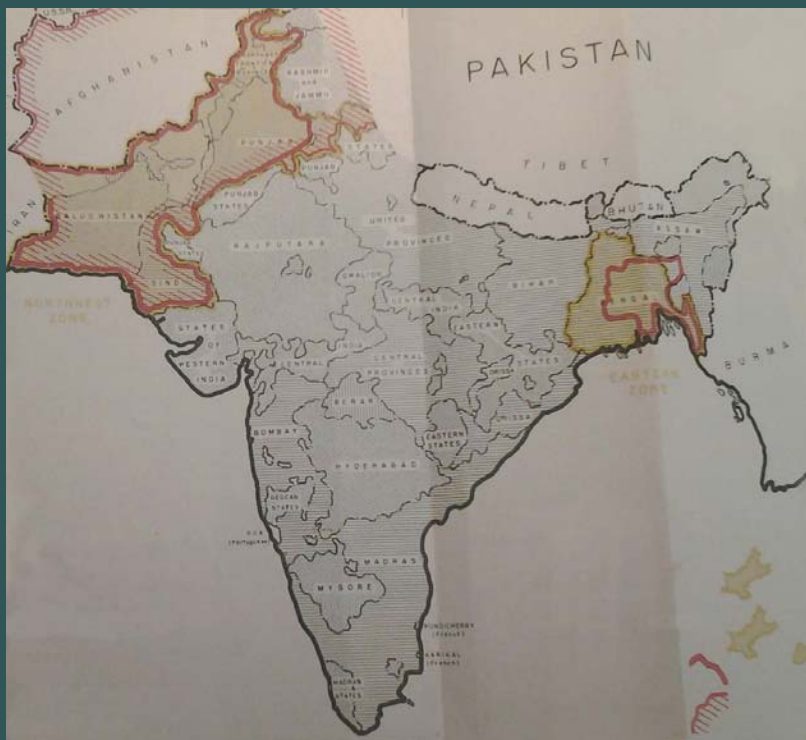


# *The British Strategic Imperative in South Asia and its Role in India's Partition: 1942-1947*

Marzia CASOLARI



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# *The British Strategic Imperative in South Asia and its Role in India's Partition: 1942-1947*

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Marzia CASOLARI



UNIVERSITÀ  
DI TORINO

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## ***Introduction\****

Scholarly interest on India's partition concentrates mostly on its political and constitutional implications while, as far as Pakistan is concerned, the historians' attention focuses more on the Cold War phase of its history, rather than on the premises to its foundation.

Pakistan is generally associated with the United States, but Great Britain had a prominent role in dividing India and, ultimately, creating Pakistan. The commonly accepted explanations of India's partition put the blame for this ruinous event more on Indian responsibilities than on British intentions. This explanation is normally associated with the assumption the British statesmen acted as mere agents who eased decisions adopted by someone else: the Congress and the Muslim League. Another explanation is that partition was the only solution to avoid the worst, like a civil war or a massacre that could have been worse than the actual carnage following the divide. However, India's divide and the birth of three nations that apparently were two, an unscrupulous experiment dividing a state into two parts separated by a couple of thousand miles of northern Indian territory, were too big an affair to be simply justified by the incapacity of the two main Indian parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, to find an agreement.

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\* I wish to thank Michelguglielmo Torri for reading and criticising this essay and, as always, for his invaluable advice. Of course, it goes without saying that any remaining imperfections are my own responsibility.

Whether all this was unavoidable is open to question. Probably it is true that a prolonged British permanence (especially of the army) for a few years after the end of World War II to guide the parts to a settlement could have been the only possible alternative to the split, but it was unfeasible. Remaining in India would have been economically unsustainable and politically unpopular. After the war, the British attitude was to get the maximum benefit from the former colonies, especially from India, with the least effort and expenditure. The US pressure to put an end to the colonial rule was very strong, while the international public opinion sympathised more with the colonised people than with the colonisers. Above all, the Indian nationalists would not tolerate British rule any longer. A prolonged permanence of the British Raj in India after World War II would entail the risk of a perpetual unrest, like in Malaysia, Indonesia, or Vietnam. The British government was therefore obliged to respect the pledge made in 1942 that independence would be granted to India after the end of the war.

However, the necessity of a quick withdrawal does not seem to be sufficient to explain an enormous event like the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The existing studies on India's partition, although accurate, like Anita Inder Singh's *The Origins of the Partition of India*,<sup>1</sup> are based mostly on the *Transfer of Power*<sup>2</sup> series, selected published records that, probably also for a calculated choice, do not focus much on military and strategic issues. For this reason, these records do not allow a clear reconstruction of British responsibilities in India's partition.

The records on which this essay is based suggest the seeds of the partition were sown much before 1947 and the British

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<sup>1</sup> Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987.

statesmen abetted the divide when it became clear that partition would be the most profitable choice for British defence requirements in Asia and the Middle East. The British rulers knew it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the colonies after the end of World War II. However, India was too important for the defence of the remaining British economic interests in the Middle East and in South-East Asia not to deserve special attention. When in 1942 the demand of independence by the Congress became pressing, the British statesmen began to conceive the option to detach a portion of the territory included in the Anglo-Indian Empire to maintain the military control of the Indian subcontinent.

Narendra Singh Sarila in his *The Shadow of the Great Game* asserts the provincial option contained in the 1942 Cripps proposal was deliberately introduced into the constitutional path for India's independence to undermine the unity of the Indian subcontinent and to pave the way to the creation of Pakistan. This is particularly evident in a letter by Amery, where he explained the content of the offer to the viceroy: "As for the Congress their adverse reaction may be all the greater when they discover that the nest [the offer] contains Pakistan Cookoo's [sic] egg".<sup>3</sup>

Cripps was not only conscious of the disruptive potential of the offer but apparently endorsed it. In the secret account of his meeting with Jinnah, Cripps noted "I think he [Jinnah] was rather surprised in the distance that it [the British offer] went to meet the Pakistan case".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-47* (hence TOP).

<sup>3</sup> Narendra Singh Sarila, *The Shadow of the Great Game, The Untold Story of India's Partition*, Harper Collins, Noida, 2005 p. 102, quoting TOP, vol. I, record no. 296.

<sup>4</sup> N.S. Sarila, *The Shadow*, ibid. and A. Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India*, p. 76, quoting Note by Cripps on interview with

This view of the British offer of 1942 is shared by the two most prominent Indian scholars of the Quit India movement, M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava who, however, do not mention Cripps' secret report.<sup>5</sup> According to Anita Inder Singh, the provincial option did not encourage "the League to settle with the Congress". As an evidence, she says that "after Cripps had discussed his formula with Jinnah", a proposal by Sikander Hyatt Khan for a Congress-League settlement was rejected by the Muslim League Working Committee.<sup>6</sup> Dennis Kux, one of the most prominent American scholars of the US relations with India and Pakistan, is of the same opinion. According to him, Gandhi opposed the Cripps mission "mainly because it left open the possible creation of Pakistan".<sup>7</sup> From 10 May 1942 onwards, from the columns of the *Harijan*, Gandhi started to criticise the partition as if he was conscious the real consequence of the Cripps offer was India's "vivisection".<sup>8</sup>

Due to Nehru's and Azad's firm position regarding defence during the 1942 negotiations, the British prime minister, the

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Jinnah on 25 March 1942, TOP Vol. I, pp. 480-481 and Cripps to Azad, 2 April 1942, *ibid.*, p. 610.

<sup>5</sup> M.S. Venkataramani, B.K. Shrivastava, *Quit India. The American Response to the 1942 Struggle*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 62-95.

<sup>6</sup> A. Inder Singh, *The Origins*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> On the Cripps Mission and US attempt to facilitate an agreement, Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941-1991*, National Defence University Press, Washington D.C., 1993, pp. 12-21 and *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000. Disenchanted Allies*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2001, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> N.S. Sarila, p. 132.

viceroys, and the military chiefs understood that most probably, once India became independent, the Congress leadership would not be willing to share its military responsibilities with its former rulers.

