By every sign and portent 1946 was to be India's year of decision - a decision that was likely to be contested by all three parties to India's future: The British Raj, 256 million Hindus, 92 million Muslims.

Clement Attlee reviewing the Indian situation as handled by Britain remarked, "Successive British Governments had declared the intention of giving India full self government. The end of the war would certainly bring a demand for these promises to be implemented. Furthermore, our allies, the American people have very strong views shared by the administration, of the evils of imperialism. Much of the criticism of British rule, was ill-informed but its strength could not be denied ... The absorption of the continent seem to be natural process to them. But an empire containing numerous detached portions of land inhabited by various races at different states of civilization appeared an example of colonialism and rank imperialism. For all these reasons it was clear that the Indian problem would have to be faced."¹

As the year opened, Secretary of State for India Lord Pethick Lawrence dutifully reiterated Britain's old promise, "She would do all she could to help India reach Dominion status". For over three years in one form or another, Britain had been offering just that, post war independence inside the Empire, provided Indians could agree among themselves on what form of self rule they wanted. Hindus wanted a united free India, Muslims wanted a separate state for themselves inside a free India. Both Hindus and Muslims wanted the British to get out.  

Muslim League President Mohammed Ali Jinnah put it coolly, "India has never been a nation. It only looks that way on the map ... I want to cut the cow the Hindu worships. When the Hindu shakes hands with me, he must go wash his hands. Our religion is not all. Culture, history customs all make Muslim India a different nation from Hindu India. The Muslim has nothing in common with the Hindu except his slavery to the British. The Congress Party boss Sardar Vallabhai Patel who hated Jinnah almost as much as he did the British, was openly scornful of the Muslim League when he said Jinnah had won electoral advantages during the war by stooping to Britain. "Do I

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think the British are sincere? he asked in their promise to leave India. They have been making promises ever since Queen Victoria's time and they have always broken them. Nehru blamed the British for the separatist tendencies prevalent. British policy in order to maintain British rule had been one of balance and counterpoise. One of preventing unity and encouraging fissiparous tendencies, one protecting and strengthening the reactionary elements in the country even when British policy spoke a different language, it functioned much the same way, for its agents in India did not change or think differently. In pursuance of this policy, separate electorates were introduced ...

The question of Pakistan or separation could not be considered apart from the question of defence and allied subjects. With trouble brewing in the Middle East, this became of paramount consideration for without proper defence, there was no security for either Pakistan or Hindustan. Nehru added that the Congress therefore, proposed a Federation of Autonomous Units with a certain minimum list of compulsory common subjects. There could be any number of safeguards for minorities and a Supreme Court could be empowered to protect the minority rights.  

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3 Ibid.

The Viceroy Wavell in his letter to Lord Pethick Lawrence described the Indian situation. Since he took charge as Viceroy, it had been quite clear that on the Pakistan issue, the Muslims and other communities were irreconcilable. The object of the Simla Conference had been to bypass the Pakistan issue and to get the parties working together in the Central Government, in the hope that after some inside experience, they would take a more realistic view. As things were, they could not evade the issue. Meanwhile elections to the central and provincial assemblies were held. The Congress won an overwhelming success in the general constituencies. The Muslim League won every Muslim seat. The Congress secured 91.3 per cent votes cast in non-Muslim constituencies and the Muslim League 86.6 per cent of the total votes in the Muslim constituencies.

Soon after the elections were over a sensation was created by the revolt of a section of Indians serving in the Royal Indian Navy. The trouble began on February 18

1945. Strikes took place and unruly crowds indulged in violence. The police had to open fire and the military had to be called in before order could be restored. India was in a fighting mood and any further delay or provocation would have been dangerous. The British realised that the situation would deteriorate if prompt action was not taken. Three members of the British cabinet were given the task undertaken by the Parliamentary Delegation to the country. This was a welcome decision which showed that the Labour Government was alive to the urgency and importance of implementing the pledges which had long remained a dead letter.

February 17, 1946, the Secretary of State for India announced the decision of the British Cabinet in the House of Commons to send to India, Cabinet Mission, consisting of himself, the President of the Board of Trade Sir Stafford Cripps and the First Lord of Admiralty A.V. Alexander, to discuss with representatives of India the positive steps to be taken for giving effect

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to the programmes outlined by the Viceroy made on February 17, 1946 on the eve of the Provincial and Central Assembly Elections. "In view of the paramount importance not only to India and to the British Commonwealth, but to the peace of the world, His Majesty's Government have decided to send out to India a Special Mission of Cabinet Ministers."  

