known about the threats made by the Pir of Manki Sharif and of the economic blockade imposed on Kashmir by Pakistan. Scott had reported, 'Whatever maybe the policy of Pakistan govt., Rawalpindi is turning on the heat. No sugar or petrol is reaching Kashmir'. He also mentioned the threat to Kashmir from the tribesmen of Hazara and surrounding areas. Then around 15th October, Major W.P. Cranson (formerly of the Indian Political Service, but attached after independence to the UK High Commission in India) reported that several thousand tribesmen from Hunza, Dir and Chitral were poised to invade Kashmir if the Maharaja acceded to India and that the Mirs of Hunza and the Mehtars of Chitral had formally informed Hari Singh of this.

The CRO anticipated the possibility of Pakistan moving beyond threats of invasion, border raids and the economic blockade. Sir Horace Rumbold wrote on Scott's report on 16th October (a week before raiders entered Kashmir), 'I see that Pakistan has given Kashmir a straight warning that the burning of Muslim villages in Poonch must stop. Pakistan is doubtless increasing the heat on Kashmir'.³⁷ However, when Mehr Chand Mahajan (Maharaja Hari Singh's Prime Minister in Jammu and Kashmir) sent a telegram to Clement Attlee on 15th October in which he informed

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-9

³⁶ Bevin to Marshall, 27.10.48, United States Foreign Review, Vol. V, p. 434

³⁷ 16.10.47, Scott's Report, Pinnell Files, pol 1401/147

him of the economic blockade and the open threat of invasion and requested him to restrain Pakistan, Rumbold wrote, 'for obvious reasons, it is impossible to comply with this request'.³⁸ Again, he noted on 25th October 1947: 'I doubt whether there is a case for our intervening with the Govt of Pakistan in regard to Kashmir on the lines suggested by the PM of Kashmir'.³⁹

Legally speaking however, there was certainly a case for such intervention. The raiders had to pass through large tracks of Pakistan territory to get to Kashmir. Sir Iskander Mirza (then Defence Minister in the Pakistan Government and later President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) confirmed to Sir George Cunningham that Jinnah, Liaquat and Abdul Qayum (Chief Minister, NWFP) had decided around early October that the Poonch Revolt (the local, Muslim uprising against the Maharaja of Kashmir, August-September 1947) should be given assistance. Cunningham's diary entry for 29th October reads, 'The only thing to do now is to pump in more tribesmen but with proper organisation of rations, ammunitions and supplies'. He admits not quite being able to 'follow Jinnah's reasoning about the fraudulent accession of Kashmir', but writes that he assured Jinnah that, 'if this is your definite policy, I am quite prepared to support it'. On 04th November, Cunningham wrote, 'with the backing of ministers, Muslim officials have been giving orders to help tribes'. On 12th December he asserted, 'There is no question at present of resisting this movement from this side, any more than a Turk in France in the 12th century would have resisted the Crusade'! Later, in a letter to Mountbatten, he confirmed that 'facilities for the tribesmen actual transit through the province [lorries and petrol] were no doubt made available which would have been impossible if officials had not shut their eyes'.⁴⁰

It is obvious then that certain key British officials involved in developments before and during the Kashmir crisis responded to these keeping in mind British interests in the light of the emerging Cold War. This led to a marked and shrewd partisanship in Britain's treatment of the two dominions, which was strongly encouraged by the CRO and FO in London. This politically motivated partisanship led key British officials to adopt a position of *masterly inactivity* on the question of the invasion and the Pakistan's therein. Sir George Cunningham wrote in his diary on 06th October (two weeks before the hostilities erupted), 'The Pakistan government seem to me to