At the end of 1942, the military began to plan India's post-war military settlement and, in the following years until the thresholds of India's independence, they carefully examined two options. One was an independent India bound to Great Britain by a military treaty. This was certainly the most favourite choice, but very hard to reach: Indian leaders might not be willing to militarily cooperate with Great Britain. The other choice was detaching a portion of former British India to build up a new state where to set up the military bases required for the continuation of the defence of British interests in the region and worldwide. This 'B plan' was gradually prepared and put in action when it became clear that it was the most convenient option for the preservation of British interests in South Asia. This essay reconstructs the evolution of the 'Pakistan option' from the Cripps Mission (1942) to the Cabinet Mission (1946).

### ***The Government of India and the future of the Indian armed forces after the war***

The Government of India began to project India's post-war settlement at the end of 1942. The main concern of both civil and military authorities was the future of the Indian army. "For some months I have had at the back of my mind the question of what the future of the Indian Army is to be".<sup>9</sup> So wrote General Robert

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<sup>9</sup> India Office Records (hence IOR), L/WS/1/1340, note The Post-War Indian Army, dated 3.12.42, signed with Robert Lockhart initials.

Lockhart, then military secretary to the India Office in December 1942.

The uncertainty about the future of the Indian army originated a series of other issues concerning the post-war political developments in India. The fundamental question had been “Was India going to be a dominion or become independent or what?” This doubt was still roaming in the minds of the British officers at the threshold of India’s independence. The question of the future of the Indian army was complicated and had several political implications connected with the political status of India and, ultimately, with its territorial features.

Even if we accept the Secretary of State’s assumption as meaning that the present Government of India Act will remain the legal instrument under which India will be governed, it will still be a matter of uncertainty what type of Government will govern India within the terms of that Act.<sup>10</sup>

The uncertainty about the future government and about India’s future political status occurred within an unsettled international context and

any scheme which Sir C. Auchinleck may produce for the future of the Indian Army is vitally dependent both on the general post-war settlement and on its particular application on India, since

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Lockhart held the position of military secretary to the India Office until 1943. After a brilliant career in the army, on 15 August 1947 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Indian army, with the rank of acting General and was promoted General on 1 September.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, draft of a letter from G. A. Simpson to General Lockhart, dated 5/12 [1942].

the future of the Indian Army is inextricably interwoven with the future condition of the world and of Asia.<sup>11</sup>

The problem of the future of the Indian army was so essential Lockhart suggested “a committee should be formed in England of senior and experienced officers to examine the whole question and make recommendations”<sup>12</sup> The committee was to be chaired by Claude Auchinleck, Commander in Chief (hence C.-in-C.) of the Indian army.<sup>13</sup>

The correspondence between the British authorities emphasised the need of modernising the Indian army, especially from the technical point of view. They noticed the war introduced tremendous technological progress in weapons, transport, equipment, and fighting techniques. The backbone of the modern warfare was airpower.

Furthermore, the international situation originated by the war presented new strategic challenges. On 15 January 1943, the secretary of state for India, Lord Leo Amery, wrote to General Wavell:

What applies to the later stages of this war – I am thinking of the eastern campaigns of 1944, 45 and 46 – will apply even more to the future organisation of all defence forces and perhaps even more particularly to those of India. It is not only within India itself that air carriage of troops may be of immense importance for

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., note by Lockhart, 3.12.42.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Extract from private letter from Lord Linlithgow to Mr. Amery, dated 28 December, 1942, extract from private letter from Mr. Amery to Lord Linlithgow, dated 11 January 1943, telegram from the viceroy dated 12 January 1943 to Mr. Simpson and General Lockhart.

internal security and for defence against an actual invader if he reached India: I am thinking even more of the possibilities of intercepting invasion on the periphery of India, i.e. in Persia, Afghanistan, Burma, Malaya, etc. In all these regions ground communication is infinitely slow and cumbrous and the army which can move by air and move its fighter air squadrons by air, will have an enormous advantage over any army organized on relatively old-fashioned lines.<sup>14</sup>

On the same day, Amery wrote to the viceroy. According to the secretary of state, “the really big problem” regarding the whole question of the reform of the Indian army was the technical development of modern weapons, especially air weapons.

There is to begin with the whole question of the extent to which the air fighting services of one kind or another should displace relatively both ground troops and navy from the point of view of Indian defence. There is secondly the whole question of mechanical warfare, how far the tank is really the weapon of the future or likely to be kept within compass by the development of anti-tank gun and self-propelled field artillery. Lastly, but possibly the most important factor of the lot, is the extent to which both ground troops and the ground equipment of air fighting services are going to depend upon air transport. My own view is that the airborne and air supplied division is going to be the really governing factor in the later stages of this war and still more in future wars.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Extract from letter from Mr. Amery to General Wavell, dated 15 January, 1943. Apparently, the British authorities expected the war to continue until 1946.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Extract from private letter from Mr. Amery to Lord Linlithgow dated 15 January, 1943.



On 16 January 1943 Lord Linlithgow wrote to General Wavell for consultation.<sup>16</sup> Replying to the viceroy, Wavell insisted on the demobilisation of the Indian army. Unlike the viceroy and the secretary of state, he was not in favour of establishing a committee to examine the future of the Indian army. According to him, the British authorities should, first of all, “have some ideas of both the strategical (sic) position in India after the war”. Wavell emphasised the political implications of the future of the Indian army and remarked that the political future of India was uncertain.

The political factors will be much harder to determine. We may assume that some form of Indian National government is likely to be in power within a year or so from the conclusion of the war; but what form that government will take, i.e. whether it will include the whole of India, or whether some provinces may secede; whether it will include the Indian States; what its attitude towards British assistance will be, and so forth, will be difficult matters on which to make assumptions.<sup>17</sup>

Linlithgow agreed with the C-in-C<sup>18</sup> “that the vital factor in any calculation” was “the political status of India after the War”. The viceroy was pessimistic

about the prospect of any solution coming out of the post-war constitutional discussions. I am very doubtful indeed whether we shall ever get the main parties even to meet round the table. I am quite certain that any conclusions that did emerge can be

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<sup>16</sup> The letter is not in the file.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, copy of a letter from Wavell to Linlithgow, undated.

<sup>18</sup> The viceroy referred here to General Wavell as Commander-in-Chief of the American-British-Dutch-Australian Command (ABDACOM).

implemented, and any scheme held together, only by the continued and effective presence of Great Britain. I should be very surprised if the post-war Cabinet was prepared to play the altruist either in India or elsewhere in the Empire and to accept kicks without being regarded as eligible for any of the compensations; and here, as in the colonial field (and the same is even more true of Burma) I think we are entitled to bear in mind that it is we who have created and developed these great territories, given them peace and good order and held them together, and that there are limits to the sacrifices that we can reasonably expected to make. Burma, India and certain of the colonies which are the products of British rule and British security must be prepared to pay for them and give certain guarantees, and I would say again how much I hope that H.M.G. will not bind themselves any further than they are already bound, and if and when it comes to a settlement, they will make it clear that their assistance and support is available on certain terms only which will be for them to lay down.<sup>19</sup>

Linlithgow embodied perhaps the most conservative element of the British colonial ruling class, but the ideas expressed in this letter reflect a position that, in the following years, would be shared by almost all the representatives of the British Raj, both civilians and military officials. The intensity of their attachment to the empire may have differed in grade, but almost all were reluctant to lose India.

Amery agreed with Wavell, but he doubted if India's existing financial, industrial, and human resources would be sufficient to satisfy its defence requirements. Amery foresaw India would continue "to rely on provisions" from the United Kingdom for some time and the permanence of "the British

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<sup>19</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1340, Extract from private letter from Lord Linlithgow to Mr. Amery dated 26 January, 1943.

element” in the Indian armed forces would be required. Amery suggested that a ten or fifteen year treaty should be negotiated with India. He did not go into the details of such a treaty, but apparently he had in mind a cooperation treaty allowing India’s defence to become gradually self-dependent. According to Amery, the treaty could be followed by “a more limited treaty if necessary to cover deficiencies still existing at the time of the termination of the first treaty”. He hoped that the Constitution would not change after the end of the war and disagreed with Wavell regarding any link between the future of the Indian army and Indian politics.<sup>20</sup>

While the India Office, the viceroy, and part of the high ranks of the army were discussing the post-war defence of India, in early April 1943 the Joint Planning Staff of the India Command, following the instructions of the chiefs of staff, issued a report “based on a full appreciation of India’s strategic problem after the war”.<sup>21</sup> The report suggested that, “for security reasons” its content should be discussed with “as few officers as possible”.