The head of the Mission Lord Pethick Lawrence's sympathy for the country were well known. Sir Stafford Cripps his colleague with his experience of 1942 was an invaluable asset. The third member A.V. Alexander a top ranking official of the Labour Party could be expected to throw, weight of his authority in favour of any liberal scheme for India, while the Prime Minister assured that the Mission was clothed with sufficient authority to implement its decision. For as Manchester Guardian warned, "This time a decision has to be taken whether Indian parties agree or not. While the view of leading Indians will govern the shape of the settlement, British advise would presumably support any solution which did not require

8All India Congress Committee Papers, File No.G.57,1946, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi, p.55.
partition of India. The Secretary of State had done well to add, "We go ready to translate British promises and pledges into action. We do not seek to provide anything incompatible with the freedom of India to control her own affairs. We are determined to do everything in our power, to bring about agreement and enable India to frame a new constitution." While the New Leader, organ of the Independent Labour Party, pointed out, "the right of India to independence must be recognised without equivocation". The editorial added, "The three Cabinet Members should leave at once with authority to transfer rule immediately to India's trusted leaders ... immediate preparations should be made to withdraw British armed forces from India." Only by drastic action on these lines can we be saved from a conflict which will disgrace the Labour Government and bring untold disaster to ourselves and the East". 9

Prime Minister clarified the position in respect of the cabinets forthcoming mission to India. Speaking in the House of Commons on March 15, Attlee declared that

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it was the Government's intention to give the Mission
as free a hand as possible. Referring to the opposition
demand that minority rights should not be ignored,
Attlee made it clear that a minority however, powerful
should not be allowed to impede the nation's progress.
"We appeal to all who have the future good of India at
heart to extend their vision beyond their own community
or interest to the interests, of the whole 400 millions
of the Indian people. We hope that the new independent
India may choose to be a member of the British Common-
wealth. We hope in any event that you will remain in
close and friendly association with our people. But
these are matters for your own free choice."¹⁰ In a
spirited appeal to Indian and the British leaders,
Professor Laski pointed out that no minority interest
however, important should be allowed to take upon the
attitude in which it sought for the achievement of its
whole programme, to break the purpose for which the
cabinet committee had come to India before discussions
actually began. "This is the eleventh hour asserted
Professor Laski and at such a time it behoves India of
every creed to remember, that the most urgent matter is

¹⁰ Wavell, F.M.V., The Viceroy's Journal, ed. by Penderel
preservation of the unity of India which is the vital source of its strength". The Prime Minister speech in the House of Commons helped to create the right atmosphere for the ensuing negotiations. Past experience had bred some suspicion of British intentions and even some well known leaders expressed their misgivings as to the outcome of the proposed visit. But Attlee's speech had the desired effect. The Congress President reciprocated this gesture of goodwill and Nehru welcomed the new "Tone and approach". But as Maulana Azad pointed "the real problem to be tackled did not concern the theoretical principles but actual practice and from this future results would naturally flow".11

The Cabinet delegation was to negotiate against a background of famine. The monsoons failed to bring India's seasonal heavy rains, while cyclones and tidal waves ravaged the fertile Madras province. Nehru blamed the British for the food failure and called on the peasants to "rebel against the political and social conditions that brought the famine about ... if we have to die, let us die like men and not like rats in a hole." This was not the normal language of Congress party leaders. Nehru and his

followers no longer denounced violence as it meant it. The Indians were also critical of the United States attitude with regards to the Indian Food Problem. The Communist organ People's Age criticized the United States Government for its unhelpful attitude to the Indian food problem. It stated American policy is "to let the British burn fingers in an Indian famine and then rush into the rescue on their own terms - cut throat profits and a share in the political and economic domination of India ... The British want to use the threat of famine to push through the cabinet mission plan and obtain American backing for it. India is "starving to death in a mad world in which two gangs of cut throats are using food to dominate nations". Leaders of the "two great parties" are "blind to American game, blind to the British game, and blind to their own people's suffering." Attack on the United States in connection with the food problem was not confined to the communist press. Virtually all Dailies read by the Mission - pro-Hindu, Pro-Muslim and Pro-British exhibited a remarkably anti-American bias in their editorials. The reason being that during the early part of United States participation in the war, the Indians had gained the impression that the United States was going

to liberate them from British rule. When this hope was
not realised, Indians were bitterly disappointed and
in many cases not only decided to question the United
States sincerity as a democratic nation, but began to
class the United States with Britain as an Imperialist
power. \(^{13}\)

The British Cabinet Mission seemed to be
determined to reach a solution. Sir S. Cripps a member
of the Mission declared "We will have to take risks
as to the effect of our action upon our own country,
upon India and upon the rest of the world. We must not
let fear of differences prevent us from doing what we
believe to be right. We must not fail either ourselves
or India through lack of decision at a critical time."

