5 Independence and Partition 1945–7

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The surprise election of a Labour government in Britain at the end of the war ensured that independence would be granted to India. A new, but final, viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, was appointed with instructions to accomplish this swiftly. However, relations between Congress and the Muslim League were breaking down so badly that this was not so easy to do. Communal violence increased relentlessly as the self-declared deadline approached for the British to depart. Although many had assumed that the borders between India and Pakistan were a formality, once independence arrived, it suddenly mattered enormously to people which side they were on, particularly in the divided Punjab. Terrible massacres took place among the hundreds of thousands trying to get across the border one way or another. The largest peacetime transfer of power in history ended in conflict and bloodshed amongst the winners.

This chapter examines in more detail:

- Negotiating positions around the demand for Pakistan
- British attempts to create plans for independence and partition
- Communal violence and partition massacres
- Resolution of the final relations with the independent princely rulers

Key dates

1945	May	British general election
	August 9	End of the Second World War
1946		Indian general election
	April	Cabinet mission
	May	Simla Conference
	May	Cabinet mission's May statement
	August 16	Direct action day
	September 2	Interim government took power
	December 7	Constituent assembly convened
1947	March 22	Mountbatten became last viceroy
	March	Congress accepted Pakistan demand
	May 3	Plan Balkan

	May 10	Mountbatten showed Nehru Plan Balkan at Simla
	June 3	Announcement of final plan for independence and partition
	July 4	Independence of India Act
	July 8	Territorial partition work began
	July 19	Interim government split
1948		Deaths of Gandhi and Jinnah
1950	January 26	India became a republic

1 | Options

Key question
What were the aims and concerns of the Labour government in relation to India?

The new Labour government voted into power in Britain in May 1945 was determined to press ahead with political reform in India and there was optimism among nationalist leaders that progress towards independence would quicken.

The two main aims were to revive democratic politics by holding elections for the 11 British provincial councils and the central assemblies and to form an (unelected) group to start work on a new constitution.

Key dates
British general election: May 1945
End of the Second World World: 9 August 1945

There was some concern among the British in India that the British government was not sufficiently aware of the scale of support for the Pakistan movement and that elections would provide a huge boost to the campaign. Nehru had said that he would not work with the Muslim League while Jinnah was strengthening the demand for Pakistan.

Fear of unrest

Viceroy Wavell was worried that Labour was too eager to hand over power to Congress, which would further raise the anxieties of the Muslim League. He was acutely aware of the potential for unrest – from food and coal shortages as much as anything – and the weakness of the British situation if the revival of politics led to renewed civil disobedience.

At the end of the war in August 1945 there were about 50,000 soldiers available in India (that is just one for every 8000 civilians) but, tired after the war, they were eager to be **demobilised** and return to their homes, whether Indian or British. It was inconceivable that extra troops would be sent. Moreover, any state of emergency would itself be more serious than ever before because of the widespread availability of unreturned weapons.

Key term
Demobilised
Released from the armed forces.

Wavell wrote to the new secretary of state for India, Freddie Pethick-Lawrence, in November 1945:

> We are now faced in India with a situation of great difficulty and danger ... I must warn His Majesty's Government to be prepared for a serious attempt by the Congress, probably next spring, but quite possibly earlier to subvert by force the present administration in India ... the choice will lie between capitulating to Congress and

> accepting their demands and using all our resources to suppress the movement.

Courts martial and mutinies

The British did not help the situation by their handling of the defeated Indian National Army (INA). It became clear that Indians generally supported the captured soldiers. Congress called for their release, declaring:

> it would be a tragedy if these officers, men and women were punished for the offence of having laboured, however mistakenly, for the freedom of India.

The British officer class nevertheless still wanted to make the point that the INA were traitors and court-martialled a sample of three senior officers, deliberately choosing a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh. This simply united the three communities and their leaders in opposition. The officers were convicted of waging war against the Crown, a charge carrying a potential death penalty. They were actually sentenced to transportation for life, but then this was abandoned and they were released in case the general mood in the Indian army turned angry.

There were mutinies in February 1946 (and indeed there was unrest among British troops unhappy about the slow pace of demobilisation). A total of 20,000 sailors from the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay, then Calcutta and Karachi, took over nearly 80 ships and a general strike was called by the Bombay Communist Party. However, Congress leaders persuaded the mutineers to surrender. This angered many supporters but the leadership of both Congress and the Muslim League saw more advantage for the moment in cooperating with the British than in resistance.

Preparation for partition

It was apparent to nationalist leaders that the British were now serious about quitting India, which meant gauging the strength of the demand for Pakistan. In January 1946, a small fact-finding visit of British MPs came and went without announcing their conclusions, but in private some stated that Pakistan must be conceded to avoid Muslim unrest. In secret, work began on deciding how the country could be partitioned. Viceroy Wavell was keenly interested in making practical preparations for the eventual unpleasantness of announcing the actual boundary lines. It was immediately apparent that the Punjab would be a flashpoint split between a Muslim-west and Hindu-east but with five million Sikhs spread throughout. The Sikh holy city of Amritsar was surrounded by a Muslim-majority area, potentially cut off in a future Pakistan.

Key date
Indian general election: spring 1946

Meanwhile, British and Indian politicians were waiting to see how the land lay after the Indian general election in the spring of 1946.

Elections

Key question
What did the election results show?

The message of the election results in the 11 British provinces was even greater polarisation of support. In overall terms, Congress won a convincing victory with 90 per cent of seats. However, the Muslim League won 75 per cent of all Muslim votes, took 90 per cent of the seats reserved for Muslims in the provinces and all 30 Muslim seats in the central assembly. Congress was shocked to realise that it would have to face up to the Muslim League and their Pakistan campaign.

Congress formed provincial governments in eight provinces, the Muslim League formed two, in Bengal and Sind, while a non-Muslim coalition took power in Punjab, even though the Muslim League had the largest number of votes and took 75 of the 88 Muslim seats.

A more subtle message was that Muslims had voted most strongly for the League in Muslim-minority provinces that could never realistically be part of Pakistan. They appeared to support the idea of a separate Muslim state as a haven to which they might move. In the areas which were already Muslim-majority, there appeared to be more interest and confidence in maintaining local power.

In Bengal, for example, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the local Muslim League leader, tried to form a regional coalition with Congress in order to campaign for a united, and possibly independent, Bengal. In Sind province, a breakaway group formed a minority government with the aim of an independent mini-Pakistan. In the North West Frontier Province, the Pathan tribes were not League supporters and Congress held power in this far-flung area beyond the Muslim belt.

The cabinet mission

Key question
How did the British prepare for a new constitution?

In order to push forward with Labour's second aim – the drafting of a new constitution – Prime Minister Clement Attlee gained cabinet agreement for another mission to India. It was widely expected that this new peacetime mission, from a socialist government which clearly intended to honour promises of independence, ought to be successful. In fact, in the words of Woodrow Wyatt, a Labour MP:

> they tried to give away an Empire but found their every suggestion for doing it frustrated by the intended recipients.

An official document of the time said that the formal brief was to consult about the:

> setting up of machinery whereby the forms under which India can realise her full independent status can be determined by Indians … with the minimum of disturbance and the maximum of speed.

The confidential brief was not just to listen but to create positive desire for a speedy transfer of power.

The mission, including 11 civil servants, was nominally headed by the secretary of state, Freddie Pethick-Lawrence, an ageing and genial socialist, but was driven by Stafford Cripps, now president of the board of trade in the cabinet, seeking to reverse the embarrassing failure of his 1942 mission. The third man was A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, but actually a very traditional Labour politician.

Key date

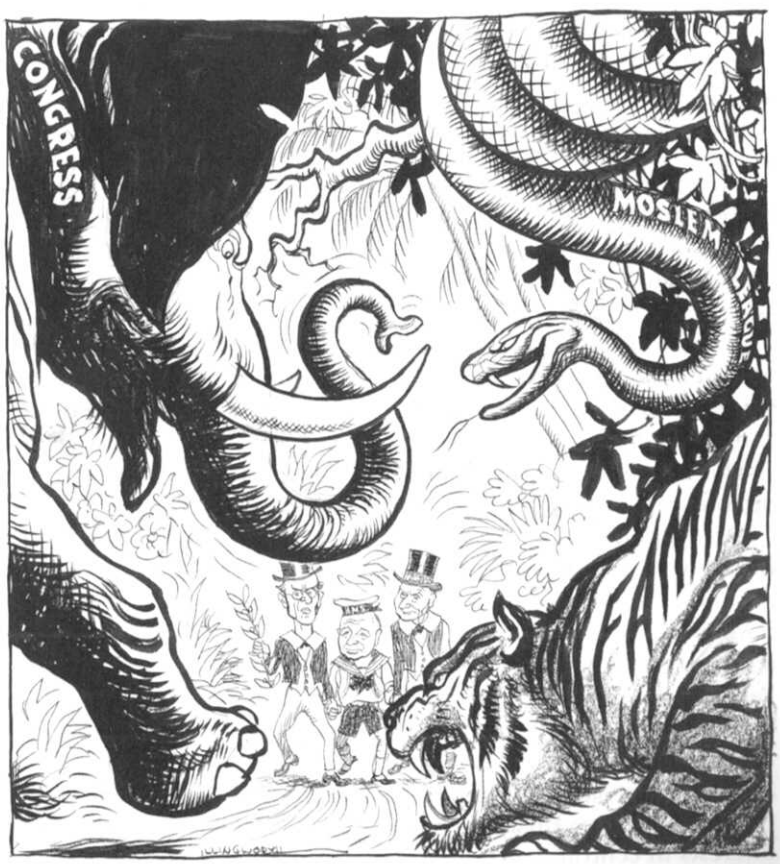
Cabinet mission: April 1946

The mission met Indian politicians on 1 April 1946 and invited the various leaders to state their demands or aspirations.

Gandhi argued defiantly for power to be transferred to Congress, as the election winners, to make decisions about and for India.

Jinnah recognised that there was no hope of Pakistan from an independent Congress-dominated India. It could only come into existence from a British decision. The British needed Muslim cooperation in order to avoid disorder and present an agreed peaceful transfer to the world. So Jinnah avoided confrontation and waited. Gandhi made a wily suggestion that Jinnah form the government balanced by a Hindu majority in the central assembly, prompting Wavell to observe that 'he is a tough politician and not a saint'.

Meanwhile, there was no Sikh representative and little attention paid to this vulnerable minority. Similarly, the position of the princely states was ignored. They had treaties with Britain which



Illingworth cartoon. Who might the three humans represent? Why is the middle figure wearing a boy's sailor's outfit? Why are the others dressed as public schoolboys? What is the figure on the left holding? What does the cartoon predict for their future?

could not force them to become part of an independent India. In theory, they had the right to remain as autonomous petty states scattered across India.

The behaviour of the British delegation was counter-productive. Pethick-Lawrence wanted Indian independence so much that he left the British no bargaining power. He tended to agree with every demand, earning him the secret nickname Pathetic Lawrence. Cripps, meanwhile, enjoyed holding secret meetings but then made no secret of his closeness to Gandhi, attending prayer meetings and being sent daily yogurt.

The Simla Conference 1946

Key question
Why did the cabinet mission plan fail?

In May 1946, Indian political leaders were invited to Simla for a conference to discuss the two constitutional options drawn up by the cabinet mission and approved by the full British cabinet.