It was assumed that as soon as possible, after the end of the war, a special committee should be set up to examine all strategic aspects concerning India and to reorganise India’s defence. Although the Joint Planning Staff was instructed not to take into account strictly political issues, like the form of government India should adopt after the war, the study focused on two main issues with strong political implications:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Extract from private letter from Mr. Amery to Lord Linlithgow, dated 8 February, 1943.

<sup>21</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1341, India Command, Report by the Joint Planning Staff. Appreciation of future position, J.P.S. Paper No. 57, 3 April 1943, signed J.G. Hewitt Captain, R.N., G.B. Still Brigadier, L. Darvall Air Commodore.

- a) Imperial defence as a whole.
- b) Current Indian political problems, and probable developments in this sphere.<sup>22</sup>

The military staff took for granted that, after the war,

- a) India would still be connected with Great Britain, either as a Dominion or by a treaty guaranteeing assistance in war and reserving certain rights in return.
- b) India would be responsible for maintaining land and air forces sufficient to defend herself against any minor power; or, if she is attacked by a first class power, to defend herself until the arrival of Imperial reinforcements.<sup>23</sup>

World War II had introduced impressive progress in the development of weapons, especially air weapons. The Joint Planning Staff compared the present situation with that described by the Report of the Expert Committee on the Defence of India 1938-39, known also as the Chatfield Report,<sup>24</sup> which studied the weapons technical progress between the two wars. Also, the planning staff stressed the connection between defence and politics: “the development of air power has affected all India’s defence problems, and must influence profoundly India’s whole policy for defence in the post war years”.<sup>25</sup>

“One of the most important considerations”, according to the Joint Planning Staff, was the location of the Imperial Reserve. The Joint Planning Staff agreed with the Chatfield report that the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Then a retired Admiral of the Fleet, in 1939 Lord Ernle Chatfield was appointed Minister for Coordination of Defence.

<sup>25</sup> L/WS/1/1341, Report by the Joint Planning Staff.

Imperial Reserve should be located in India. The Joint Planning Staff then examined all possible threats to India's defence.

In early 1943, the British aimed at maintaining a permanent connection between India and Great Britain and to perpetuate the colonial model after the end of the war. The 1943 report assumed the countries then occupied by Japanese forces would return to the position they were before the war.<sup>26</sup> However, as discussed further in the present essay, in the following years the British became increasingly concerned about internal political developments in India and the position it would adopt at the international level. Doubts also grew about possible changes in India's relations with Great Britain, on one side, and the Soviet Union on the other. Above all, the main question was if India would remain in the Commonwealth.

According to British military authorities, the main danger for India's security in early 1943 was the "aggression by a Major Land Power", where "The only great power which could threaten India's security is Russia". According to the British military experts, a possible Soviet attack on India "is likely to include airborne forces and operations by submarines and aircraft against Indian ports and shipping".<sup>27</sup>

The British military staff was planning how to improve the deployment of land and air forces, weapons, and airborne troops to defend India from a similar attack. The two most vulnerable areas, according to the British Command, were the North West and the North East frontiers. The North West Frontier was an area of permanent crisis, due to the perpetual unrest of the Waziri tribes. It was particularly exposed to the risk of Russian infiltration and its defence required the continuous presence of huge land forces.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

While the North West Frontier Province represented an old and well known problem, the importance of the North East Frontier had just been revealed by the recent defeats in Burma. The security of the North East Frontier was therefore strictly connected with Burma's defence. This area adjoined the economically most vital part of India at that time. Therefore,

India cannot disinterest herself from the problem of Burma's defence, since, if Burma is occupied by a foreign power, the most vulnerable and highly industrialized part of India is threatened, particularly by air attack. We have, therefore, shown the forces we consider to be necessary for Burma in the conviction that Burma forms part of the North East Frontier defence problem.<sup>28</sup>

The Soviet Union was not the only threatening power in this area (Japan's and the Axis' defeat was predictable), as

the only important power likely to threaten Burma is China. Chinese have however demonstrated their military incapacity during this war and are unlikely to attempt more than infiltrating small units into Burma.<sup>29</sup>

The defence of the North West and North East frontiers could be secured by land forces and police regiments. However, the new challenges represented by the production of more sophisticated weapons and "the speed of modern war" required a flexibility and mobility that could be provided only by the development of the airpower. It was therefore of fundamental importance to maintain and develop the existing airfields, construct new ones, and control all of them.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

In this phase two aspects emerged that, within a few years, would shape Britain's foreign and military policy: the relations with Soviet Russia and the possible partition of India. It is striking to discover that in 1943, while the Soviet Union was one of Great Britain's key allies to fight against the Axis powers, Britain was already starting to consider the Soviet Union a future potential enemy.

Summing up, the geopolitical map outlined by the British military staff in 1943 included two sensitive areas, respectively northwest and northeast of India, which needed to be protected by the British or with British assistance. Symptomatically, these two areas coincided with those that, in the scheme of partition officially outlined in 1946 and realised in 1947, were to become the constituent parts of Pakistan.

### ***The post-war world order in South Asia and Middle East according to the British planners***

The relevance of the future of the Indian armed forces for the protection of British interests was dependant not only on the defence of India, but because British planners viewed India and the Middle East as strictly connected. The importance of India for British strategic and economic interests was determined by its geopolitical position. British India's policy was complementary to British Middle Eastern policy. The role of India in British policy can be compared with that of Palestine, whose importance became increasingly clear to British strategists beginning with World War I. During World War I, Britain needed to maintain the control of Palestine, because of its proximity to the entrance of the Suez Canal. Later on, from the end of the 1930s onwards, the economic role of Palestine became increasingly relevant for British interests. In war times, troops could be easily transferred from Palestine to Egypt, while

“reinforcements from India would have to be sent overland from Iraq through Palestine to Egypt”.<sup>30</sup> The refinery and the port of Haifa had been developed by the British. The Haifa-Kirkuk oil pipeline had a vital importance for the British military supplies during World War II. Palestine was also a crucial stopover for air communications between the Mediterranean and the Far East. The war itself showed how important this area could be for British interests, even in post-war times. It was therefore necessary to maintain military bases and airfields in Palestine, for the defence of such interests, especially after the end of the war.<sup>31</sup>

India was in a similar position. In 1942, the newly created Military Sub-Committee (MSC), a sub-committee of the chiefs of staff, on request of the Foreign Office, prepared a memorandum to study British “post war strategic requirements in the Middle East”.<sup>32</sup> The main subject was Britain’s strategic requirements “world-wide” and in “areas adjacent to the Middle East, particularly the Mediterranean Basin as a whole”. The evaluation of the post-war world situation was based on the assumption the United States and the British Commonwealth would remain in close cooperation and Turkey would be a “strong and friendly” state.