Lord Pethick Lawrence at a press conference at
New Delhi on March 23, 1946 explained, "We have come with
but one purpose in view. It is in conjunction with Lord
Wavell, to discuss with the leaders of India and her
elected representatives how best to speed the fulfilment
of your aspirations to full control of your own affairs,
and thus enable us to complete the transfer of responsi-
bility with pride and honour to ourself. The British

Government and the British people desire without reservation, to consummate the promises and pledges that have been made and we can assure you that in our negotiations we shall not seek to provide for anything, that is incompatible in any way with the Sovereign dignity of India".14

United States stressed the point that a peaceful settlement should take place of all colonial problems. President Truman defining United States Foreign Policy reiterated, "We hope for a peaceful settlement of the differences which have arisen between colonial peoples and colonial sovereigns in all areas. The roots of democracy however, will not draw much nourishment in any nation, from a soil of poverty and economic distress. It is a part of our strategy for peace therefore, to assist in the rehabilitation and development of the Far Eastern countries."15

After reaching New Delhi, British Cabinet Mission listened to every political group - the Congress, the Muslim League, the ruling princes, the untouchables, the

15 The Times of India, Bombay, April 8, 1946, p.9.
Sikhs, The Women's Movement and the Communists. Sir Stafford Cripps was most active of the three Ministers engaging in informal talks as well as official interviews. The atmosphere of these discussion continued friendly and most groups including the Congress, seemed confident of their successful conclusion. 16

Only the Muslim League remained adamant. Jinnah summoned a convention of the League representatives in all the provincial legislatures, for the purpose of offering their uncompromising adherence to the principles of Pakistan. With complete separation of the North Western and North Eastern Zones from the rest of the Indian Peninsula. A boycott against British goods was talked of and bloodshed was also threatened. 17 Jinnah in his meeting with the Cabinet Delegation claimed that throughout her history, from the days of Chandragupta there had never been any Government of India in the sense of a single Government. The Muslim Mughal Empire had the largest control but even in those days the Maratha and the Rajputs were not under Muslim rule. When the British came,


they gradually established their rule in a large part of India, but even then, India was only one-third united. The big states and sovereign states were constitutionally and legally already Pakistan. Nehru made a spirited declaration against Pakistan. "The Congress is not going to agree to the League's demand for Pakistan under any circumstances what so ever - even if the British Government agrees to it. It is not even the question of Congress agreeing or not. I know something of the Indian people. If the Congress agrees to the demand even than it will not come off. Nothing on earth not even the United Nations Organisation is going to bring about Pakistan that Jinnah wants."

He declared "If the British Cabinet Mission fails to solve the pressing problems which clamour for solution, a political earthquake of devasting intensity will sweep the entire country. We have put severe restraints on ourselves for long but now no one can say how long the self imposed restraint will continue. The truth is that the people are tired of foreign domination and want to end it immediately. We would talk to the Cabinet


Mission as the free people of one country and the people of another country." Sardar Patel reiterated his stand on the Pakistan issue declaring that Congress is concerned there can be no compromise on the subject of Pakistan. A divided India would be insecure and in constant danger from outside. "

Maulana Azad reiterated the view when in his meeting with the Cabinet Mission he explained, that the position which Jinnah had adopted was fundamentally untenable because he insisted that the Muslims were a separate nation. The Sikh leader Master Tara Singh in his talks held the view that Pakistan was absurd, but if India was to be divided, the Sikhs would want a large share of Punjab. Gandhiji in his interview with the Cabinet Delegation claimed that he was a sincere friend of the Muslims, but could not appreciate Pakistan as Jinnah meant. The two nation theory was dangerous. The Muslim population was a population of converts – only a microscopic minority were not. They

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were all descendents of Indian born people.\textsuperscript{24}

Would the Cabinet Mission listen to Jinnah and the Muslim League or to the urgings of all the rest of India was the question?

While the Cabinet Mission was talking with Indian leaders, a meeting was held in the courtyard of the Anglo-Arabic College. Muslims flaunted slogans such as "Pakistan or die" the speeches were equally inflammatory. Abdul Quiyam Khan from North West Frontier Province declared, "I hope the Muslim nation will strike swiftly before Hindu Government can set up in this country"... "the Muslims will have no alternative but to take out their swords" said Sir Shaukat Hyat Khan. Sir Firoz Khan Noon declared, "If neither the Hindus nor the British give Pakistan to us ... if our own cause is to fight, and if in that fight we go down, the only course for Muslims is to look to Russia ... I will be first to loose every Rupee I have in order that we may be free in this country." The gulf between Muslims and Hindus had always been real but Jinnah dug it deeper. Economic