Key date
Simla Conference: May 1946

Wavell joined the three-man delegation to form the British party with four representatives each from Congress and the Muslim League. The mood was not good. Jinnah refused to speak to Maulana Azad, one of the two Muslim Congress representatives. Gandhi, although not formally involved, turned up on a special train to announce that he would block any moves towards partition.

The first, preferred option attempted to be imaginative and flexible. It proposed a single state with a three-tier constitutional structure:

- a minimal 'union government', responsible for foreign affairs, defence and communication
- self-selected regional *groupings* of provinces exercising all other governmental powers
- the existing provinces.

More controversially, it was proposed that the regional groupings might be permitted after a period of time to **secede** from the original union by means of **plebiscites** to become independent states.

Key terms

Secede
Peacefully break away from a state.

Plebiscite
A vote of the whole population on constitutional issues.

Hindustan
Literally the land beyond the Indus (coming from the west) – an Arab or Mughal perspective.

The second, fall-back option was the first formal proposal of a two-state outcome: **Hindustan** and Pakistan. The two states would conclude formal treaties with each other but would have no common government.

The hope was that Congress would recoil from the second option and support the first. It had the attraction of producing a Congress-dominated single state but they would have to accept the right of provincial groupings to secede.

On the other side, although the Muslim League would obviously prefer the second option, they might be persuaded to accept the first if they were confident that sustained demand for Pakistan would allow it to emerge democratically.

The British cabinet was concerned about the viability of a Pakistani state in itself as well as the effect of splitting the Indian armed forces. There is, however, some evidence that the British regarded a future Pakistan as more loyal to British strategic interests in central Asia than a future India (see page 148).

In the end, perhaps predictably, Congress could not give its support to either option since they could both lead, sooner or later, to partition. After two full sessions of the conference, with no prospect of agreement, Pethick Lawrence wound up proceedings.

With hindsight, historians have speculated about the role of the failing health of Jinnah. Jinnah's public stance of waiting until people came round to the idea of Pakistan was at odds with his personal fear that he did not have long to live. He wanted to see Pakistan born before he died and he wanted to be its first leader. He could not afford to wait another ten years or more for plebiscites to take place.

If Congress and the British had known how seriously ill he was, they might have been tempted to slow down and wait for him to die in the hope that the momentum would go out of the Pakistan movement. It is one of the great 'might have been' questions of the period.

Key question
How did the British move on from the Simla failure?

The May statement

Having failed to reach agreement in the Simla conferences, the cabinet mission moved matters on by making a declaration of intent, leaving it up to the various Indian parties to agree or not.

They announced that they would create a **constituent assembly** of elected representatives from the 11 British provinces. The assembly would draft a constitution for the single state with regional groupings.

Key term
Constituent assembly
A parliament with the sole task of designing a constitution.

Congress declined to accept the May statement. However, on 6 June, the Muslim League did accept it and Jinnah spoke publicly to emphasise the personal compromise he had made in accepting the right of a constituent assembly to decide about Pakistan.

Key date
Cabinet mission, May statement: May 1946

The cabinet mission further announced that it would create an interim government composed entirely of Indians, with the exception of Wavell as governor-general. However, this plan got stuck on the proportions of members for different communities. Jinnah insisted on choosing all the Muslim representatives, while Congress insisted on being able to choose Muslims for the Congress section. A Sikh and a Christian representative were added, followed by a Dalit and then a Parsi.

As time moved on, a further (June) statement announced that the viceroy would select members for any group which did not immediately accept the May statement.

Key question
What were the political effects of upholding Congress' counter-interpretation?

Congress counter-interpretation

On 24 June Congress suddenly announced a partial acceptance of the May statement. They were clearly seeking to avoid being excluded but they also proposed a counter-interpretation of the groupings plan. They argued that if groupings could secede from the nation-state, then individual provinces could opt out of regional groupings, either to become autonomous or merge back into the (Indian) state. Their hope was, of course, that this would fragment Pakistan if it ever got formed. To the anger of Wavell and Jinnah, Cripps declined to rule out this interpretation.

On 27 June, Jinnah, feeling betrayed, announced that constitutional methods had failed. The cabinet mission left India and Wavell wrote:

> The Mission gave away the weakness of our position and our bluff has been called. Our time in India is limited and our power to control events almost gone.

Wavell announced the imminent formation of the interim government on the basis of six Congress nominees, five from the Muslim League and three chosen by Wavell to represent minorities. When the Muslim League declined to nominate anyone, Wavell agreed that Congress should choose additional Muslim representatives.

The Muslim League responded by withdrawing its previous agreement to the May statement and instructed all Muslim officials to resign.

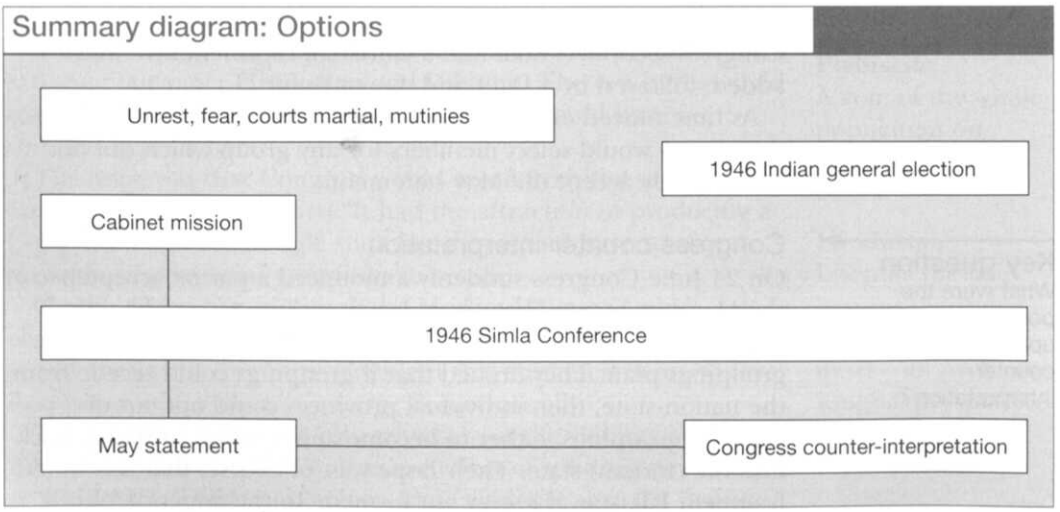
Withdrawal plans

As the political process broke down, so the country slid towards civil war. The commander-in-chief Auchinleck warned on 13 August that 'in the event of civil war, the Indian armed forces cannot be relied on'. Wavell was advised to 'leave India to her fate'. He wanted to announce a phased withdrawal which would be completed by 1 January 1947, just five months later.

However, the British government wanted no sense of panic so Wavell was refused troop reinforcements. He had almost been refused permission to even make plans for the evacuation of 100,000 European civilians, including many families, and only just got promises of extra ships if necessary.

Then, in the heat of August 1946, Jinnah made his first and last great misjudgement.

Summary diagram: Options



2 | Setbacks

Key question
Why did Jinnah resort to direct action?

The great Calcutta killings

Jinnah had decided that the time had come to show that the Muslim League could also use direct mass action like Gandhi and Congress. Jinnah had up to now deplored the use of such action, regarding it as a form of intimidation, and preferred entirely peaceful means of constitutional negotiation. However, he had now despaired of negotiations because of the tactics and behaviour of Congress leaders and was confident of a show of strength because of the election results. This combination of inexperience, confidence and despair perhaps led him to underestimate the forces he was about to unleash.

Key date
Direct action day: 16 August 1946

Jinnah called for a 'universal Muslim *hartal*' on 16 August 1946 which was declared direct action day. The symbolic focus of the strike was a huge Muslim League procession through Calcutta. Jinnah's intention was entirely peaceful and League leaders had persuaded the relatively new British governor of Bengal to declare a public holiday with the result that the army was withdrawn to barracks.

However, the tens of thousands of marching Muslims had provided themselves with *lathi*s and rocks, for either self-defence or aggression. Hindus threw stones as they passed. At the final mass rally of 100,000 marchers, the chief minister of Bengal, H.S. Suhrawardy, is thought to have incited violence against local Hindus. As dark fell, the crowd moved off and the attacks began in the slums and the docks. There followed three days and nights of rioting, lynching, killing and arson before troops gained control again. Hundreds of bodies were left in the streets. The toll is now thought to have been 6000 people dead, nearly 20,000 wounded and 100,000 made homeless. Most of the latter moved to areas already strong in numbers of their religious community – a portent of the desperate migrations to come.

Key question
What were the political consequences of the Calcutta killings?

Causes and consequences

It was assumed that, since Muslims were responsible for the march, the vast majority of victims were Hindu. This is not now thought to be the case. Congress held the governor responsible for failing to prepare for rioting. However, elsewhere in India, the *hartal* caused no trouble at all. Commentators now believe that the initial trouble was exploited by the many underworld gangs of the vast, poor city of Calcutta, looking to settle scores and indulge in looting.

The outcome of the Calcutta massacres was the destruction of any optimism that the communities and their leaders might take political chances and offer compromises. The slope towards communal partition had tipped steeply. For Jinnah, it was a personal catastrophe. His reputation for wise leadership was damaged, whether one believed that he knew what he was doing or simply that the Muslim League could not manage its own community discipline.

Congress, notwithstanding its numerical strength, now felt the injured party and resorted to working outside and against negotiations. Gandhi warned Wavell that Congress would not try to calm any future trouble if that actually meant using British troops as back-up. Behind the scenes, Gandhi instructed the Congress representative in London to try to set up a secret meeting with the prime minister. Attlee agreed not only to the meeting but also to the suggestion that Wavell should be replaced as viceroy. Wavell got to know and, despite (false) reassurances from Attlee, it was clear that Congress was succeeding in undermining him.

The interim government

The long-awaited interim government took power on 2 September 1946, a moment described by the historian Patrick French as more important than independence nearly a year later. The 1935 Act had shifted power at the provincial level; now the balance of power at the national level shifted over to nationalist politicians.

Key date
Interim government took power: 2 September 1946

The viceroy was still responsible for the effective government of British India and relations with the princely states. However, as governor-general in council, the same person was now obliged to carry out the decisions of Indian ministers and members of executive council. Since the Muslim League had withdrawn its representatives, this meant that Congress was now in charge of India, including foreign affairs which were the personal responsibility of Nehru as vice-president of the executive council. Congress general secretary, Sardar Patel, was responsible for **home affairs**, which included security and the secret services. He immediately diverted the flow of intelligence reports to the Congress administration, cutting out the viceroy.

Key term
Home affairs Government department for law, order and justice.

Wavell persevered with attempts to bring the Muslim League back into the interim government and in October they agreed to join the executive council. However, it was clear that it was not from a position of strength. The League did not have a veto over legislation concerning Muslims as it had previously demanded. Jinnah declined to join the executive council because of Nehru's dominance and appointed Liaquat Ali Khan in his place. When Wavell proposed the Muslim League be responsible for home affairs, Congress threatened to bring down the new government and Jinnah, avoiding a trial of strength, agreed to become finance minister.