Obviously, the Middle East was an area of vital importance for British oil supplies and, at the same time, it was also “a base

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<sup>30</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine*, p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>32</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1341, draft of a memorandum Post-war strategic requirements in the Middle East, incomplete, unsigned and undated but presumably from the end of 1942. The document is registered as M.S.C. (42) 3 and it is among records of the beginning of 1943 in the file.



from which” Britain could “exercise pressure in the event of threats or developments hostile to Anglo-American interests”. Communications had a crucial importance in protecting the area and the connected interests. Sea, land, and air communications in the Middle East should therefore “be developed after the war”. The availability of airbases suitable for all types of military and civil aircraft was essential.<sup>33</sup> Land forces were required to protect air bases. The British planners aimed at building up a network of air and land bases, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Far East, through the Suez Canal and India:

The Mediterranean route to Egypt, India and the Far East is a strategic link of great importance in the overseas communications of the British Commonwealth.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, according to the British strategists, Britain should have the right to station forces and to maintain and develop bases in EGYPT as necessary to its defence, and to move reinforcements to and through EGYPT.<sup>35</sup>

Other cornerstones of the system were the Cape route, the Nile Valley, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, as well as communications between the Persian Gulf and Russia. However, the focal points of British defence in the Middle East were the communications between Egypt, “the Levant”, Iraq, Persia, and “across Persia to Baluchistan”. These connections were required “as alternatives to long-sea routes through the Indian Ocean”. The Kantara/el Qantara-Haifa-Aleppo-Mosul railway and the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Capitals in the original text.

Haifa-Baghdad road should be protected, as well as air bases for civil air routes and sea communications between Egypt and Palestine. “In the event of a threat” to Britain’s interests, the British strategists claimed the right

to move forces to and through PALESTINE and TRANSJORDAN and through the LEBANON, SYRIA, IRAQ and along the ALEPPO-NISIBIN-MOSUL railway [and to] use Haifa as a naval base.<sup>36</sup>

Thanks to the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, Britain would retain her existing bases in Iraq and could develop additional ones if necessary. The treaty had a duration of twenty years. Apart from mutual military assistance, it obliged Iraq to grant to Great Britain sites for air bases near Basra and the west of the Euphrates. The United Kingdom, on her part, should provide the kingdom of Iraq with “arms, ammunition, equipment, ships and aircrafts of the latest available pattern”.<sup>37</sup> The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty is particularly meaningful because it represented the model the British military authorities suggested to tie India to the United Kingdom after independence, in case India would not opt to join the Commonwealth.

India was part of the picture, because it could play a fundamental role in protecting British interests in Persia, if the Persian government developed anti-British feelings or if it broke down. In this case

Precautionary measures might include: the holding ready of air-

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Treaty of Alliance between his Majesty in respect of the United Kingdom and His Majesty the King of Iraq, signed at Baghdad, 30 June 1930, Annexure, Clause 5.

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born troops in BALUCHISTAN or the threat to bomb military objectives in PERSIA, assuming we have the right to maintain troops in INDIA.<sup>38</sup>

In 1944, the British military experts concentrated on India's role in the defence of the Iranian and Middle Eastern oilfields:

The defence of India is complementary in our strategy to the defence of EGYPT and the Middle East. In this war we have managed to hold both; and, although the loss of one would not necessarily entail the loss of the other, the value of one is very greatly impaired without the other.<sup>39</sup>

Above all other considerations, India, "by virtue of its central position, was "well situated for reinforcement to East or West" was crucially important in the thinking of the British planners.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The different views of the British planners on the future of India's defence***

The India Office and the War Office were studying the future of India's defence, simultaneously but separately. Apparently, the chiefs of staff and the India Office acted without coordination, with some overlapping and disagreement.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., draft A Note on the defence of India after the war. The record is unsigned and undated, but presumably it is from April 1943. Most probably the author was Lieut. Col. Wren.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Note on India's interest in the military aspect of the post-war settlement in connection with D.P.M. (44) 18 and on the assumption that she remains within the British Commonwealth of Nations, dated 29.4.44, unsigned.

On 27 April 1943, on instruction of the Directorate of Military Office (D.M.O.), Lieutenant George William Wren, of the MI2, wrote a note referring to a meeting with General Lockhart the previous day.<sup>41</sup> Wren mentioned a report he had given to General Lockhart, where he had outlined the “Egyptian set-up”.<sup>42</sup> In the event that India would become fully independent, it would be considered, like Egypt, “a foreign country but one that is essential for the defence of the Commonwealth”.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, India was to be bound to Britain by a treaty. Wren noted that Lockhart did not appreciate the parallel between Egypt and India, which he considered “very dangerous”.<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, Lockhart clarified his views and admitted, as far as a possible treaty was concerned, the parallel between Egypt and India was “very obvious”, but it involved the political and not the military side of the problem. Moreover, the set-up of the Indian army was not comparable with the set-up of the Egyptian army. Wren knew the India Office was exchanging views with the War Office and the army about the set-up of India’s defence

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<sup>41</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1340, note signed by Wren, 27 April 1943. The recipient of the note is not specified, but from following correspondence it can be deduced that the note was addressed to General Lockhart. Lieut. Col. Wren had been asked to prepare the note by the War Office: note Future of the Indian Army, 30 April 1943, signed by Lockhart.

<sup>42</sup> The reference was most probably to L/WS/1/1341, A Note on the Defence of India.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. It is not completely clear why Lockhart considered the parallel between India and Egypt very dangerous. Most probably, because it entailed that India would have been completely independent, an event that the British disliked.

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after the end of the war and knew Lockhart had received the report of the Joint Planning Staff.<sup>45</sup> According to Wren, “the terms of reference of this paper are too narrow for our purpose here, since the size only of the army is considered”. Referring to his conversation with Lockhart, Wren stated

the future organization of the Army in INDIA must depend on the future political organization of INDIA, and in the Far East generally. Until that political organization takes shape, we shall be able to make little headway with the military set-up. For instance:

(a) Is INDIA to be a loose federation of semi-autonomous states (PAKISTAN), or will it coalesce into one unit. If the latter, the Indian Army might retain it’s present general outline (sic). But if the former, will PUNJAB soldiers be acceptable in MADRAS, or will some form of provincial forces become necessary.

(b) Will the defence of INDIA remain a solely British responsibility, or will it devolve on some international or regional body, thereby enabling us (perhaps?) to give our eastern defence forces a different and more acceptable “cover” than “British Imperialism”.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding possible political developments in India, Wren concluded

(c) At present Indian political thinking is still colored the more extravagantly liberal ideas (sic) of the past 25 years. INDIA and many of her friends have yet to learn that freedom is not licence.

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<sup>45</sup> L/WS/1/1341, Report by the Joint Planning Staff.

<sup>46</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1340, note 27 April 1943.

A reaction in the right direction is apparent in the rest of the world, and may spread to INDIA. If it does, we may find our job of organizing suitable defence forces a good deal easier than it would be today.<sup>47</sup>

According to Wren's report, the D.M.O. believed "whatever constitutional changes took place in India that country would remain of vital importance from the point of view of Imperial strategy".<sup>48</sup> A treaty should regulate the permanence of some British troops in India, provided the country "would not be able to defend herself for a long time to come" and its defence should be secured.<sup>49</sup>

The India Office and the War Office had almost opposite views regarding the future of the Indian army. The dominant opinion within the India Office was that the modernisation of the army and the reform of India's defence after the war should depend on the constitutional and political developments in India. The decision to carry out any reform or enact any change, directly or indirectly involving India's defence, was conditioned by the future government of India and its attitude towards Great Britain and the Commonwealth. On the contrary, the C.-in-C. of the Indian army, Sir Claude Auchinleck, pragmatically believed that

The proper way to handle the problem is surely the way it is being done here – i.e. first assess the requirements in the immediate postwar period, bearing in mind potential dangers in the future and then create a machine to turn this into practical plans, always with an eye on possible future developments, and guided by policy regarding the sort of defence forces which we should wish

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Future of the Indian Army.