³⁸ 16.10.47, Mahajan's Telegram to Attlee, *Ibid.*, Rumbold's note

³⁹ 25.10.47, Rumbold's note: File No. L/PS/13/1845b, Pinnell Files

⁴⁰ MSS Eur D 670/6, Cunningham Papers

wink at very dangerous activities on the Kashmir border, allowing small parties of Muslims to infiltrate into Kashmir from this side'. On 29th October he writes, 'I never thought I would become practically a member of a tribal lashkar; the fact that it is against the Sikhs and people like Patel is some consolation'. Another entry dated 14th November (two weeks after the battle had begun) reads, 'It is difficult to keep the balance between being cold and constitutional on the one side and entering *con amore* into the plots on the other'. In a letter to Lord Halifax, dated 17th December he writes, 'The present influx of armed Muslims into Kashmir from the Punjab, and from this province...has meant an ever-growing strain on the administration, as official eyes - from top to bottom - have to be closed to certain things that ought not be done'. In a letter to Brown on 14th February 1948 he writes, 'There are probably...2 or 3,000 [tribesmen in Kashmir] now, though at the outset there were 5 times that number. They often come and see me (though I am not supposed to approve), and sometimes congratulate me on the success of their operations! A funny situation!'⁴¹ Probably the bluntest admission of this *masterly inactivity* comes from the letter Cunningham wrote to Mountbatten on 08th May 1948, the first paragraph of which reads, 'I am not able to say who were the actual people who incited our tribes and stirred them up. I know some of them and suspect others but I honestly do not know [I never felt there was much use in enquiry] where the real initiative came from'.⁴² Indeed, Sir Iskander Mirza reminisced in a letter to Sir Olaf Caroe in 1968, '...what did the politicians do to Sir George. Behind his back they pushed tribesmen into Kashmir...Knowing as I do you could not have put up with all those dishonourable intrigues so very rampant since the very inception of Pakistan.'⁴³

Despite its policy however, the British establishment was split into two camps on the Kashmir question. Mountbatten, Ismay, Shone and Cripps were pro-India and the CRO led by Noel-Baker, Graffety-Smith, General Gracey and Ernest Bevin at the FO were pro-Pakistan. This split was very real and is confirmed by another diary entry by Sir George Cunningham, dated 07th November, where he quotes Sir Frank Messervy having told him 'that the government at home seem to be divided into pro-Pakistan (Attlee etc) and pro-India (mainly Cripps) parties'.⁴⁴ On 31st October, Lord Ismay, referring to the dispatch of Indian troops to Kashmir, had written to Noel-

⁴¹ MSS Eur D 670/6, Cunningham Papers

⁴² 08.05.48, Cunningham to Mountbatten, MSS Eur D670/9, Cunningham Papers

⁴³ Mirza to Caroe, 26.7.68, F 203/2, Caroe Papers, IOR, British Library

⁴⁴ MSS Eur D 670/6, Cunningham Papers

Baker that he was 'convinced that there was no option despite grave political and military risks involved'. He continued, 'the only man who can stop fighting is Jinnah who controls lines of communication of the tribesmen through Pakistan territory. PM must make it clear to Jinnah that his action in conniving or at least permitting the tribesmen to pass through his territory is thoroughly blame-worthy and that HMG can not but attach considerable responsibility to him for present situation'.⁴⁵ The British High Commissioner to India, Sir Terence Shone, supported Ismay in his judgements and wrote to Noel-Baker the same day, 'I am very glad Lord Ismay has sent the above. Pakistan has been guilty of conniving in actual use of force in case of Kashmir. I had been about to draft a telegram myself on somewhat similar lines'.⁴⁶

Noel-Baker's response reveals the rift in the Cabinet as well as the dominant paradigm in the FO and CRO. While satisfied that 'Jinnah has been feeble or unwise in acquiescing or tolerating the activities of the tribesmen or more probably in not stopping his people from pursuing such a policy', Noel-Baker expresses 'considerable doubts whether Jinnah could actually have stopped the movement of tribesmen however ardently he had desired... We can not send a strong message to Jinnah along the lines you suggest'.⁴⁷ Attlee himself conveyed to Ismay his 'unwillingness to send a message to Jinnah which in effect charges him with major responsibility'.⁴⁸

Ultimately, the notes prepared by the CRO on 31st October 1947 established the basic tenets of British policy. These were as follows: First, the accession of Kashmir to India was unnatural. Second, there was no evidence for Pakistan having organised incursion. Third, a weak Pakistan faced a strong India. Finally, India had been unnecessarily provocative by accepting the provisional accession of Kashmir and sending Sikh troops with no prior consultation with Pakistan.⁴⁹ The purpose of this document (circulated within the Commonwealth and sent to friendly countries like the US) was to set out a definite position to be taken by the United Kingdom in the international discussions on the Kashmir issue. It was a geopolitical and strategic position-paper which had moved beyond the juridical realm of the case at hand. Philip Noel-Baker had already identified two key pillars of Britain's pursuit of its vital interests. First, that

⁴⁵ 31.10.47, Ismay to Noel-Baker, No. 1142, File no. L/PS/13/1845b, Pinnell Files

⁴⁶ 31.10.47, Shone to Noel-Baker, No. 1144, *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 31.10.47, Noel-Baker to Ismay, 374/36, L/PS/13/1845b, *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ 31.10.47, Attlee to Ismay, pol 1486/47, Pinnell Files