To complicate matters still further, relations between Nehru and Patel had broken down since the elections for Congress president in April 1946. Patel had secured the votes of 12 of the 15 provincial Congress committees, but Gandhi made it clear he wanted Nehru and so it was decided. This was despite the growing distance between Gandhi's religious vision for independent India and Nehru's secular socialism.

Breakdown plan

Murderous consequences of the Calcutta killings spread throughout the final months of 1946. Muslims in Bihar province were killed in retaliation for the killing of Hindus in east Bengal who had themselves been killed in reprisal for the Calcutta violence. There was almost continuous rioting in Bengal, Bombay, Bihar and the United Provinces. The terror included forced conversions to Islam and forced marriages to Muslims. At Meerut, a police officer's wife was murdered with her eight children. Whole villages were destroyed and areas cleared of one community or the other. Twenty thousand Bihari Muslims died in 1947 with tens of thousands on the move.

In November, Wavell again warned the secretary of state, Pethick Lawrence, that the country was on the brink of civil war and asked for guidance. He had prepared a secret breakdown plan. In the event of the collapse of the interim government and law and order, all British civilians and families would be moved speedily to heavily protected safe zones near the coast in the north-east and west. They would be evacuated from Calcutta and Karachi. British troops would also be withdrawn leaving only Indian forces to maintain any order. Wavell, and the commander-in-chief, Auchinleck, agreed that:

> our present position in India is analogous to that of a military force compelled to withdraw in the face of greatly superior numbers.

Attlee refused to agree to the plan, saying that it would be accepting defeat. In fact, Attlee was stalling while he considered replacing Wavell, a situation which only let matters get worse.

The London talks

Eventually, Attlee agreed to summon Indian leaders to talks in London. Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Balder Singh for the Sikhs engaged in four days of talks with Wavell and Attlee. The Muslim League was continuing to insist on the basic interpretation of the May statement, namely that groupings of provinces could secede from an independent India. On this basis, they saw no need for a further constituent assembly.

Constitutional experts agreed with this interpretation, but Attlee had taken against the Muslim League, describing Jinnah as 'an Indian fascist'. He reassured Nehru of his support for Congress. They would press ahead with the constituent assembly and Nehru flew back for its opening.

Jinnah remained at his residence in London, laid low by illness and disappointment. The 79 Muslim seats in the constituent assembly would be boycotted so there was no urgency to return.

Wavell too stayed on to press the case for a retreat plan. He also wanted decisions about the employment or pensions of the tens of thousands of British officials about to become unemployed upon independence. He made no progress. Indeed, his position was further weakened by the British appointment of a high commissioner to handle relations between the Indian interim

government and the British Government, leaving the viceroy a figurehead.

Constituent assembly

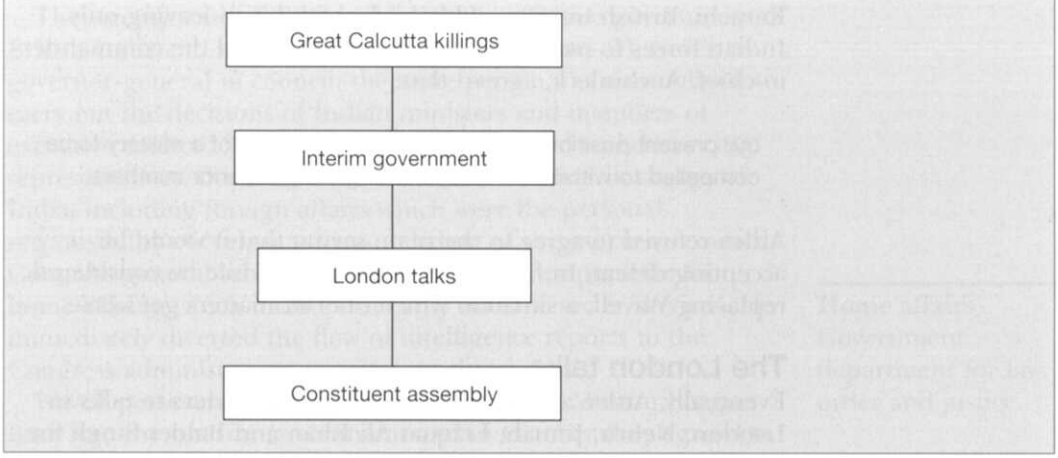
The constituent assembly convened on 7 December 1946 but would never complete its task. Muslim demands for separate states grew ever stronger.

Key date
Constituent assembly met: 7 December 1946

Attlee was privately determined to force the issue by replacing Wavell with a new viceroy eager to hand over power as soon as possible.

In February 1947, Wavell was recalled to London and was told it was time for a change at the top. He was offered an earldom but no thanks for his work as viceroy. He was in effect sacked without dignity and everyone knew it. His view was that the Attlee government seemed as unclear what to do as Churchill's wartime government had been clear what not to do.

Summary diagram: Setbacks



3 | Full Speed Ahead

The last viceroy

Attlee considered his choice of Lord Louis Mountbatten as the new viceroy to be brilliant. He was a military commander in the region and known privately to be sympathetic to the Labour government. He was moreover quite royal, being the king's cousin, which was appealing in a sentimental way since it was quite clear that he would be the last viceroy of the British Raj.

It is generally accepted that Mountbatten was full of self-importance, unjustified by his war record for example. Knowing that he had been selected for the position added to his desire to set conditions. He successfully demanded **plenipotentiary powers**.

Key term
Plenipotentiary powers
The capacity to make decisions without approval from government.

Historian Stanley Wolpert takes an even more critical view, stating that Mountbatten knew the viceroyalty would be an interruption, however grand, to his naval career and he was

Profile: Lord Mountbatten 1900–79

1900 – Born
1943 – Supreme Allied commander, South East Asia
1947 – Last viceroy of India
1947–8 – First governor-general of independent India
1979 – Died

Louis (Dickie) Mountbatten was born into a branch of the British royal family and was the great-uncle of Prince Charles. He served in the Royal Navy in the First and Second World Wars, during which he planned the disastrous Dieppe Raid. Before becoming viceroy he was supreme commander in South East Asia, based in Ceylon.

There has been much speculation about the relationships between the Mountbattens and Nehru. At the very least, there was a strong personal friendship between them all at the time. However, Lady Mountbatten is known to have had many previous affairs – a form of behaviour quite normal in British aristocratic marriages – and one which was known and tolerated by Mountbatten himself (perhaps because of similar, possibly bisexual, behaviour). For the rest of Nehru's life, Edwina visited Nehru and he stayed with her alone in England. It has been assumed that she developed an affair with Nehru: some say only later, others argue that it was an open secret since Jinnah resisted arguments to use it against Congress and the viceroy.

Lord Mountbatten was killed by the Irish Republican Army who exploded a bomb aboard his fishing yacht in Ireland in 1979.

determined to be brisk and brusque in handing India back. The fact that Attlee had replaced Pethick Lawrence as secretary of state by the young Earl of Listowel showed that no great experience would be applied to brake Mountbatten's impatience.

However, in contrast to the public display of power and self-confidence, Mountbatten also insisted privately on strict instructions from the Attlee government about political objectives. He wanted no setbacks to this final glorious viceroyalty.

The instructions Mountbatten received were to complete the transfer of power no later than the end of June 1948, having concluded a fair deal for the princely states and preserved the united strength of the Indian army. The public announcement of his appointment on 18 March included the objective of obtaining:

> a unitary government for British India and the Indian (princely) states, if possible within the British Commonwealth.

This latter point was Attlee's, and the king's, last main hope.

Key date
Mountbatten became last viceroy: 22 March 1947

Mountbatten took over on 22 March. In later recollection, he claimed he was conscious of huge power. In reality, political events had a growing momentum of their own and Mountbatten needed to win approvals from politicians as before. In effect,

Nehru (second from right) and the Mountbattens. What does the body language reveal about their relationship?

Mountbatten's role was to cover the feeble departure of the British in a little aristocratic glamour. Patel saw through it immediately and remarked that Mountbatten was a toy for Nehru to play with.

Mountbatten engaged in a series of meetings with political leaders while his wife, Lady Edwina, accompanied him in uniform on visits to troubled areas. Mountbatten was charmed by Congress politicians. Nehru with his English public school education was a favourite and was given time to be privately spiteful about Jinnah. Mountbatten admired Patel's bluntness but found Jinnah resistant to charm, judging him later to be 'a psychopathic case'. Dr Ambedkar insisted that Congress did not represent the 60 million Dalits or the three million Christians come to that.

Political stakes

The political stakes were higher than ever. The British wanted a peaceful handover under international scrutiny. The Muslims found Mountbatten much less sympathetic than Wavell, but knew that the best hope for Pakistan still lay with a British reluctance to

simply walk away from a political disaster. For its part, the Congress leadership had come to the view that the first cabinet mission proposal – for a single federal state – would actually weaken the control of the national organisation.

Key dates
Congress accepted Pakistan demand: March 1947
Plan Balkan: 3 May 1947

Accordingly, and rather suddenly, in March 1947, Patel and Nehru persuaded the Congress working committee to accept publicly the demand for Pakistan (provided half the Punjab remained in India) in order to remove the point of compromising over a decentralised state. The Congress leadership had decided that even if Pakistan came into existence, it could not survive economically or politically and it would be reabsorbed back into a strongly centralised state of India. Such a victory would be worth both the gamble and the wait.

April conference

In April 1947 Mountbatten convened a conference of the 11 British provincial governors. They expressed grave concerns about the continuing growth of unrest and the likelihood of civil war given the increasing numbers of armed groups 'defending' the political parties. They recommended the earliest possible announcement of a definite plan for independence and partition if necessary.

However, it was also clear to all that no plan had a chance of peace without the agreement of Congress. Mountbatten thought that only a 'clean partition' would satisfy them. This would be no easy matter since Jinnah was now arguing that the two potential halves of Pakistan, East and West, should be linked by a land corridor, hundreds of miles in length cutting through Indian territory, but presumably under Pakistani control.

Key question
How did Plan Balkan envisage decision-making?

Plan Balkan

Mountbatten's first plan for an independent future was presented in secret to the British Cabinet on 3 May. It has become known as Plan Balkan after the European region renowned for splintered states almost continually at war.

The plan proposed that all decisions would be freely made at the provincial level. So, the 11 British provinces would be allowed to decide whether to be autonomous or join to form larger groups, not necessarily of comparable size. The provinces of Bengal and Punjab would be able to partition themselves if that was the popular preference. The princely states could also remain individually autonomous or join with others including former British provinces.

At best, this might be seen to permit or secure local agreement in the hope of a process of gradual formation of economically stronger groups. At worst, it seemed that Mountbatten was trying to wash his hands of any decision-making from the start. The cabinet was not impressed but made only minor amendments such as confirming that North West Frontier Province could become independent of a Pakistan swirling around it.

Mountbatten announced that he would reveal the plan at a conference of Indian leaders to be held before the end of May.

Meanwhile, Patel was calling for the immediate transfer of power to let Indians make their own plans whilst the most high-ranking Indian in the Army of India declared that a military dictatorship was probably the best course of action.

The Simla moment

Before the momentous announcement, Mountbatten took a private break with his wife at the viceregal summer residence in Simla. They were joined, at the viceroy's request, by Nehru and his daughter, Indira.

Key question
Why did Mountbatten invite Nehru to Simla in 1947?