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to create for the new Govt. of India – whatever it may prove to be.<sup>50</sup>

General Auchinleck believed it was inconvenient to deal simultaneously with the problems arising from the immediate post-war situation and “the steps to be taken during a political transition period of unknown length”.<sup>51</sup> According to him, the British “task” was

to create the best possible defence organisation which India can afford and thus to provide for whatever Govt. takes control in India, the means of maintaining its authority. The defence forces must therefore be kept as efficient as possible.<sup>52</sup>

General Auchinleck considered it “dangerous” to reorganise the Indian army along provincial and communal lines. He did not mention the reasons, but supposedly he feared a similar arrangement could affect the unity of the army. Auchinleck foreshadowed the outbreak of a “next world war” that would expose India to the enemies’ greed and had no doubts that India would become a member of the Commonwealth, when independent.<sup>53</sup>

The analysis on the defence of India in the post-war period became increasingly more detailed throughout 1944. After the end of the war, an international defence system based on “Regional Zones of Defence” should be created, “within a general system of world security”. Accordingly,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Letter from Claude Auchinleck to Lieut-General G. N. Molesworth, 10 March 1944. George Molesworth was the military secretary to the India Office.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

(a) A South and South West Pacific Zone has been suggested, without defining areas. It is reasonable to suggest that other zones might be (i) the Mediterranean and Middle East (ii) India (iii) Central and North Pacific (iv) China (v) South Africa – perhaps others.

(b) The Indian Zone should presumably link with the Mediterranean – Middle East zone to the West, the South and South West Pacific Zone to the East, to any Zone in China to the North East and possibly to any South African zone.<sup>54</sup>

More specifically,

(d) The zone in which India is clearly interested, leaving aside what she may ultimately be allotted, is:

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <u>EAST</u>       | Burma<br>The Bay of Bengal<br>Malaya<br>Sumatra                        |
| <u>SOUTH</u>      | Ceylon<br>Possibly certain Indian Ocean bases                          |
| <u>WEST</u>       | The Persian Gulf and Trucial Sheikhdoms                                |
| <u>NORTH WEST</u> | The Basra Vilayet<br>Southern and Eastern Iran<br>Afghanistan          |
|                   | (Note: Southern Arabia, Aden and the Red Sea interest her indirectly). |
| <u>NORTH</u>      | Sinkiang<br>Thibet (sic) <sup>55</sup>                                 |

This picture, describing India as the keystone connecting

<sup>54</sup> L/WS/1/1341, Note on India's interest.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



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East and West was outlined in 1944 and was further developed in 1945 and in the following years.

***The British planners' conclusions on the future of India's defence***

Eventually, in summer 1944 the chiefs of staff succeeded in delivering a sixty-eight page survey, made of several lengthy appendices and reports. The importance of the document is highlighted by the fact that it was printed.<sup>56</sup>

It can be summarised as follows:

- a) No constitutional change would take place in India after the end of the war;
- b) Burma would remain independent from India;
- c) The situation of internal security in India and in the NWFP would not radically change;
- d) India would be responsible “for maintaining land and air forces sufficient to defend herself against a minor Power, and against a major Power until such time as Imperial reinforcements can arrive”;
- e) India would be also responsible for maintaining an external defence force, according to the principles expressed by the Chatfield report of 1939;

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, India – Post-War Defence, 28 August 1944. The survey starts with a Copy of a letter dated 7 August 1944, from the commander in chief in India to the secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, with annexed five reports: C.O.S. (44) 642, C.O.S. (44) 636, C.O.S. (44) 637, C.O.S. (44) 637/I, (44) 91 and relative appendices.

f) Japan would be “evicted” from China and South-East Asia and would not represent a threat to the security of India;

g) “Russia” would remain “in friendly relations with Great Britain and the United States” and would be “unlikely to threaten India except by subversive means”;

h) China would “have accumulated sufficient equipment from the United States to maintain a considerable regular force”.<sup>57</sup>

It is well known that most of the above-mentioned assertions did not correspond with the facts and General Auchinleck was aware of it. He did not agree with the observations contained in the report C.O.S. (44) 636, included in the file, which he considered “written purely from the Service point of view” and its “proposals” could not “be regarded as final recommendations”. The report was based on theoretical assumption and on an ideal view of the situation in South Asia. He and the British military and political authorities were far from certain about at least two of those assertions: India’s constitutional settlement in the post-war period and USSR’s supposed interests in South Asia and in the Middle East and its possible attempts to expand to these areas. Any further action of the British authorities was based on these two concerns. Therefore, General Auchinleck suggested:

Firstly, it is important that a basis should be established as soon as possible on which planning for the post-war defence forces in India can proceed, and which can serve as a guide for preparations for demobilization.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Copy of a letter dated 7 August 1944.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

The survey examined all possible aspects concerning the defence of India, the size and composition of Indian forces, the reform of land, air, and sea forces and the integration between them, the organisation of regiments, divisions and garrisons, estimates regarding internal security, and external defence, training of troops and officers. The record reflected a rising suspicion among British authorities that, besides China and Russia, the United States also was cultivating its own interests in India.

Once more the importance of the air power was emphasised and it was recommended “that the enemy’s air forces are kept at a reasonable distance from our territory and our bases”.<sup>59</sup> Apparently, India was considered British territory.

In India were placed what the British considered their bases:

1. We shall require to use India as a main support area in order to avail ourselves of her manpower resources and growing industries capacity.
2. Airfields in India are essential for the maintenance of our communications to the Far East.
3. Bases in India are important to our command of the Indian Ocean.
4. The continuance of India’s cooperation with the Commonwealth in defence is essential.<sup>60</sup>

To fulfil these requirements, India’s armed forces should be

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., typed note included in the printed survey, Notes for Discussion on Treaty with India, incomplete.

“modern, efficient, capable of expansion in war, and under unified control”.<sup>61</sup>

It was expected India would provide “the greater part of garrisons” for Burma, Malaya, and Siam and, in general, for the South-East Asia command.<sup>62</sup> Afghanistan should be protected against a probable Soviet expansion. This event should be avoided by political measures, but especially by strengthening India’s defensive capacity.<sup>63</sup>

The crucial question was where to locate the Imperial Reserve. The ideal place was obviously India, because it was

strategically and administratively a suitable place in which to locate an Imperial reserve but, in view of possible political developments the feasibility of developing Baluchistan to meet the requirements of such a reserve should be examined.<sup>64</sup>

This option was to be carefully examined, should it be necessary, in future, to locate the Imperial Reserve “elsewhere than in India proper”.<sup>65</sup> This does not just mean the British military did not consider Baluchistan as a part of India, but rather

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Annex II, Chiefs of Staff Committee, C.O.S. (44) 636, Report on the Size and Composition of the post-war forces in India, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> These principles were very similar to those behind Liaquat Ali Khan 1950 request of armaments to the U.S., which he justified with “the cause of ‘stability’” in the region and the defence of western communication routes connecting South Asia with the “oil-bearing” Middle East through Iran and Afghanistan: M.S. Venkataramani, *The American Role in Pakistan*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1982, p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1341, Annex II, p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

they believed it was possible to easily detach a part of Indian territory.

The report considered also the size of the forces to be allotted to face internal troubles in particularly sensitive areas, as well as possible external threats, the transport and type of armaments to be employed. The external dangers affecting the North West and North East Frontiers were represented by a possible attack on India by a "major Power". Internal troubles meant essentially unrest among the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) tribal people or possible threats to India along the Durand Line (dividing British India from Afghanistan).

As far as the North East Frontier was concerned, the British military experts estimated that no special allotment of troops was required, apart from those already on the field, as no danger of external attack in that area was expected, but only a possible general unrest in Burma, after the end of the war. In all cases, the employment of air arms and the role of airfields were crucial.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding external threats on India, the only major power to be in a position to seriously threaten India after the war, it was repeated, was Russia. The British officers expected that the Soviet Union could launch an attack on India from its airfields in Turkestan. The most vulnerable areas were considered to be Punjab, the NWFP, and Baluchistan. They should therefore be reinforced with "an adequate number of fighter aircraft". Afghanistan could be at the same time a direct target of a Soviet attack or an intermediate step of an advance to India. Quetta and Karachi were the keystones of the British defence against a possible Soviet invasion. Moreover, independently from a possible Soviet menace, Karachi was the most important supply base for any military operation in the region.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 20, 22-23.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-26.