\textsuperscript{24} Mansergh, N. and Moon, Penderel, \textit{The Transfer of Power}, Vol. VII, April 3, 1946, p. 117.
differences aggravated the irritation. Enterprising Hindus and Parsees almost monopolized banking, insurance big business. Muslims slower to welcome western education, complained bitterly that Hindu factory owners rarely employed Muslims. Muslims had a real fear that in a unified India, Hindus would freeze them out of important posts in Government and industry. The British in the years when they still hoped to hold India, gave the religious differences official standing by decreeing in 1909, that Hindus and Muslims should vote separately. H.N. Brailsford, a sympathetic British student of India said "We labelled them Hindus and Muslims till they forgot they were men." The British policy of divide and rule has been turned by Jinnah to the Pakistan demand "divide and quit." 25

The Cabinet Mission gave out the plan with full approval of the British Government. The Cabinet Mission indicated that in the absence of agreement between the Indian Party leaders upon the fundamental question of unity or division of India, it was their duty to put

25 Time the Weekly News Magazine, April 22, 1946, p. 28.
forward "What we consider are the best arrangements possible to ensure a speedy setting up of the new constitution". The statement expressed the Mission's conviction that sovereign Pakistan was impracticable whether on a large or a small scale, and accordingly the Mission felt unable to advise the British Government that the power which at present resided in British hands, should be handed over to two entirely separate sovereign states but accepting the existence of the very real Muslim apprehensions, the statement proceeded to sketch the outline of a three-tier form of constitution for the Union of India:

1. There should be a Union of India embodying both British India and the States, which should deal with foreign affairs, Defence and Communications and should have the power necessary to raise the finances required for the administration of these subjects.

2. The Union should have an Executive and Legislature constituted from British India and states representatives. Any question raising a major communal issue in the Legislature should require for its decision a majority of the representatives present and voting, of each of the two major communities, Congress and Muslim League as well as a majority of all members present and voting.
(3) All subjects other than Union subjects and all residuary powers should vest in the provinces.

(4) The States will retain all subjects and powers other than those ceded to the union.

(5) The provinces should be free to form groups with Executives and Legislatures, and each group should determine the provincial subjects to be taken in common.

(6) The constitution of the Union and of the groups should contain a provision whereby any province could by majority of its votes in Legislative Assembly, call for a reconsideration of the terms of the constitution after an initial period of 10 years and at ten yearly intervals thereafter. The Cabinet Delegation declared:

It is not our object to lay out the details of the constitution on the above lines, but to set in motion the machinery whereby a constitution could be settled by Indians for Indians. It had become necessary for them to give a broad basis of the future constitution because it became clear that otherwise there was no hope

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of getting the two major communities to join in the setting up of the constitution-making machinery.

They pointed out that in forming any Assembly to decide a new Constitution structure, the first problem was to obtain as broad-based and accurate a representation of the whole population as was possible. After a most careful consideration of the various methods by which these inequalities could be corrected, they had come to the conclusion that the foremost and most practicable plan would be

(a) to allot to each province a total number of seats proportional to its population, roughly in the ratio of one to a million as the nearest substitute for representation by adult suffrage.

(b) to divide this provincial allocation of seats between the main communities, in each province in proportion to their population.

(c) to provide that the representatives allotted to each community in a province shall be elected by the members of that community in its legislative assembly.

The Congress accepted the statement of May 16, 1946 despite an expressed awareness of its defects and adherence to their own interpretation of certain of its
proposals, while i at the same time rejecting the
proposals for the formation of an Interim Government
as contained in the statement of May 16. Maulana
explained that they could not accept anything in the
nature of parity, even as a temporary expedient and
the inclusion of a Nationalist Muslim, which they
felt to be a grave omission involving a vital principle
from which they could not depart. 27

On the basis of the Cabinet Mission's proposals,
the Viceroy issued invitations to members for the form-
ation of Interim Government, on the basis that the
constitution making would proceed in accordance with the
statement of May 16. He invited 6 Congress Members
including representatives of the depressed classes. Five
Muslim League, one Sikh, one Indian Christian and one
Parsee. The Viceroy declared he would arrange the dis-
tribution of portfolios in consultation with the ldaders
of the two major parties. 28