Whatever the truth about the personal relationships of the Mountbattens with Nehru, it certainly risked accusations of political favouritism to invite Nehru at this sensitive time. But perhaps Mountbatten planned to use social appearances to cover a political move which was clearly unfair and would have been indefensible if it had become public.

Key date
Mountbatten showed Nehru Plan Balkan at Simla: 10 May 1947

During the night of 10 May, Mountbatten showed Nehru the short document setting out his plan (Balkan) and asked him to give his response in the morning. Some consider this to have been a consequence of growing nervousness about the plan. Perhaps Mountbatten hoped that before the plan became public he could alter any matters likely to make Congress object. If that was his thought, he had a rude awakening.

Nehru sent him a confidential note on the morning of 11 May which slashed the plan. Nehru called it 'a picture of fragmentation, conflict and disorder' which would create a multitude of **Ulsters** all over the continent. Nehru blamed the British government for the impracticality and unacceptability of the plan, but that was perhaps to avoid embarrassing Mountbatten.

Key term
Ulster
Province in Ireland allowed to remain British.

Nevertheless, one of Mountbatten's team said that not only was: 'British policy ... once more in ruins but [Mountbatten] had endured a personal and most humiliating rebuff.'

Mountbatten asserted at a crisis meeting with his advisers on 11 May that the plan had only contained what Indians had previously indicated they would agree to and that his midnight tryst with Nehru had at any rate saved the day.

The Menon (June 3) Plan

In public, there was no immediate change to the intention of announcing the plan on 20 May. Behind the scenes, of course, an entirely new plan had to be decided and approved by the British cabinet. Moreover, by seeking Nehru's secret approval once, Mountbatten had effectively committed himself to ensuring his prior approval for any back-up plan.

With only hours before Nehru was due to leave Simla, V.P. Menon, the Indian reforms commissioner, was asked by Mountbatten to turn the dormant second cabinet mission plan into a credible document. This he did and Nehru pronounced himself satisfied. Rather incredibly, this two or three hours work became the basis for the greatest peacetime transfer of power in history.

The Menon Plan was for two states, India and Pakistan, with dominion status in what was now called the Commonwealth. Moreover, there would be no further deliberation by the constituent assembly as the states would use the existing political structures of the 1935 Act until they wished to alter them (in different ways). Provincial assemblies would decide which state to join, with the Bengal and Punjab assemblies also voting on the question of provincial partitions.

The princes would now decide whether to join not regional groupings but either India or Pakistan as states or, as before, insist on their autonomy.

Mountbatten informed the cabinet that the plan they had approved was now dead in the water but he had another. He was summoned to London with Menon and the original date for announcement of the plan passed.

Back in India at the end of May, Mountbatten embarked on a series of meetings to win groups over to the plan. He knew that Congress approved because they would easily gain control of a single Indian state, especially without the poor Muslim areas, and if dominion status was somewhat patronising, no one could stop them dropping it once the handover ceremonies had been forgotten.

Just to be sure, Mountbatten went to see Gandhi, who was not concerned enough to break his latest vow of silence, preferring to write comments on the backs of envelopes. For the Sikhs, Balder Singh, now defence minister, had literally no alternative and had to agree.

Jinnah, too, was finally in a corner. There would be a single, two-part, state of Pakistan but, with the almost inevitable partitions of Bengal and Punjab, it was no more than the area he had previously described as 'motheaten'. Moreover, the regional Muslim leaders were more than ready to do their own independence deals to secure their local power. This was finally the best deal he was going to get and within 24 hours Jinnah had given his agreement also.

Key date
Announcement of final plan for independence and partition: 3 June 1947

On the evening of 3 June, Mountbatten and the leaders went on All-India Radio to announce that a plan for the future of India and Pakistan had been agreed. The tone was hardly celebratory. The underlying message was that it was all that could now be rescued from the situation. Jinnah did attempt to end on a positive note with the phrase '*Pakistan Zindabad*' – 'Long Live Pakistan' – but with poor radio reception, it was heard as 'Pakistan's in the Bag' which sounded falsely triumphal and further antagonised Hindus.

Key question
How was the date for handover decided?

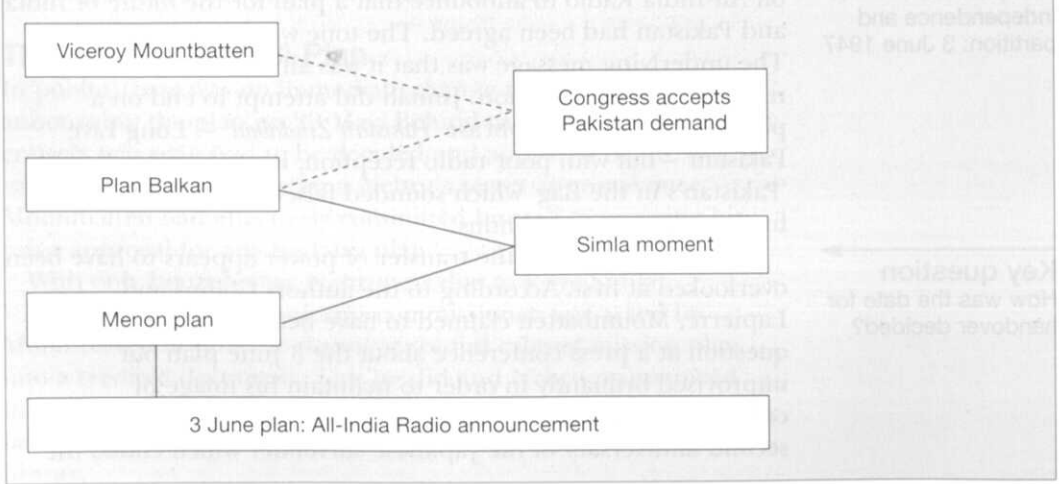
The precise date for the transfer of power appears to have been overlooked at first. According to the authors Collins and Lapierre, Mountbatten claimed to have been unprepared for the question at a press conference about the 3 June plan but improvised brilliantly in order to maintain his image of confidence. He instantly chose 15 August because it was the second anniversary of the Japanese surrender which ended the

Nehru, Ismay, Mountbatten and Jinnah (left to right) at the meeting to agree the final plan for independence and partition, 3 June 1947. What do the facial expressions suggest?

Second World War. With hindsight, this was perhaps not the date to mark the retreat of the British from India.

More significantly, it soon emerged that according to Hindu astrologers, 15 August 1947 was so horrendously inauspicious that a compromise had to be found. The transfer would take place at the stroke of midnight which might be regarded as the moment between the two days.

Summary diagram: Full speed ahead



4 | Decisions

The Sikhs

The situation of the six million Sikhs was complicated and serious. Sikhs had dispersed across India (and the world), but were concentrated in the Punjab, where the city of Amritsar was holy to them. Relations between Sikhs and Muslims were never friendly. The prospect for the hundreds of thousands of Sikhs in the future Pakistan was not good.

The Sikh political party, the Panthic Pratinidhi, gained 22 seats in the Punjabi assembly in the 1946 elections and their leader, Tara Singh, claimed the right to autonomy. In fact, Jinnah offered autonomy within Pakistan but this was emphatically rejected. There was, however, no realistic prospect of a third, independent Sikh state.

During 1947, communal violence escalated in the Punjab, with Sikhs particularly fearful of the paramilitary Muslim guards. Tens of thousands of Sikhs began to move out of what would be Pakistan territory. The provincial government began to disintegrate.

The 3 June plan made no particular provision for the Sikhs despite promises of special consideration. Balder Singh was scorned for giving it his support. Local leaders spoke of uprising and civil war.

Rumours about the line of the eventual border raised tensions even more. In particular, the arrival of official army troops in the mainly Sikh district of Ferozepur meant that trouble was expected, which suggested it had been included in Pakistan, which in turn meant that Amritsar itself was at best surrounded by Muslim Pakistan or fully incorporated.

In fact, while this had been true for a while, the territory around Amritsar had been clearly marked for India but the troops had not been recalled. This one small area would be a flashpoint.

Key question
What options were there for the princely states?

The princely states

The legal position of the princely states was perhaps more complicated than the Sikh situation though hardly so dangerous. Strictly speaking, it was not even possible to talk of a collective position. Each of the 561 rulers had a separate treaty with the British, indeed a separate kind of treaty depending on whether they were union states, petty states, agencies or protectorates. With the departure of the British, each ruler was free to decide his own position. For a few states of a huge size and wealth continued independence was a tantalising possibility.

The British had no power to transfer a treaty even if the ruler wished it. Moreover, the nations of India and Pakistan did not yet exist and the princely states could not conclude new treaties with non-existent countries. So it looked unlikely that the transfer of power from the British to the Indian and Pakistani governments could also include a complete decision about the political map of the subcontinent.

In this light, it is remarkable that, in fact, hundreds of years of princely autonomy were abandoned so quickly and so easily. Two legal principles were key: paramountcy and accession.

Paramountcy

India had for hundreds of years been subject to a fluctuating mixture of foreign and regional powers. Nevertheless, there was no historical precedent for power to be relinquished or gained on a single day.

Congress seized the constitutional initiative and claimed that it should now be recognised as the paramount power and opened negotiations with the princely states in the future Indian territory. There was no objection: there were no realistically autonomous states in the future Pakistan territory and, it quickly transpired, the states themselves were ready to reach new arrangements.

Accession

In overall diplomatic terms, it was maintained that no decisions need be taken before 15 August. After that, the princely states would be able to conclude formal treaties with the constituted states of India and Pakistan. Out of diplomatic courtesy, it was maintained that such treaties might indeed recognise the independence of the princely state in question. However, states were welcome to **accede** to the new nations.

This courtesy actually permitted Congress, and Mountbatten, to work hard behind the scenes to push states to become part of India. Congress set up a states department to handle approaches to, and negotiations with, each of the rulers. For the time being, all criticism of the lack of democracy in the princely states was suspended.

Key term

Accession
The process of peacefully merging into a larger country.

Pressure

At the same time, all the small states without access to the sea were forced to confront their geographical weakness. Mountbatten assisted Congress by ruthlessly pressurising the rulers, publicly and privately. At a meeting of the chamber of princes on 25 July, he presented a scenario of constant fighting between local warlords with private armies, as in China. He wrote to each prince, telling them that his cousin, the king, would be personally insulted if they did not choose to become part of the new Dominion of India. He blithely promised that they would be free to become independent again if India became a republic, ignoring the fact that by then British promises would have no legal power.

This combination of Congress courtesy and royal arm-twisting resulted in a mass movement amongst the princes to accede to India. The princes would be allowed to stay as local rulers, with residual pomp and power to levy local taxes. India would be responsible for their defence and foreign relations and the territory would be officially part of India. As such, it has been calculated that Patel and Menon added more land to India than would be 'lost' by the creation of Pakistan.

The plan in reality

Earlier in the day of 3 June, the British had presented a dossier to Indian leaders entitled 'The Administrative Consequences of Partition'. Despite its bland title, it opened the final bitter and bloody phase of the independence struggle.

The dossier outlined matters for decision such as geographical boundaries, diplomatic representation, division of armed forces, civil departments, assets including railways, justice and the courts.