⁴⁹ File no. L/PS/13/1845 b, no. 1158, *Ibid.*

Pakistan can be requested to use its influence with the raiders *only after* Pakistan and India reached agreements on 'plans which seem to afford the most hopeful chance of early cessation of the fighting'. Cunningham's diary entry of 29th October 1947 expresses the same hopes of 'justice to Muslims in Kashmir' and then possible withdrawal of tribes and almost absurdly suggests, 'we must avoid suggesting that we can influence them'.⁵⁰ Second, that 'stand down' instructions were to be issued only if there was a danger of British officers actually taking the field against each other and not while planning against each other, because, as A.V. Alexander wrote to Auchinleck on 6th November 1947, 'it is likely to have less effect on India than on Pakistan'.⁵¹

Britain's overriding concern for the survival of Pakistan as a bulwark against the former USSR is exemplified in a letter which Sir Francis Mudie wrote to Sir Maurice Hallett on 11th November, 1948, 'It is of the greatest importance, therefore, that the Pakistan barrier should be preserved intact. This means that Kashmir, or at any rate all but the small Hindu area in the South-east, should go to Pakistan. The settlement of the Kashmir dispute is also essential as removing the most immediate cause of an attack by India...it [should be] made clear to India that an attack on Pakistan would not be tolerated'.⁵²

Throughout 1947-49 Pakistan's weakness in the face of the twin menaces of the Soviets and the Tribes, preoccupied British official mind. Sir Olaf Caroe reminded in 1948 that the NWFP had never been a stable region, held hitherto delicately by the strength, resources and skill of the British and that this difficult frontier region, where Soviet influence might be expected, was now the responsibility of a weak and inexperienced Pakistan.⁵³ His notes of 29th March 1949 repeated the key elements of the Soviet threat and the Pathan anarchy with respect to the precarious position of Pakistan.⁵⁴ As has already been shown, a concern for this position became nothing less than an axiom of the British policy. For example, when Paul Grey was sent to the subcontinent by Attlee, in November-December 1947 to meet the two governments and lead

⁵⁰ 31.10.47, Attlee to Liaquat, L/PS/13/1845b; 29.10.47, MSS Eur D 670/6, Cunningham Papers

⁵¹ 06.11.47, A.V. Alexander to Auchinleck, L/PS/13/1845b

⁵² Raju G.C. Thomas (ed.), *Perspectives on Kashmir: The Roots of Conflict in South Asia* (Pennsylvania: Westview Press, 1992), p. 315

⁵³ 04.02.48, Speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, F 203/4, Caroe Papers

⁵⁴ 29.3.1949, Notes on NW Frontier, F 203/3, Caroe Papers

them towards a peaceful solution his feelings were unambiguously sympathetic. 'I felt profoundly sorry for the Government of Pakistan for whom since August 15th it has obviously been one damn thing after another. And I left Lahore feeling that we ought to try to combine with such neutrality as is necessary some encouragement to this infant member of the Commonwealth to feel that we have not disowned her now that she has left the parental nest'. Later in the tour, after meeting Nehru, Grey wrote in his diary, '...the Pakistan government could not have stopped the tribes even if they had wished, with the local feeling running so high'.⁵⁵ Almost the same sentiment were expressed by Cunningham when he wrote to Lord Mountbatten on 08th May 1948, that Pakistan could not have controlled the tribes without using physical force and this would have provoked a dangerous militant outburst of popular opposition and to Archibald Carter, at the CRO, on 18th April 1948 that 'it is enormously important to help [Pakistan] on the two matters of Kashmir and munitions supply [and] officer's training', else 'Pakistan might easily slip out of the Commonwealth'.⁵⁶

The events in Kashmir, in particular and in the subcontinent, in general are beyond comprehension without an appreciation of the fact that neither India nor Pakistan controlled their respective armed forces or their provincial administrations. From the Governor-General in India to the provincial governors in Pakistan, most crucially in Punjab and the NWFP; from the Supreme Commander of British-Indian troops to the individual C-in-Cs of the two dominion's armies loyalty to and concern of British interests, quite naturally, remained paramount. Of course, individuals came into conflict with each others in taking sides depending on their understanding of British interests and the best way to pursue them. Hence, if Graffety-Smith, Noel-Baker and Douglas Gracey argued Pakistan's case then Lord Ismay, Stafford Cripps and Terence Shone favoured the Indian position. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee and the Foreign Minister, Ernest Bevin remained involved throughout ensuring that Britain's wider interests were served in the light of the developing Cold War.

⁵⁵ 20.11.47, Grey to Shone; 26.12.47, Grey's notes: L/PS/13/1845b, Pinnell Files

⁵⁶ 08.05.48, Cunningham to Mountbatten; 18.4.1948, Cunningham to Carter, MSS Eur D670/9, Cunningham Papers

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