27 Mansergh, N and Moon, Penderel, The Transfer of Power,

28 Mansergh, N. and Moon, Penderel, The Transfer of Power,
The Congress party agreed to join the interim government. While the Muslims contrary to their earlier decision rejected the Viceroy's proposals, instead they decided to start direct action. "As a token of their deep resentment to the attitude of British towards the Muslims, the Muslims were asked to renounce their titles forthwith conferred by the alien government. The League's action was justified by the assumption that the "spirit of cooperation" necessary to carry the plan through was missing. In addition it appeared that the Muslims were deeply chagrined by the Viceroy's refusal, to form an interim popular government after the Congress leaders voted against participation, that the Muslim League would try to gain its ends by armed uprising, looked probable. The Muslim League charged the Cabinet Mission and Viceroy with breach of promise. They freely used phrases like "dishonourable betrayal of Muslim interests" and the unholy alliance between the British and the Congress. Released from its embarrassing commitment to the British long term plan, the Muslim League reverted to its original


demand for the immediate realization of Pakistan, but
with a dangerous addition - a threat of direct action.\textsuperscript{31}

August 16 was fixed as the date for the celebration throughout India by the Muslims of "Direct Action Day". For weeks inflammatory speeches and broadcasts proclaimed a holy war against unbelievers. The culmination was an orgy of mass murders in Calcutta with the Muslim League Ministry openly encouraging the campaign. The Hindus and Sikhs infuriated by indiscriminate assaults retaliated with equal fanaticism. Five thousand dead and fifteen thousand injured in three days of unrestrained gansterism. This however, did not deter the Muslim League. Fiery speeches were made in some centres suggesting a complete boycott - political, economic and social of both the British and the Hindus, and defiance of measures prohibiting demonstrations and the possession of dangerous weapons. The rioting in Bombay was insignificant in comparison with Calcutta but was sufficient to convey the warning, that India's present atmosphere could easily be disturbed.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Shiva Rao, "India Unity or Civil War", \textit{The Nation}, Vol.163, August 24, 1946, pp.213-214.

During the Mission's deliberations and the Congress-League impasse over the question of Pakistan, American interest in India's independence was reaffirmed. Indian newspapers reported that the United States was willing to offer assistance in resolving the deadlock. It was also reported that the Department of State favoured international arbitration on Pakistan. The American Mission in New Delhi, however, had to convey to Washington certain unfavourable reactions of the Indian National Congress, the League, and British officials to the rumoured American feelers. George R. Merrell, the American Commissioner in New Delhi, cautioned that no useful purpose would be served if the United States were to intervene at its own initiative at this juncture. Cautioned against intervention, the Acting Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, issued a statement appreciating the Cabinet Mission Plan "as a constructive and statesmanlike step to solve the Indian problem". When the composition of the Interim Executive Council was announced, Acheson welcomed it on behalf of the State Department by saying, "The Department has followed with interest the negotiations which have been going on for a political settlement in India and welcomes the announcement that a representative Council composed entirely of Indians will take office... The composition of the new
council makes it clear that members are entitled to speak on behalf of a great majority of the Indian people. They have the best wishes of the United States in their effort to effect a peaceful transition to complete freedom. It is regrettable that Muslim League has not decided to participate; but it is hoped that it may later find it possible to do so."\(^{33}\)

Nehru formed the Provisional National Government consisting of twelve members, seven from the Congress party, two Nationalist Muslims not belonging to the Muslim League, a Sikh, a Parsee and a Christian. The Congress leaders asserted that they were willing to reconstitute the entire government on the basis set forth by the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy namely six Congressmen, Five Muslim Leaguers and three representatives from other minorities. Nehru as Prime Minister outlined his plans. The achievement of Independence was naturally the primary objective of the new government. But while pressing for this it would tackle the vast and intricate task of feeding, clothing, housing, educating and safe guarding the health of 400,000,000 Indians.

However, the Congress leaders had an anxious time ahead as Jinnah's challenge could prove formidable.  

Jinnah in one of his statements declared, "the Russians have more than a spectators interest ... They are not very far from India." After a short while Jinnah intimated to Lord Wavell, Muslim League's willingness to enter the Interim Government on the basis of five seats offered by the Viceroy.

When the League did join the Interim Government, the American Press hailed the step as "a political truce which may lead to important political developments". America promptly accorded recognition to the Interim Government by elevating the status of the Indian Mission at Washington and the American Mission at New Delhi to Embassy rank, on a reciprocal basis. The negotiations for such an elevation had been in progress since early 1946, but had not fructified owing to the State Department's reluctance on the ground that it would have amounted to a public announcement that the United States considered


India a self-governing country, in effective control of its external relations. Acheson believed that a representative Interim Viceregal Council at Delhi, would constitute a far more appropriate occasion for such a change in the form of diplomatic representation and would reflect American approval of India's advance towards self-government. Accordingly, a Department of State release dated October 23, 1946 announced:

The Honourable George R. Merrell, at present American Commissioner to India with the personal rank of Minister, will act as Charge d'Affaires of American Embassy pending designation and arrival in India of an American ambassador. 36