Decisions about decisions

The arguments started at the very next meeting over the prior question of who was responsible for making the decisions. Congress argued that it was for Indians to decide; Jinnah that it was for the British to decide how to dispose of their colonial property. He knew that the Muslims were unlikely to obtain as much from Congress as from the British. However, Mountbatten sided with Congress, arguing that the governor-general in council – that is he himself – was now executive officer of the Indian ministers of the interim government. Their decisions, ratified by the chief justice of India, would be final. Since Congress dominated the interim government, they would be Congress decisions and that, in effect, meant Sardar Patel decisions.

Congress forced confrontation of another issue. In their view, it was nonsense to think that India was being created. India existed and would continue. It was Pakistan which did not yet exist and therefore it was another nonsense to describe provinces joining a state which did not exist. They were seceding from India. Accordingly, if that was their choice they did not deserve any of India's assets.

Other attitudes

There was a considerable amount of desperately looking on the bright side: Mountbatten was told by an adviser that if he had not transferred power when he did, there would have been no power to transfer. Maulana Azad, the Congress Muslim leader, expressed a common view that:

> The division is only of the map of the country and not in the hearts of the people and I am sure it is going to be a short-lived partition.

There were also hardline attitudes: some Hindus were opposed to any partition even if voted for by provincial governments and some Muslims demanded that the historic Muslim capital of Delhi be part of Pakistan whatever the local wish (likely to be for India).

Provincial decisions

As set out in the 3 June plan, assemblies of the affected provinces held votes to determine which of the future states they would join:

- Sind and Baluchistan voted with straightforward majorities for being part of a Pakistani state.

- In the complex communal provinces of Bengal and Punjab, Muslim representatives voted for undivided provinces to be in Pakistan, whereas the Hindu and (Punjabi) Sikh representatives voted for partition so that their majority areas might be in India. The provinces would accordingly be divided.
- In the North West Frontier Province, a full plebiscite was held because it was recognised that there was considerable support for Congress or even the creation of a separate tribal area: 'Pakhtunistan'. The Muslim majority decision was to be part of Pakistan.

The Independence Act

With these decisions, the way was open to frame the independence bill, which would create the two new states. This was done in a matter of days, even including securing the agreement of both Congress and the Muslim League to the wording in advance of parliamentary discussion. On 3 July, the India committee of the British government worked until midnight to finalise the bill which was printed during the night and presented to the House of Commons on the morning of 4 July. It was passed immediately without amendment let alone objection (and one in a bunch of bills) and became law in mid-July.

Key dates

Independence of India Act: 4 July 1947

Interim government split: 19 July 1947

Assets and the partition council

Key question
How were assets apportioned?

A dedicated partition council was set up in June 1947 to reach decisions on the division of the assets currently belonging to the British in India. Every item, from steam locomotives down to typewriters, had to be apportioned. More acutely, every single administrator and civil servant would have to choose or be deployed to one new country or the other.

On the partition council, Sardar Patel and Rajandra Prasad represented Congress; Liaquat Ali Khan and Abdur Rab Nishtar, soon replaced by Jinnah himself, the Muslim League.

The partition council became in effect the government of (British) India because there was no other more important business now than deciding this division. (The geographical division was out of Indian hands.) On 19 July the interim government formally split into two interim governments, one for each of the imminent states.

However, behind the public façade of two new, constitutionally equal, states, Congress exerted maximum control on the basis that Pakistan was seceding and forfeited any right to Indian property. Similarly, any official who selected employment in the future Pakistan was immediately ejected from their workplace. The planning for Pakistan was undertaken in tent offices with scarcely any equipment.

For this reason, Liaquat Ali Khan wanted partition, if not actual independence, brought forward two weeks to 1 August. This attitude runs counter to the argument that Mountbatten should be held responsible for the rush to independence and partition. However, there is no escaping the shameful partisanship he displayed over the decisions of future pomp and ceremony.

Governor-general

India and Pakistan were to become separate dominions within the Commonwealth. As such, they would retain the British monarch as head of state, with a constitutional and legislative structure like Britain of the crown-in-parliament. They would retain a governor-general to represent the Crown element in their own territories.

Mountbatten had assumed that he would become governor-general of both the successor states. He considered this would show proper care and impartiality. This was despite his evident antipathy to Jinnah, the Muslim League and Pakistan, and his lack of concern about their treatment by Congress in the partition council decisions.

Jinnah wrong-footed him with a radical but rational decision. He declared that there was no need for a British governor-general and that he would bear the responsibility himself. It was clear to the Muslims that a weak Pakistan would only come under more pressure from having the same governor-general as a strong, hostile India. Mountbatten now found himself at the receiving end of the same ***realpolitik*** that he had supported when it was Congress exerting the control and pressure. He was faced with the choice of resigning, impartially, on independence day or revealing his favoured relationship with India. He chose to keep the governor-generalship of India (which actually had to be offered first by Nehru on 15 August).

Key terms

Realpolitik
A term for political leverage, borrowed from the German language.

R.I.
Rex Imperator, Latin for King-Emperor.

Mountbatten was also forced to acquiesce when Jinnah pointed out that George **R.I.**, the king's official title, would no longer be acceptable in Pakistan since the 'I' clearly had no further basis in constitutional reality.

Key question
How were the borders decided?

Border decisions

As early as February 1946, Viceroy Wavell had defined a specific line of demarcation between future Indian and Pakistani territory (on a map, not in reality). No further work was done until the

Jinnah arrives in Pakistan on 7 August 1947 with his sister Fatima. Compare his clothing with the photograph of Nehru and Jinnah on page 111.

partition council commissioned an independent British lawyer to draw up proposals. Sir Cyril Radcliffe KC (King's Counsel) arrived in New Delhi on 8 July, 36 days before independence, and hid himself away in order to create an air of neutral consideration of maps and statistics, rather than listening to political arguments.

Key date

Territorial partition work began: 8 July 1947

Two separate boundary commissions were established, one for the border between West Pakistan and India and one for the border around East Pakistan. The former involved the partition of the Punjab, the latter the partition of Bengal. Each commission had two Muslim and two non-Muslim high court judges with Radcliffe as chairperson to exercise the decisive casting vote in the event of split decisions.

Criteria

The commissions used census data to identify the majority community in each **district** of the relevant provinces along the provisional demarcation line. They then tried to ensure that the districts of a particular majority could be grouped so as not to leave any district surrounded by a different communal majority. Every district should be **contiguous** at some point with a district of the same majority.

It was recognised that the 1941 census would be out of date and might be seriously wrong in the case of the Punjab, in particular, since many Sikhs had been away in the army at the time.

Key terms

District
A formal subdivision of a province.

Contiguous
A formal term for touching or adjoining.

Cartographical
Relating to maps.

Assumptions

Various assumptions surrounded the issue of boundaries. These were never really dispelled because what emerged was never actually publicised for discussion. It was simply announced by the British as a fact.

In the first place, Jinnah had from the start of the Pakistan demand been careful not to get involved in discussions about actual borders. Nothing was done to dispel hopes of a so-called 'greater Pakistan', including undivided provinces of Punjab and Bengal and perhaps even reaching Delhi in the east. It was on the basis of this unconfirmed idea that the elections of 1946 had taken place.

There was a Congress assumption, as previously noted, that Pakistan could be 'given away' because it would fairly quickly come to its senses and be reintegrated.

The most widespread assumption was that the borders would be largely theoretical or **cartographical**. It was assumed that in practice, people would come and go across the border freely. The precise line might appear to cut villages off from their fields, for example, but farmers would simply live in one country and work in another a few hundred metres away. Certainly, middle-class Muslims, such as Jinnah, intended to keep homes in India as well as Pakistan and travel frequently between them. On this assumption, it was felt even in June 1947 that independence

might arrive without confirmed decisions which could all be worked out in due course.

In the end, Mountbatten did indeed postpone the announcement of the frontiers until after the independence ceremonies. Although he claimed to have no knowledge of the details, he had realised that there would be trouble which would quickly take the joy out of the celebrations.

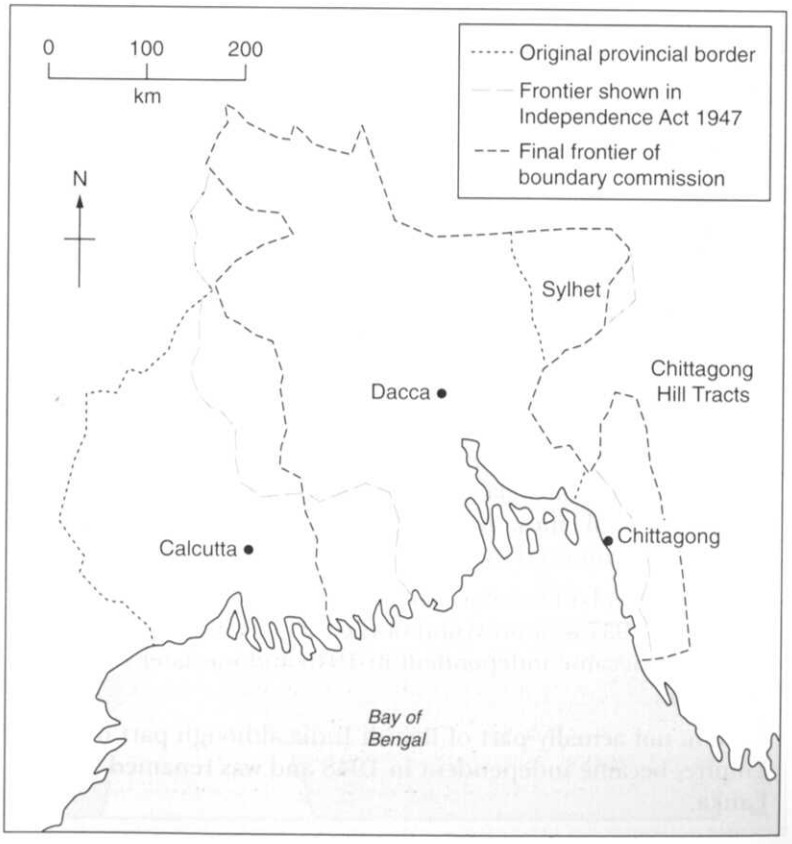
Key question
Why did the border line become a flashpoint?

Problems

The borders determined by Radcliffe were basically the same as those secretly drawn up by Wavell in 1946. The unexpected and tragic reactions created by their notification will be dealt with in the next section. A number of other matters may be noted here.

On the eastern edge of East Pakistan, a tribal area called the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which was neither Muslim nor Hindu, was awarded to Pakistan. The main reason appears to have been to include the port of Chittagong within East Pakistan which was not going to include the great Bengal port of Calcutta. Indeed, to create an Indian zone around Calcutta a small Muslim area to its north was awarded to India.

In the Punjab, the key problem was that Amritsar district, containing the holy city of the Sikhs, was largely surrounded by Muslim-majority districts. In addition, for a while, even Ferozepur district, despite being a Sikh-majority area, had been marked for Pakistan.



Partition of Bengal in 1947.

It was decided to award a small portion of Lahore district to India, even though Lahore city itself was to be in Pakistan. In addition, the Gurdaspur and Ferozepur districts were placed on the India side of the line.

However, additional troops had already been sent to Ferozepur district in anticipation of trouble. The plans were changed but this was of course unknown to the local population who were alarmed by the arrival of the troops. The alarm would escalate throughout the province and lead to terrible massacres.