In a possible future war involving India, the air force would play a crucial role and could have several functions: internal security, control of the North West and North East Frontier tribal areas, defence of these border areas against a minor aggression, and support to Afghanistan “against pressure or intimidation by a neighbouring Power”.<sup>68</sup>

To sum up, Baluchistan was at the same time a possible target of a Soviet invasion and the most suitable base of the British defence of India. Air forces were considered fundamental in the defence of India in a possible future war against Russia. India as a whole was considered the “base” of British military organisation in Asia. Two of the main centers of the British defence system in South Asia, Baluchistan and the port of Karachi, were placed in areas that could be detached from India, once it became independent. The British military experts intended to build up a “skeleton air force ... as a foundation upon which substantial air force” might be developed. “General considerations” pointed “to the Karachi, Quetta and Rawalpindi areas” as “the most suitable locations for the units comprising the skeleton Air Force”.<sup>69</sup> The skeleton air force “and ground organization” provided for by the British military authorities had been conceived to safeguard “the requisite mobility to any Reserves which may be stationed in India” and therefore it was expected to be capable to protect as much as possible the air reinforcement routes.<sup>70</sup> This was the ultimate goal of the reform of the Indian defence. At that time, India was “unable to contribute air forces” to any external defence units,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 32 and 35.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

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but should rather contribute all the airfields, installations, skeleton warning system and ground organization necessary to receive the Imperial reinforcements arriving to defend her country (sic) in the case of war.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Where to locate the British troops after World War II?***

As the Imperial Reserve in the East required a location in areas that were “most likely to be required to reinforce” the British troops, the military experts identified India “proper” and the “adjacent territories” of Baluchistan and Burma as the most suitable areas to host the Imperial Reserve.<sup>72</sup> Several factors played in favour and against the choice of each area. The experts evaluated three cases. The first, India, would be favoured by the following three aspects:

1. “The presence of this additional force inside the country would greatly assist the internal security problem in peace”.
2. India possessed “better road and rail communications than either Burma or Baluchistan”, while its ports could be considerably developed and were so strategically located to facilitate the transport of forces along the East-West routes.
3. In India existed many installations developed during the present war, that enabled the country “to act as a base” for the transportation of forces overseas.

However, against this choice there were the following counter indications:

1. The internal situation in India was expected to deteriorate

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

after the war. If serious problems arose, “its communications and installations” might be “endangered” and the readiness of forces would be damaged.

2. In case India requested the Dominion Status, it was “questionable whether she would agree to an Imperial Force being located in the country”.<sup>73</sup>

The memory was still vivid of the attitude Indian political leaders adopted in 1942, when they denied the use of Indian territory as a base for the war operations. Also, the British had not forgotten the Quit India movement. That experience influenced British military and political choices concerning India in the following years.

Four elements were in favour of Burma as the location of the Imperial Reserve:

1. The Imperial Reserve would be an addition to the existing garrison until the country could raise its own force.
2. The Imperial Reserve would act as a deterrent against China’s attempts “to infiltrate into or invade parts of Burma”.
3. Similarly, the Imperial reserve in Burma would be “a deterrent to any Chinese advance into Tibet”.
4. The Imperial Reserve in Burma would be “suitably located for operations in the Far East”.

Against this option, there were the following factors:

1. The internal road and rail communications were poor and Rangoon, the only main port, had several intrinsic defects and could be improved to a great extent.
2. The internal situation in Burma was mostly unsettled and could adversely affect the preparation of the force.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 37.



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3. “The climate of the greater part of Burma is unsuitable for European troops”.

Finally, as far as Baluchistan was concerned,

1. It was “relatively easy to exclude Baluchistan” from the remainder of India once India was given Dominion Status.

2. A force located here could meet aggressions by “Russia” or Afghanistan.

3. Baluchistan would be “well situated to reinforce the protection” of British interests in Iraq and Persia.

4. The Imperial Reserve in Baluchistan “would act as a deterrent to further Russian penetration in Persia”.

However:

1. Baluchistan had no ports, “unless Karachi and the communications to it are placed under Imperial control” and Gwadar would be developed.

2. These ports were exposed to “heavy enemy bombing” in case of war.

3. The road and rail communications of Baluchistan required development.

4. The region was arid and underdeveloped.<sup>74</sup>

Excluding Baluchistan from India meant detaching it from the rest of the country, to better militarily control its territory. Drawing the conclusions, the report stated that Burma was not a suitable location for the Imperial Reserve, while the possibility to use Baluchistan for the purpose required further investigations. After all, India remained the best option, for the moment.

However, the choice of India as the location of the Imperial reserve was subordinated to a future political settlement of India

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

favourable to British interests. Accordingly, not only was the military approach to the problem examined, the political implications of the use of India as a military base were examined:

The question of the use of India as a base for Imperial forces is one of the main questions that will have to be dealt with in the constitutional settlement, and from this point of view there might be something to be said for Baluchistan. You will remember that in a recent memorandum Sir Olaf Caroe discussed this question, and made the suggestion of Kashmir or somewhere else on the outer ring of India (as opposed to British India) in order to get round Indian political objection.<sup>75</sup>

Olaf Caroe (1892-1981) was the last foreign secretary for India, from 1939 to 1945. He had been governor of the North West Frontier Province between 1946 and 1947, across the partition. Due to his positions, exceedingly in favour of the Muslim League, Caroe encountered the opposition of the Indian government and was replaced by Robert Lockhart. After his retirement in 1947, Caroe wrote extensively about the great game and Britain's oil policy.<sup>76</sup> Caroe might have inspired most of the above-mentioned analysis concerning the strategic role of India in the defence of Britain's oil interests. After publishing his *Wells of Power*, Caroe was noticed by the American authorities, who invited him to Washington in 1952, where he met US Secretary

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<sup>75</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1340, Extract from a note dated 27.10.44 by the External Department, India Office.

<sup>76</sup> Olaf Caroe's main publications are *Wells of Power*, Macmillan, London, 1951, *Soviet Empire: The Turks of Central Asia and Stalinism*, 1953, *The Pathans 550 B.C.-A.D. 1957*, MacMillan, London, 1958, *From Nile to Indus: Economic and Security in the Middle East*, Conservative Political Center, 1960.

of State John Foster Dulles and Henry Byroade, then assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. It is believed Olaf Caroe was in favour of India's partition and he might have inspired US's pro-Pakistan policy.<sup>77</sup>

***The British doubts on the political feasibility of their post-World War II military projects for South Asia***

The language of an India Office note of April 1944 highlights that, although the British had the intention to use India as a military base to protect their interests in South and South-East Asia, but they doubted that the post-war constitutional settlement would allow them to pursue this goal. The English officers in general but, in particular, Auchinleck and Wavell were convinced that India would become independent sometime after the war. But the British did not trust the Indian leadership, which was essentially the Congress leadership. They remembered the experience of the Cripps mission. That mission failed, especially because of the impossibility to find an accord on defence responsibilities, and because Indian leaders claimed it when the British rulers were not ready to transfer.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Narendra Singh Sarila, *The Shadows of the Great Game. The Untold Story of India's Partition*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 30-31, Lloyd I. Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Making of US Foreign Policy for South Asia. Offshore Balancing in Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, February 25, 2006. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph notice that Olaf Caroe "facilitated" and "welcomed" India's partition. This is certainly true, although the responsibility of the partition did not fall only on Caroe, but was shared by part of the India Office, the Government of India and the army high ranks.