When the Muslim League agreed to nominate representatives to serve in the Indian Interim Government, it was possible to hope that a communal truce would prevail while India took the next step towards its goal of independence. Unfortunately this hope was completely dissipated. The Muslim Minister had entered the Cabinet only to prevent it from functioning successfully. They refused to recognise Nehru as Prime Minister or to accept the principle of joint responsibility. Jinnah

announced a boycott of the constituent assembly due to meet the next month. The breakdown in the administrative structure was illustrated by the bloody Hindu-Muslim riots of Bengal and Bihar provinces. Nehru charged the British of forming a mental alliance with the Muslims. Jinnah accused the Viceroy of appeasing Congress. 37

Shiva Rao in his article in the Nation, "India in Travail" discussed the Indian problem as it was. Jinnah wanted absolute and immediate Pakistan with an exchange of population if necessary. Someone asked him what would happen in the country during the next six months if he did not succeed in achieving Pakistan. "You have seen what is happening and that will continue", he replied. Social, economic and political unrest was rapidly increasing as a result of the stresses developed by the war and its aftermath, the administrative structure was plainly unequal to dealing with this unrest, a government divided into two nations, Congress and the Muslim League, - incapable of acting together because of their fundamentally different ideologies. 38

The word sabotage was being used by the nationalist press to describe the British Imperialist attitude towards the Labour Cabinet plans. Churchill was openly encouraging India's minority leaders to adopt a defiant policy. A formidable combination of vested interest was fighting with skill and without scruples to prevent the swift and peaceful transfer of political power - the landlords, the British privileged class both official and commercial, some of the Indian princes, Muslims like Jinnah. Designing men were exploiting the social and economic unrest for their own unworthy ends. It was possible, India would be plunged into civil war despite the efforts of Gandhi and Nehru. It was impossible to turn back at this state. If British Labour wanted to retain India's friendship it had to go forward rapidly and remove all those however, high placed they may be who could not accept its principles.39

In another article in United States magazine, Nation entitled "The Indian Crisis", the magazine urged the British to take positive steps. It suggested that Premier Attlee should make it quiet clear that British

39Ibid.
stood firmly on the basic principle of Indian unity, which he enunciated before the Cabinet Mission was despatched to New Delhi. A firm stand by Attlee was all the more necessary because the London Times in an editorial on November 28, 1946 proposed that Britain reverse its stand on Indian unity and agree to Pakistan. The mere fact that such a proposal had been put forward in a paper with the standing of the Times was likely to increase Congress suspicions that Britain was encouraging Jinnah, in order to find an excuse for breaking its pledge of freedom for India. Urgent eleventh-hour efforts were made in London to save from failure of the British Government's crucial talks with the Indian leaders.

The London Conference, December 3-6, 1946, aroused considerable American interest. Concerned over the communal wrangle the State Department believed, that a halt in the constitutional progress, which might cause widespread chaos in India similar to that in China, could have worldwide repercussions. Acheson instructed the Embassy in London to cable the progress of negotiations.

using both British and Indian sources, and to informally impress upon Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah the desirability of a successful conclusion to the talks. The Embassy was advised to draw the attention of the two leaders to the sympathetic interest that Americans had long taken in India's freedom and to assure them that the United States looked forward to a stable, peaceful, and united India, in which all elements of its population, including the Muslims, would have ample scope to realize their legitimate aspirations. For the Embassy's confidential information, Asheson added that it would be wise for the Congress party to accept the League's interpretation pertaining to a compulsory grouping of the provinces of North-West and North-East India by a majority vote, of the appropriate representatives of the Constituent Assembly, though this might lead to the downfall of the then ruling Congress governments in Assam and the North-Western Frontier Province. These provinces had little economic importance, however, and the future Government of India could easily exercise all the strategic control it needed over these regions through its defence powers. Concessions by the Congress would probably have brought the League round to a position of loyal
cooperation within the framework of the Indian Union.

The American Charge d'Affaires in London informed Acheson that it was uncertain to what extent information about talks would be obtainable, because the India Office believed that the decision about giving the information to the American Embassy would have to be taken by Prime Minister Attlee, who might decide that it would be more appropriate for Ernest Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, to advise the American Secretary of State. It was also unlikely that the brief stay of Indian leaders in London would provide an opportunity for information on the talks. Moreover, the existing tension might cause Nehru and Jinnah to interpret whatever was said to them as interference by the United States. It would, therefore, be better to issue a statement on India from Washington, and so Acheson issued the following statement on December 3, 1946. 41 "The crux of the internal problem confronting India appears to arise from differences of opinion between the two principal parties as to the conditions, under which provinces can elect to join or to remain out of sub-federation, in North-Western and North-Eastern India. I am confident that if the Indian