There is confusion and controversy to this day about this small but tragic detail of partition. Radcliffe destroyed all his notes on completion of his task so his reasoning is not known. French argues that the original allocation of Ferozepur to Pakistan was in order to ensure that the headwaters of the Sutlej river were protected from diversion into Indian Punjab irrigation. Wolpert argues that Gurdaspur was reallocated to India to protect the last Indian strategic road route up to Kashmir. This princely state had not yet decided its future but the later revelation of this change has led many to see a plan to force Kashmir to accede to India (see page 146).

One other area of dispute was the Andaman Islands lying off Burma. During the war, these islands had been given to the Indian National Army by the invading Japanese. Now Congress claimed them for India. The Muslim League argued that if there was to be no land connection between the two halves of Pakistan, then they should be granted the islands as a refuelling base. The British also wanted them as a strategic base in the Indian Ocean since they were about to lose the entire subcontinent and all its naval dockyards.

Independence arrives

At the stroke of midnight between 14 and 15 August 1947, the British Raj came to an end and the two nations of India and Pakistan came into existence.

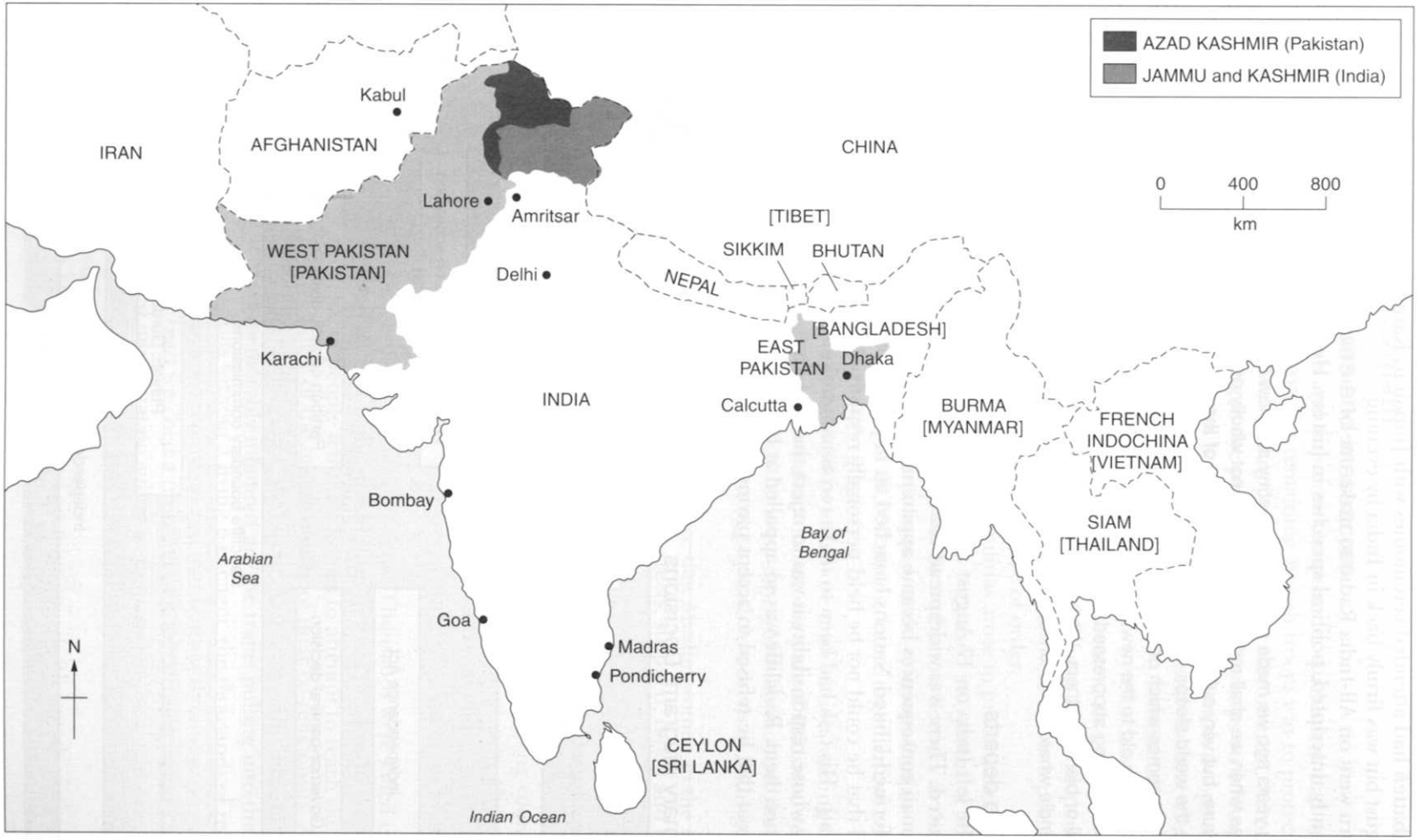
Other imperial matters

The remaining French colonial possessions in India – mainly coastal cities including primarily Pondicherry – were not absorbed into India until 1954.

Portugal, under the Salazar dictatorship, refused to negotiate over its colonial cities, including Goa. They were eventually invaded and annexed by India in 1961.

Burma, which had become a separate territory of the British Empire in 1937 as a provision of the 1935 Government of India Act, became independent in 1948 and was later named Myanmar.

Ceylon, not actually part of British India although part of the Empire, became independent in 1948 and was renamed Sri Lanka.



Final borders 1947.

Mountbatten had attended ceremonies with Jinnah in Karachi on 14 August but was firmly back in India by evening.

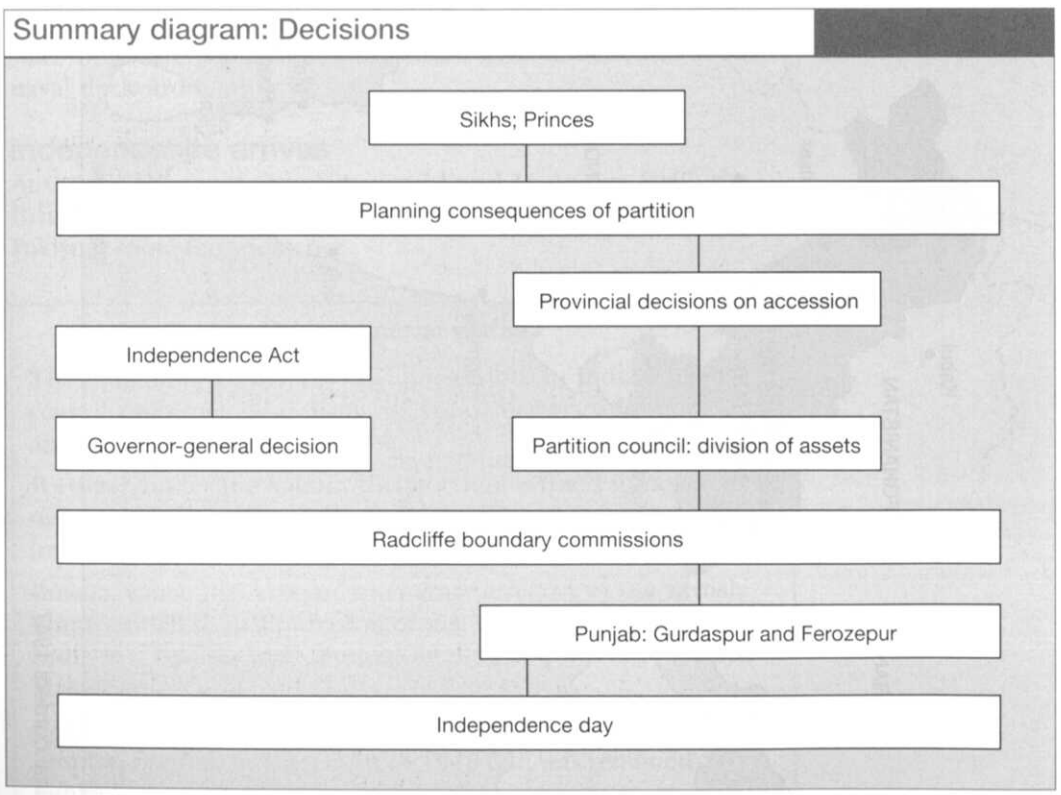
Nehru went on All-India Radio to make one of the most poetic, apparently unscripted, political speeches in history. He declared:

> Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance ... This is no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.

Radcliffe departs

Radcliffe left India on 17 August as the border decisions were announced. There was widespread condemnation. As the scale of the human consequences became apparent to the world, the newly formed United Nations launched an inquiry. Radcliffe argued that he could not be held personally responsible for the aftermath. His task had been to make recommendations to the viceroy whose responsibility it was to reject them or accept and announce them. Radcliffe was so appalled at being made the scapegoat that he refused to accept payment for the job done.

Summary diagram: Decisions



5 | Aftermath

Migrations and massacres

Mountbatten and Supreme Commander Auchinleck had agreed that the priority for remaining British troops was to protect an early withdrawal of Europeans from the subcontinent. Accordingly, Auchinleck began the process of recalling troops on 15 August. However, there was no violence directed at British troops or civilians during the departure phase. It quickly became clear that fear, anger and revenge would be intensely communal. It is debatable whether both of these factors were because the secretary of state, Listowel, made a statement that troops would not intervene in any communal disturbances after independence. The broken Indian and Pakistan armies were not in a position to immediately take up maintenance of order.

Key terms

Jatha
A squad.

Gurdwara
Sikh temple.

As a consequence, armed militias arose to protect and to intimidate. In the Punjab, Sikhs organised into ***jathas*** of about 30 men operating outside the law and across borders as they thought necessary. A semi-formal, multi-religious Punjab boundary force, about 20,000 strong, came together but could not protect over 17,000 villages.

On 14 August, 38 Sikhs at Lahore train station, waiting to travel out of what was about to become part of Pakistan, were knifed to death. Later the same day, a Muslim mob set fire to a ***gurdwara*** in Lahore burning to death hundreds of Sikhs gathered inside for protection.

The next day, independence day, Muslim women in the Indian Punjab were dragged into the streets, stripped, raped and hacked to death.

On 20 August, militiamen of the Punjab boundary force shot dead 84 participants in a Muslim mob. On 24 August, Muslim members of the force were killed by their fellow Hindu soldiers, after having shot Hindu looters. The force split along communal lines and on 1 September was broken up completely. There was no law and order in the Punjab for weeks on end.

Massacres

Massacres of whole villages began. Thousands were killed every day. As fear and panic spread, hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people left their homes to attempt to reach the relative safety of the other country of their co-religionists. As they walked in endless lines, they were even more vulnerable to attack.

Most memorably infamous are the trains pulling into their destinations without a living passenger, the thousands of refugees aboard having been massacred and sent on their way. A reporter for *The Times* watched a train full of 4000 Muslims being carefully shunted into a station siding in preparation for a cold-blooded massacre. Eventually, trains started running again with armed guards.

Criminal gangs preyed on migrants, death squads worked through lists of names to clear neighbourhoods. Victims were

publicly humiliated, tortured and genitally mutilated before being killed.

As law and order disintegrated and thousands of bodies were left to rot in the August heat, cholera and other diseases spread rapidly, causing more fear and flight. It is said that the vultures were too fat to fly.