<sup>78</sup> M.S. Venkataramani, B.K. Srivastava, *Quit India*, R.J. Moore,

The British had considered the attitude of the Congress under Gandhi's influence as mere non-cooperation to the war effort. The Mahatma's position, partially mitigated by Nehru's mediation, was one of absolute opposition to the use of Indian soil for military operations and stationing of American and Chinese troops. Gandhi expressed unequivocally his views in a famous article published in *Harijan* on 26 April 1942:

Now we have promise of a never-ending stream of soldiers from America and possibly from China. I must confess that I do not look upon this event with equanimity. Cannot a limitless number of soldiers be trained out of India's millions? ... We know what American aid means. It amounts in the end to American influence, if not American rule added to British. It is a tremendous price to pay for the possible success of allied arms.<sup>79</sup>

The British feared the Indian leadership might adopt a similar attitude after the war. Americans too must have remembered the position of the Congress regarding the US policy in India when, after the end of World War II, they became suspicious about Nehru's non-alignment and opted for Pakistan as its most reliable ally in Asia.<sup>80</sup>

In mid the 1940s, the British rulers knew very well the orientation of the Congress leadership, especially of Nehru, who embodied the "more extravagantly liberal ideas of the past 25

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*Curchill, Cripps and India 1939-1945*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted by M.S. Venkataramani, B.K. Srivastava, *Quit India*, *ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>80</sup> Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991*, National Defense University Press, Washington, 1992.

years”, to use Lieut. Col. Wren’s words.<sup>81</sup> The British suspected India would develop an independent foreign policy, far from the British sphere; hence, the necessity to create a British base in Baluchistan or in other areas in the “outer ring” of the Indian territory. This meant setting up military infrastructures, in particular airfields, in areas that could be easily detached from India in case it would opt not to join the Commonwealth once it received independence.

Baluchistan, but possibly also other areas, west and east from India, could be suitable. The neighbourhoods of India, the fringes of its continental block, far from the capital and from the core of the country, could be separated without provoking a major mutilation. It is interesting (and striking) to learn that in Caroe’s plans Kashmir was included in the outer belt, which could be detached from India. The Kashmir issue is one of the most debated in India’s contemporary history. Nevertheless, due also to the availability of the records (many are still sealed), the feeling of the historian is that it is still not completely investigated.

Finally, according to the External Department of the India Office, Indian politicians should be “got around”. In other words, it was easier, according to the British rulers, to deceive the Indian leaders and public opinion by severing a part of India’s territories before India’s independence, rather than facing constitutional quibbles and political opposition afterwards.

### ***Detaching a part of India to make a military base***

It is interesting to notice that Amery, to justify the necessity to modernise the Indian army, in the already-mentioned letter to

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<sup>81</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1340, 27 April 1943.

General Wavell of January 1943 asserted “India has been discussed so much as the venue of all sorts of daring political experiments”.<sup>82</sup> What did Amery mean with this sentence? Amery’s letter did not refer to any strategic or geopolitical issue, but concentrated on strictly military aspects. However, from 1944 the British authorities examined with increasing attention the idea of detaching a part of India, especially of north western India, to better control the region, without being paralysed by the Indian leadership.

The connection between the right of any province to secede from the Indian Union (in other terms, the Pakistan option), established by the 1942 draft declaration, and Britain’s defence requirements in the Indian subcontinent is clearly expressed in a letter from Richard G. Casey, governor of Bengal, to Lord Wavell, dated 6 November 1944. Apart from defining the draft declaration “a generous proposal”, the Governor described the outcome of the constitutional process which should bring to “the realization of self-government in India’ as an Indian Union in common allegiance to the Crown as a Dominion”.

On the other side, Casey underlined “the right of any Province or Provinces to contract out and so become, if desired, another Indian ‘Union’, with the same status as the principal ‘Indian Union’ and with its own Constitution and with the same relationship to the Crown”.<sup>83</sup> Quoting the draft declaration, Casey suggested that the Constitution-making body (or bodies in case of more than one Dominion) would negotiate separate treaties “covering ‘all necessary matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility” from the British authorities to the

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<sup>82</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1340, Extract from letter from Amery to Wavell, 15 January, 1943.

<sup>83</sup> TOP, vol. V, p. 179.

Indian independent government. The treaty could be contracted out of the British Commonwealth. Casey did not specify it, but it is clear, when the declaration was drafted, it had been taken for granted that one or more Unions would not adhere to the British Commonwealth. As it will be better described further on in this essay, the British were very doubtful whether India would join the Commonwealth. Interestingly, Casey considered the Cripps Declaration as “still ‘open’” and described it as the basis for the settlement of the Indian Union and the basis along which eventually divide the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. This is a proof that the possibility to divide India was already an embryo in British intentions in 1942 and, consequently, in the Cripps Declaration. There is a continuity between the Cripps Declaration, the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946, and the partition announcement of 3 June 1947. The “right of the British Provinces to walk out was a consistent feature”, in Britain’s approach to India’s independence.<sup>84</sup>

The British did not conceive the provincial option just to meet the requests of the Indian Muslims, but rather to preserve their strategic interests in the region. Even if Casey thought that Pakistan was “nonsense” and expected Pakistan and India to reunite after a few years, he asserted:

After all, our major interest is to have an India that is as friendly as possible towards us in the post-war world.<sup>85</sup> We do not want in particular to antagonise the Muslims because -

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<sup>84</sup> N.S. Sarila, *The Shadow*, p. 102.

<sup>85</sup> The main goal of the British rulers was to maintain good relationships with India, that was larger, richer in raw matters and more authoritative than Pakistan. The latter was an expedient to maintain a control (especially military) on the area, in case India would walk out the

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- (a) they have been our friends and supporters for a great many years;
  - (b) the potential NW and NE Pakistans lie across the track of our major imperial line of communication; and
  - (c) we do not want to antagonize their Muslim cousins in the Middle East, who also lie across our imperial communications by sea and air.<sup>86</sup>

On the other side, Casey was convinced “the great majority of educated Indians dislike us and want us out”. Casey did not include the Muslims in this category: such hostility was “the result of nearly a generation of intensive propaganda, principally by the Congress”.<sup>87</sup> Like other British statesmen in 1942, Casey hoped the United States would aid British officials in promoting the draft declaration and to carry out “some strong-arm publicity on the Indian problem” to

combat the distorted presentation of the India problem in the mouths of professional anti-British agitators in America and stop this propaganda from becoming a means of driving a wedge between Britain and the United States.<sup>88</sup>

In his reply to Casey’s letter, Wavell agreed only partially with the governor’s views. In particular, Wavell was sceptical about a “mere restatement” of the Cripps Declaration, because

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British Commonwealth and would adopt a non-cooperative attitude towards the United Kingdom.

<sup>86</sup> TOP, vol. V, p. 183.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> TOP, vol. V, p. 182. Regarding the promotion of Britain’s Indian policy in the US, see M.S. Venkataramani, B.K. Shrivastava, *Quit India*.



he believed that the Muslims' idea of Pakistan had "crystallised" since 1942.<sup>89</sup> Wavell did not add much, but most probably he wanted to mean that the Muslim might demand more concrete steps for the foundation of Pakistan compared to the vague principles enunciated by the Cripps offer.

The correspondence exchanged by Casey and Wavell between the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 sheds light on the off-stage work preceding independence and partition. Casey was very sceptical about what he defined the "Pakistan idea", which had grown, according to him, because of the Congress' approach to the Muslims. The governor of Bengal had many reservations regarding Pakistan and he shared the views of an elitist Bengali minority who believed East Pakistan should be "a sovereign state with a bare Muslim majority of population", administered by Muslims and Hindus "in amity".

On the other side, Casey was doubtful about Pakistan's economic feasibility. Wavell was much more pragmatic. He also did not believe that Pakistan would work and he thought that it was "economically unsound". Unlike Casey, Wavell believed that "the driving force of Pakistan" did not come from the provinces where the Muslims were in a majority, which had nothing to gain from the separation, apart from "freedom from the Centre", and could easily "dominate the Legislature and the Government" even within the Indian Union. However, Wavell believed that

Until we have something to offer in place of Pakistan, I do not think you should risk being represented as openly hostile to it.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from Wavell to Casey, 13 November 1944, TOP *ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from Wavell to Casey, 1 January 1945, TOP, vol. V, pp. 345-346.