leaders show the magnanimous spirit, the occasion demands, they can go forward together on the basis of the clear provisions on this point contained in the constitutional plan proposed by the British Cabinet Mission to forge an Indian Federal Union in which all elements of the population had ample scope to achieve their legitimate political and economic aspirations. The United States has long taken a sympathetic interest in the progressive realization of India's political destiny ... By our recent establishment of full diplomatic relations with the Interim Government of India, we have expressed in tangible form our confidence in the ability of the Indian leaders to make the vital decisions, that lay immediately ahead with full awareness that their actions at this moment in history may directly effect world's peace and prosperity for generations to come."\(^{42}\)

Jinnah said that he appreciated the sympathetic interest shown by United States Government in the political situation prevailing in India and he was appreciative of the statement issued by Acheson. The problem of India was a very complicated one and while leading United

States Government officials had shown an understanding of that problem, public in the United States and infact throughout the world was ill-informed.43

Nehru returned from his dramatic flight to London disappointed but not embittered. "We hungered for a message of cheer and cooperation from British", he said addressing the Constituent Assembly" and it has been a blow to me that obstructions and new limitations not mentioned previously have been placed before us".44 The Constituent Assembly would consider as its first item as to what would be the basic future of the permanent constitution. The deliberations of the Constituent Assembly were held in an atmosphere of uncertainty. Until Jinnah returned from London one could not say whether the League representatives would participate in the Assembly. Equally unpredictable was the attitude of the princes. Many among them seemed frightenened by the term "Independent Sovereign Republic".

Churchill in the course of the parliamentary debate:


offensively raised the question whether such an Assembly was competent to make decisions affecting the whole of India. The Labour Cabinet endorsed Jinnah's interpretation of its long-term plan and asked the Congress leaders to accept it, adding the important reservation that the British Government would not impose on unwilling parts of the country a constitution framed by an Assembly from which a section of the people had held aloof. 45

After the failure of the London talks, the British Government urged the United States to informally influence Congress leaders, particularly Nehru, to accept the British and the League interpretation. Meanwhile, the American Commissioner in New Delhi had already discussed Acheson's statement of December 3 with Vallabhbhai Patel and C.Rajagopalachari, and Patel had told Merrell that the United States was unduly influenced by the British and seemed to follow a policy of favouring the strong. Rajagopalachari added that if it continued to make concessions as suggested by Acheson, the Congress party would itself become a minority.

45 Ibid.
The State Department was averse to such an impression and directed Merrell to clarify the American position with Nehru. In his meeting with Nehru, Merrell stressed that recent expressions of American interest in the amicable resolution of the political impasse were solely on its own initiative and stemmed from America's belief that the establishment of the Indian Federal Union would be a great step forward towards world stability and prosperity. The United States Government believed that as politically disinterested outsiders with considerable experience in federalism, America's views might be given a sympathetic consideration, and that though the British Cabinet Plan was open to honest criticism, it represented a fair basis for constitution-making. The Congress concession to the League on the disputed clause should be a reciprocal one, involving an undertaking by the League to work loyally within the framework of the Indian Federal Union. 46

Nehru, in reply, told Merrell that he and his colleagues did not think that public and private expressions of American interest were at the instance

46 Foreign Relation Papers, December 11, 1946, p. 103.
of the British. He was convinced, he said, that American opinions were expressed spontaneously, in the interest of India and the world. The State Department appreciated Nehru's reaction and directed its Mission in New Delhi to contact the League leaders and to emphasise to them that the attitude of the Congress could not be modified unless the League publicly declared its willingness to cooperate loyally within the framework of the Indian Federal Union. Meanwhile, Thomas E.Weil, Second Secretary at Delhi, met Liaquat Ali twice and stressed the view that if the League was willing to cooperate within the framework of the Indian Federal Union and chances of the Congress accepting the December 6 statement would improve. During these meetings, Liaquat Ali was so bitterly against the Congress, that he seemed unwilling to recognise the merit of the League's voluntary assurance of cooperation.47

The Muslim League however, instead of joining continued to demand the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, asserting that its decisions were invalid and illegal. The Congress party therefore, raised the point of the propriety of the Muslim League remaining in office

while repudiating the constituent assembly. Attlee finding solution difficult adopted an entirely new line. He fixed the precise date for the British withdrawal from India, as not later than June 30, 1948.48