Mass rape

Mass rape was used as a weapon of war. Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women alike committed suicide when surrounded, often by throwing themselves down wellshafts. In some cases, men killed their families rather than let the mobs get to them. Women and girls were also abducted, forcibly converted and 'married'. Even when located in later years, the women were afraid to return to their own communities because of what they had been forced into.

The personal and financial strain of the refugee crisis was intolerable. More than half a million refugees arrived in Indian Punjab, making the province bankrupt. Hundreds of thousands struggled on to Delhi, barely surviving in squalid camps where women and girls were sold in exchange for food.

Death toll

All the authorities publicly underestimated the death toll. The British preferred it to be seen as continuing unrest but on a larger scale; they did not want to be accused of causing, and then

Cartoon about the aftermath of partition. What do the various central figures represent? What is their reaction to the events around them?

turning their back on, an unprecedented human catastrophe. The Indian and Pakistani governments quite simply wanted to avoid inflaming the situation or appearing incompetent. At the time, it was said that 200,000 died; a figure of about a million is now regarded as more accurate.

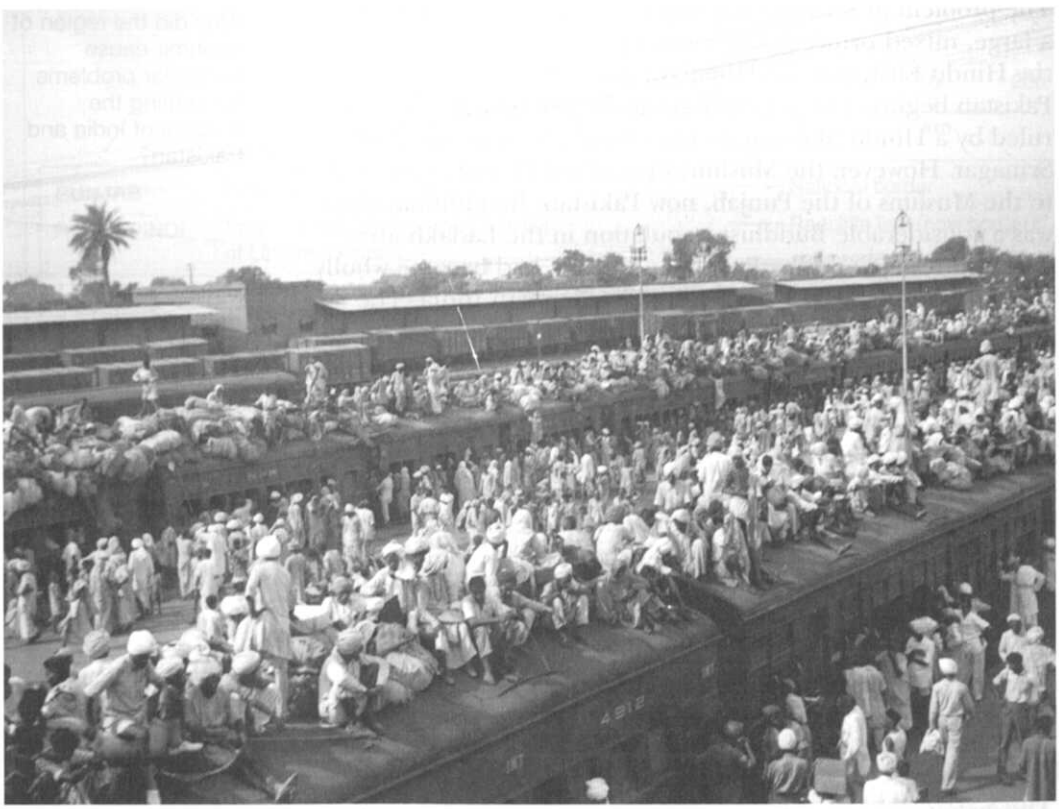
The massacres have left a psychological scar across the political act of partition and the birth of the two independent nations. In the Punjab, it was nothing less than civil war, and in the opinion of some, communal genocide. The dubious current term of 'ethnic cleansing' would certainly be applied: less than 1 per cent of the population of Pakistani Punjab is Hindu or Sikh and less than 1 per cent of the Indian Punjab population is Muslim.

The princely states

On independence, India and Pakistan were able to conclude legal treaties with the princely states. Within two years, as a result of the determined negotiations of Menon and Patel, all but three of the 561 states had acceded to what was termed the Indian Union. Only three States resisted: Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir.

Junagadh

The Nawab of Junagadh, a small coastal state in the north-west, had opted to accede to Pakistan on independence even though



Refugee train in the Punjab in 1947. What would be the advantages and risks of escaping by train?

the two were separated by 300 miles of Indian territory. Mountbatten had not argued against this plan when he was still viceroy. Patel had other ideas. He ordered the Indian army to blockade the state, threatening mass starvation. The Nawab fled by sea to Pakistan, the army 'invaded' and a quick plebiscite resulted in an overwhelming popular vote to join the Indian union.

Hyderabad

The Nizam of Hyderabad declined to join either India or Pakistan on the principle that modern nation-states should not be formed for religious reasons. Although landlocked in the centre of the subcontinent, he could afford this high-minded stance because Hyderabad covered tens of thousands of square metres (larger than many members of the United Nations), had its own army and the Nizam was then the richest man in the world. He was able to lend the new Pakistan government 200 million rupees without hesitation. It was agreed that there should be a one year 'standstill agreement'. After the departure of Mountbatten (in 1948), Nehru and Patel ordered the annexation of the state, the army invaded (really invaded this time, since the ruler resisted) and after four days of fighting, the Nizam gave in.

Kashmir

Key question
Why did the region of Kashmir cause particular problems for settling the borders of India and Pakistan?

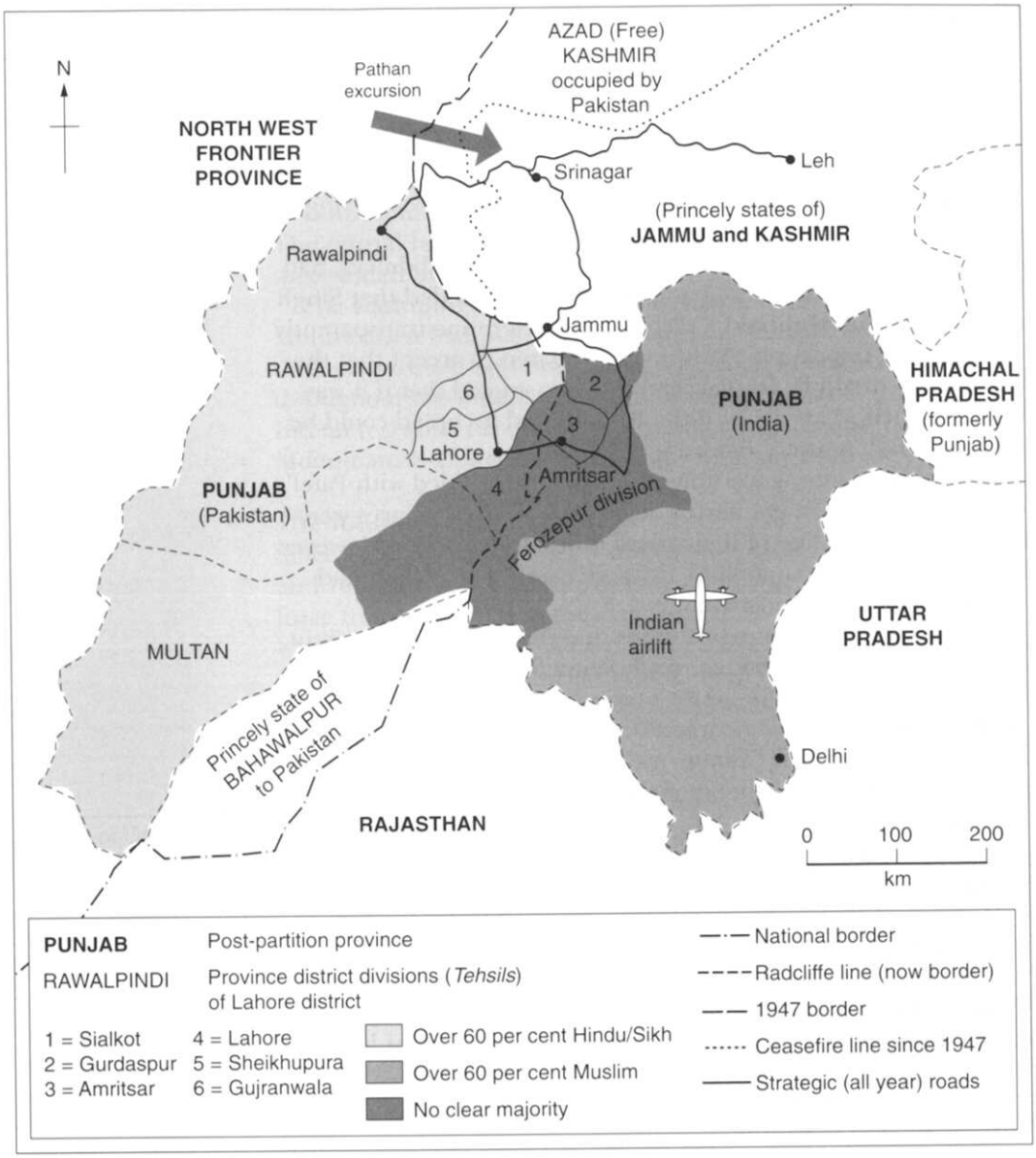
The problem of Kashmir has still not been resolved. Kashmir was a large, mixed princely state right up against the mountains of the Hindu Kush and the Himalaya where the Indus river of Pakistan begins. The population was 80 per cent Muslim but was ruled by a Hindu Maharajah, Hari Singh, from his court at Srinagar. However, the Muslims were of a different (Sufi) tradition to the Muslims of the Punjab, now Pakistan. In addition, there was a considerable Buddhist population in the Ladakh area.

Kashmir adjoined the Punjab and if that had become wholly Pakistani there would have been no border with India. The partition of the Punjab resulted in some contiguity with the post-independence province of Himachal Pradesh but only through mountainous territory. Most land routes into upper Kashmir were through Pakistani territory, except one, through the controversial Gurdaspur district.

It made a lot of sense, both demographically and geographically, for Kashmir to join Pakistan. The Maharajah for his part seems to have thought that the British would never actually leave, forcing him to choose. When it came to pass, he attempted to model the state's future on Switzerland's neutrality. When that failed, he opted for India: some say because he feared that Kashmir would suffer communal violence as had Punjab and Bengal; some say his family feared to live in an Islamic state.

Provocations

The events in Kashmir of 1947–8 are controversial to this day and subject to nationalist interpretations. According to the Indian version, Hari Singh tried to secure a standstill agreement as in



The Punjab and Kashmir in 1947.

Hyderabad, to which Pakistan agreed but India did not. Pakistan then applied economic pressure for a decision by restricting supplies along the roads in Pakistani territory. On the night of 21/22 October 1947, Pathan irregular troops, led by Pakistani officers, entered Kashmir and proceeded towards Srinagar. The border areas of which they took control are still occupied by Pakistani troops and are marked on maps as Azad (Free) Kashmir.