Clement Attlee declared "His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is there definite intentions to take the necessary step to affect transfer of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948." Britain's declaration had no strings attached. The Manchester Guardian called it "the greatest disengagement action in history".49 The Tory gentlemen of the House of Lords were angry. Peer after Peer rose to condemn Britain's decision to quit India. The Conservative leader, Viscount Cranbore said, the Government was throwing up the sponge—abandoning our friends, washing their hands of the whole business. While Viscount Templewood and others argued that the Govt. decision was a betrayal of India's minorities, and "A Gambler's Throw" with civil war at stake. While Lord Halifax, Viceroy of India from 1926-1931 admitted that

48 Shiva Rao, "India Come into its Own", The Nation, March 8, 1947, pp.275-277.

Britain's position in India was "rapidly becoming intolerable" and according to him the Government's decision to pull out was "atleast as likely to encourage disunity as to encourage unity". But said Halifax, "the truth is that for India today there is no solution that is not fraught with the gravest objection, the gravest danger... I am not prepared to condemn what His Majesty's Government are doing unless I can honestly and confidentially recommend better solution that he - could not do".

While Churchill talked of Attlee's scattering and squandering of the Empire. He talked about India being shamelessly cast away. Churchill suggested that the problem of India should be handed to the United Nations for a solution. Recalling that the Government had adopted this course with Palestine, Churchill asked, "is it as difficult to resist the feeling, that the same train of reasoning applies on a far greater scale and with much greater course to India".

Attlee's reply to Churchill was "he ignores the great movement for self-government which has been spreading for decades throughout Asia. He abandons the democratic

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principles for which we fought in the war. It is significant that when I announced in the House of Commons that India had a right to choose the future of the country whether to stay in the British Commonwealth or go out there was not a single speech from the opposition. Churchill was away. I do not know of any responsible person of recent experience in India who believes that you can put the clock back. Nor do I believe that in the British Commonwealth or in the United States there is any support for the absolute imperialism that Winston Churchill seems to support. The fact is that on this subject Winston Churchill never thinks. He only gives way to his emotions.\textsuperscript{51} 

The British Government explained its policy to the United States. The British Embassy informed the Department of State "the objective of United Kingdom's policy in India had for many years been to gradually transfer authority, ultimately to hand over power to a Federal system of Government commanding at least the assent of all the important elements in the Indian population and in which, the Indian States would be the cooperating parties. The unity of India which was the greatest single

\textsuperscript{51} The Times of India, Bombay, April 26, 1947, p.6.
achievement of their rule would thus be preserved. The policy of the present British Government had been in line with that tradition. Unfortunately, these conditions had not been realised. The communal situation had deteriorated. Between August and November, over ten thousand persons had died. Since the London conference, the situation had improved but tension was still high. They had made every effort to bring the Indian parties together by negotiation. The alternatives were to place the responsibility for finding a solution, or for the consequence of failure to do so, solely upon Indian leaders, or to reassert British authority and govern India for a substantial period. The latter course could only be feasible if they resorted to widespread and extreme measure of repression. This course was not likely to lead to any solution of the Indian problem. They had therefore, come to the conclusion set out in the statement announcing their intention to hand over authority in India not later than June 1948. Attlee believed that "New men were needed for a new policy." He replaced Wavell with Lord Mountbatten, as Governor General of India, to expedite


53Attlee, Clement, As it Happened, p. 183.
the transfer of power. The new Viceroy tried to reach an agreed solution and succeeded in securing agreement over partition.

United States attitude towards emerging Pakistan State was foreshadowed in the Department's press release which stated "future constitutional pattern is a matter to be determined by Indian people themselves and whatever that pattern may be, United States Government looked forward to continuance of friendliest relations with Indians of all communities and creeds. We hope to have friendliest relations with new Pakistan's State when it is established.

The Muslim League refused to bend. The only way out was the acceptance of the idea of Pakistan. The Indian leaders finally decided to agree to avoid further bloodshed. The Department of the United States praised the agreement reached by all the major parties in India, on the plan for the transfer of power and expressed the hope that this meeting of minds will bring an end to the civil disorders in India and avoid further bloodshed." The World Telegram headlined "Nehru accepts partition of India" while the Journal American headline said "India Okay's British plan for freedom". Pearl Buck said the people of India can make

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54 The Times of India, Bombay, June 11, 1947, p.7.
a divided country into another Europe with competition and jealousy or they can build a union of friendly and co-operative states. The basic question is not how India divided, but how India is united. Emanuel Cellar of New York expressed disappointment that India would be partitioned and said that the British Government were "pandering to Mr. Jinnah".

India was finally granted independence on August 15, 1947. The Indians felt triumphant at having achieved their aim, the only discord being that a part of India was cut out into a separate state called Pakistan. Communalism had triumphed over secularism as far as the Muslims were concerned. India however, maintained its secular identity.

56 The Times of India, Bombay, June 5, 1947, p.7.