According to the Pakistani version, Kashmiri troops had been harassing Muslims out of Kashmiri villages along the border with Pakistan in order to create a depopulated zone which was easier to protect. It was this harassment which provoked the Pathans to come to their support.

Divergent motives

From this point, there also appear to be divergences in British and Indian motives.

Hari Singh appealed for Indian military assistance which Patel was prepared to organise. Nehru, whose family originally came from Kashmir, is often thought to have secretly arranged for Kashmir to become Indian. In fact, he repeatedly blocked Singh's request on a matter of democratic principle.

One popular Muslim leader in Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, had been imprisoned by the Maharajah. Nehru demanded that Singh release Abdullah and hold a plebiscite to determine transparently the wishes of the people. Nehru was prepared to accept that the overall vote might be for Pakistan. He also argued that if it was for India then whatever land the Pathans had occupied could be retaken. Singh refused to release Abdullah.

Mountbatten, now governor-general of India, sided with Patel's wish to intervene on the narrow legal grounds that princes were free to decide the fate of their states without plebiscites. However, he would not agree to military assistance until Hari Singh had signed the accession document.

It now appears to some historians that the British government, as distinct from Mountbatten, really wanted Kashmir to belong to Pakistan. Kashmir was the most northerly area of the former Raj. Britain retained a strategic interest, supported by the USA, in monitoring Soviet and Chinese activity across the border. Britain trusted Muslim Pakistan more than an India governed by Nehru who openly supported the Soviet Union and Communist China. Attlee repeatedly refused to support Mountbatten's hasty actions in support of India.

Memoirs of Pakistani generals have revealed that a further strategic interest was the major road running along the Pakistani side of the border between Lahore and the army headquarters at Rawalpindi. An Indian Kashmir could allow India to invade and cut off troop reinforcements to the Punjab in a matter of hours.

Two matters remain confused.

The accession document

First, the records show a flurry of plane flights between Delhi and Srinagar culminating apparently in a signed accession document, accompanied by a promise from Hari Singh to Nehru that he would release Abdullah and hold a plebiscite. The United Nations has repeatedly called for this plebiscite to be held but India refuses to organise it until Pakistani troops withdraw from Azad Kashmir.

Indian troops were airlifted into Srinagar, saved the Maharaja and held the Pathans back. Whether the airlift started before the accession was actually signed remains a question. There seems reason to believe that Patel pulled the wool over Nehru's eyes for a crucial few hours and days.

The accession was certainly claimed as the reason why the (British) commander-in-chief of the Pakistan army refused to commit Pakistani troops when the Indian army entered Kashmir.

The Gurdaspur district

Second, it was recalled that the Punjabi Muslim-majority district of Gurdaspur was actually put on the Indian side of the border. The official reason was to ensure that Amritsar was not surrounded by Pakistani territory.

The Kashmir crisis led to an alternative theory that Mountbatten had put secret pressure on Radcliffe to ensure that the one last road and rail-link into Kashmir which stayed open throughout the winter – through Gurdaspur district – stayed in Indian territory. According to this theory, there must have been a Mountbatten–Congress plan to gain Kashmir from the start.

The future of Kashmir

Since 1947, there have been several full conflicts between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. A state of emergency has been in force from the 1990s to this day. Tens of thousands of Kashmiris have died in the continual fighting. There is little prospect of peace at the present time and the United Nations has identified Kashmir as the conflict most likely to cause the world's first nuclear exchange.

The end of Gandhi and Jinnah

Key date
Deaths of Gandhi and Jinnah: 1948

Gandhi had been sidelined as the political momentum gathered towards independence. He was, however, still a respected figure. As communal violence erupted, and despite his age, he took himself to the centre of disturbances. In Bengal, he walked from village to village, insisting on calm before he moved on. He did not attempt the same in the Punjab; perhaps even he thought it beyond hope for a while.

He remained constant to his lifelong view that he should and could take personal responsibility for the violence and for promoting religious tolerance by example. He continued to include readings from the **Qur'an** at his prayer meetings and deliberately chose to be in a Muslim property on independence night. He let it be known that he was so distressed by the treatment of the Muslims that he was planning to spend what remained of his life in (East) Pakistan.

Key term
Qur'an
The Muslim holy book.

This was too much for some. At 5pm on the evening of 30 January 1948 he was walking to his evening prayer meeting among a crowd of supporters. Three shots were fired at close range into his chest. He died within minutes. It was later claimed that his last words were a prayer to the Hindu god Ram. More credible witnesses reported self-deprecation to the end: he said he hated being late for prayers.

His assassination was long-feared and leaders braced themselves for renewed communal attacks. However, it soon became clear that his killer, Nathuram Godse, was a Hindu fanatic, incensed by Gandhi's care for Muslims. Godse was a

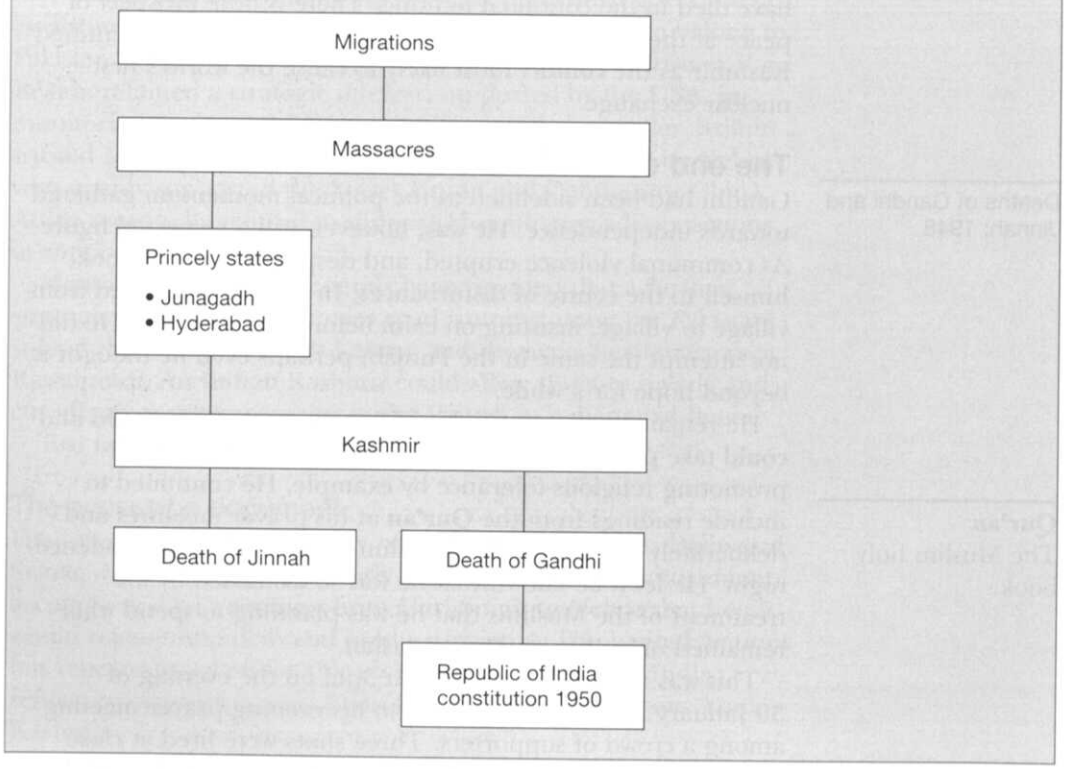
member of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, a murky Hindu fundamentalist organisation. Patel had tolerated the fact that many RSS supporters were in positions of party or civil authority. Now, Nehru, the lifelong anti-fascist, demanded that Patel outlaw the RSS. Nehru broadcast on All-India Radio that 'the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere'.

Jinnah did not outlive the same year. His lung disease worsened throughout 1948 and in September he died, aged 71, in Karachi.

He had achieved a remarkable objective, despite Gandhi's opposition, and yet curiously in the end he too adopted a tolerant, all-embracing position. In August 1947, he declared, in effect, that Pakistan was a secular not a Muslim state. He promised:

> You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state.

Summary diagram: Aftermath



6 | The Final Constitution(s)

In 1950, less than three years after independence, on 26 January, the day identified by Nehru in 1929 as independence day, India approved a new constitution creating a republic in which an elected president replaced the post of governor-general.

Key date

India became a republic: 26 January 1950

Study Guide: AS Question

In the style of Edexcel

Source 1

From: a statement by Jinnah, 29 July 1946, after the decision by the Muslim League's all-India council to withdraw the League's acceptance of the May statement and draw up plans for direct action.

Never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by constitutional methods. But now we bid goodbye to constitutional methods. Throughout the negotiations, the parties with whom we bargained held a pistol at us; one with power and machine guns behind it, the other with non-cooperation and the threat to launch mass civil disobedience. We also have a pistol.

Source 2

From: P.J. Marshall, British Empire, *published in 1996.*

In 1946 Lord Wavell suggested British withdrawal from India, not because of overwhelming nationalist pressure (on the contrary, Congress and League were in political deadlock), but because government was on the verge of collapse. Since both Congress and the League hoped to inherit the imperial legacy intact, they swiftly came to the conference table when the British prime minister, Clement Attlee, instructed Mountbatten to prepare for Indian independence by a date no later than 1 June 1948.

Source 3

From: Bipan Chandra, India's Struggle for Independence, *published in 1988.*

Why did the British finally quit? Why was partition accepted by the Congress? The imperialist answer is that independence was simply the fulfilment of Britain's mission to assist the Indian people to self-government. Partition was the unfortunate consequence of the age-old Hindu–Muslim rift – a consequence of the two communities' failure to agree on how and to whom power was to be transferred. The radical view is that independence was finally wrested by the mass actions of 1946–7, and the leaders of Congress, frightened by the revolutionary upsurge, struck a deal by which power was transferred to them and the nation paid the price of partition.

Use Sources 1, 2 and 3 and your own knowledge.
Do you agree with the view that the threat of popular violence was primarily responsible for the partition of India in July 1947? Explain your answer, using Sources 1, 2 and 3 and your own knowledge. (40 marks)

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the question.

Source 3 begins with the key issue of why independence was accompanied by partition. The question suggests that the prime reason for this was the threat of popular violence.

In support of the seriousness of the threat of popular violence, the following points can be developed from the sources:

- The Muslim League all-India council rejected constitutional methods and called for direct action in July 1946 (Source 1).
- Congress accepted partition because of fear of a revolutionary upsurge shown in the mass actions of 1946–7 (Source 3).
- Government was on the verge of collapse in 1946 (Source 2).

To counter the claim the following points can be developed from the sources:

- Partition was the result of political deadlock and disagreement between Congress and the League (Sources 2 and 3).
- Partition reflected the traditional Hindu–Muslim divisions (Source 3).
- Jinnah's statement (Source 1), in spite of the reference to 'pistol', is a call for mass civil disobedience – not for mass violence.

You should use your own knowledge from Chapter 5 to develop or counter these points, and to add new issues. You could consider:

- army and navy mutinies in 1946 (page 117)
- the electoral successes of both Congress and League in 1946 (page 118)
- the mistakes and misjudgements made by Indian and British politicians – in particular in relation to the cabinet mission (pages 118–22)
- the role of Jinnah (page 123 onward)
- the great Calcutta killings (pages 123–5)
- the role of Mountbatten (page 126 onward).

You will need to reach an overall conclusion. How far do you agree with the statement?