Apparently, afterwards the British did not find anything to offer in place of Pakistan. After all, also Wavell thought that

Pakistan is the extreme expression of Muslim suspicions and fears, which are real and to some extent justified.<sup>91</sup>

### ***The importance of keeping India united***

Summing up, by 1945 the possibility of favouring the detachment of some territories from India proper to create politically secure military bases for the British Empire had already been discussed in some depth by the British. However, a strong and undivided India still remained Great Britain's favourite option. This was the end result of the development that, during World War II, the British had become increasingly aware of India's strategic importance under three aspects. First, they acknowledged India's vital importance for the defence of the British Empire and British strategic and economic interests in Asia. Second, they acknowledged India's role in connecting the Middle East and South East Asia. Third, they considered India as a "bastion" against the USSR's expansion south and eastwards. Already in the early 1940s, the British started to imagine a post-war world order subordinate to British interests and inspired by

the principle that no power capable of prolonged hostile action against us should set foot South of the arch formed by the HIMALAYAS, the HINDU KUSH, the North PERSIAN frontier, the ELBURZ mountains, and the Northern borders of SYRIA.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., capitals in the original text.

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In 1943, the British developed a policy in India complementary with Britain's Middle Eastern policy. Britain's "vital strategic requirements in the Middle and Far East" were

- (a) the retention of the oilfields in Iraq and Persia
- (b) the protection of its communications along the west-east routes.<sup>93</sup>

If India came under control of an "unfriendly" power, these two conditions could not be secured and the sea routes from India and Ceylon to the Persian Gulf and Iraq oilfields, and from the Mediterranean to the Far East and Australia, would be compromised. India was "the keystone of the military security of the Commonwealth" in the Far East.

The United Kingdom's task was therefore, after the end of the war, to maintain in India adequate forces not just for local defence, but also against all possible external threats, "by land, sea, and air". India should realise its own security was not merely a matter of maintaining internal order and must protect its borders. It should therefore accept the presence of "considerable" British forces. According to the British military authorities,

The political future of India is uncertain. It may split into a number of semi-autonomous states. It may coalesce into one unit. It may even refuse to remain within the Commonwealth, in which case it will be like EGYPT, a foreign country but one that is essential for the defence of the Commonwealth. We must therefore ensure by negotiations that we retain the responsibility for the defence of INDIA, and not grant independence without a thought of safeguarding our own future.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Accordingly, the following seem to be the main points to be secured:

- a) INDIA must pledge unrestricted aid to BRITAIN in case of war.
- b) INDIA's aid in war must include unrestricted use of all facilities, including ports, air-fields, and communications.
- c) INDIA must undertake to place her economy at our disposal in war in order that, as far as possible, our forces in the Far East may be maintained from India.
- d) INDIA must agree to the posting of British forces in certain selected and vital localities, and that they may be at once available for the wider defence of India, should such action become necessary.

The above note has been written to deal with the worst possible case, from the military point of view, of a united INDIA which wishes to become fully independent. If full independence is not desired, our object will be correspondingly easier to attain. The internal security problem in India will, of course, provide a very strong reason for the presence of British forces for some time to come, and therefore may be counted on to aid our case.<sup>94</sup>

However, since it was hard for the British to justify their strategic aims only on the basis of Indian internal security, they should, the document stated, put their "demands to INDIA frankly and firmly". It was expected that the policy to be carried out in India after the end of the war could be similar to the policy adopted in Egypt in 1936, when the British occupation terminated with the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of Alliance.<sup>95</sup>

When the end of the war and independence approaching, the attention of the British statesmen focused increasingly on India's future role in Asia. In Spring 1945, the secretary of state

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

required the secretary of the External Affairs Department to produce a report to be submitted to the recently reconstituted “interdepartmental Far Eastern Committee set up in London under the chairmanship of the Foreign Office”, where the India Office was represented.<sup>96</sup> The task of the Far Eastern Committee was to advise His Majesty’s Government on “the political and economic policy” regarding the Far East and the “desirability of close co-operation with the Dominions, the Government of India and foreign Governments with interests in that region”.<sup>97</sup>

The report defined India as “the hub of Asiatic policy” and described its “external interests” as projected

all around the perimeter; on the landward side over all the Middle East countries where India’s foreign interests have been engaged for more than a century, over the small countries immediately surrounding India which have been described as buffer States. Over the table lands to the north such as Sinkiang and Tibet where the interests of India have conflicted with those of other Powers, round the continental countries of South East Asia; on the sea approaches over the Indian Ocean from Singapore (or perhaps beyond) to Suez including of course the Persian Gulf.<sup>98</sup>

India’s foreign policy in Asia appeared as “one connected picture”<sup>99</sup> and the defence of India depended on the defence of the surrounding areas:

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<sup>96</sup> IOR, L/WS/1/1007, paper India’s Political and Economic Interest in Asia, dated 6.4.45, p. 1 and War Department Memorandum in reply to a paper by the secretary, External Affairs Department regarding India’s foreign policy, included in the printed booklet, dated 9.6.45. Along with other records, the paper is part of a printed booklet.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

The question of defence is not within the purview of the Committee, but it is impossible in reviewing foreign policies to exclude considerations of defence altogether, as for example when such subjects as the future of Siam or Indo-China are being discussed. The foreign policy of India in such matters as the stability of buffer States, the maintenance of influence in the Persian Gulf and the drawing of frontiers, has to be seen always with an eye to security and defence.<sup>100</sup>

It was expected India would make a rapid political progress “towards a position of autonomy within the British Commonwealth of Nations”. However,

It is not clear how far India may be regarded as an effective base for the maintenance of security in the post-war world or who its allies and associates will be.<sup>101</sup>

The experts feared that, at the end of the war, India would ally with the USSR or that it would side against the British interests in South Asia:

Although the assumption is that India will remain within the British Commonwealth even so in future its policies and interest may be expected to diverge from those of Great Britain.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1945 the British planners were still optimistic India would join the Commonwealth and they aimed for India to become a leading country in Asia,

even more important than China if it built on foundations already

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

laid and was prepared to co-operate freely and fully with the Commonwealth as a whole. The vision should be one of a future for India as a great Power in Asia – a vision which may do more than anything else to turn Indian politics away from sterile introversions and to hold the country together against separatist tendencies within. This way lies the most solid hope of maintaining a belief in the wisdom and usefulness of the British connection.<sup>103</sup>

After celebrating the *pax Britannica* in Asia, which granted India stability, and after praising the British commitment to the modernisation of India's infrastructures and economy, the paper examined the Asian developments at the end of World War II. Japan, emerged as a world power after World War I, had been defeated but it would remain as major power, while "the revolution in China and the beginning of its transformation into what may make it tomorrow as powerful as Japan at its height"<sup>104</sup> represented a new challenge, as well as the "new inventions" in warfare technology, which shortened the distance between the USSR and India.

The External Affairs Department had an intricate vision of India's future foreign policy and its position in the region. The External Affairs Department overestimated the post-war role and influence of the Soviet Union in Persia and Afghanistan and assumed British goals would be coincidental with Indian objectives. Accordingly, the report foresaw a system of "interstices of petty tribal territories or friendly and, for the most part minor, buffer states" between India and the external world. Such system was described as the result of British policy and

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 3. Surprisingly, the British were able to foresee the rise of China as a power some decades before its actual achievements.

involved territories and states from Persia and Afghanistan to “Siam” and Malaya, including Kalat,<sup>105</sup> Kashmir and Sikkim, Tibet, Nepal, Burma and Ceylon. In the past, these territories had represented the “glacis” of India’s defence but, after World War II, the balances had changed and the relations of India with the surrounding areas had to change accordingly.<sup>106</sup>

The report focused on three main issues: strategic requirements, the protection of communications, and the oil supply. India’s military security was the central objective and it required that “Persia and Iraq should be neutralized”. The report repeated some concepts already expressed by the military staff in 1943-44 regarding the importance of “Persia and the adjacent Arab lands”, where the entire Gulf region acted “as a kind of magnet to Asiatic air routes”. Therefore, for the protection of the land and air routes between the Middle East and India, “friendly governments in Persia, in the Gulf, and in Iraq” were required.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, these lands were

India’s principal source of oil, the power house on which its industrialization and modernization will largely depend. Neither Burma nor any other Asiatic producer (including the N.E.I.) is likely to have an importance at all comparable, at least on the basis of present knowledge of oil deposits.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The Khanate of Kalat was a princely state which became part of Pakistan in 1948. In 1952 it was merged with other areas to become the province of Baluchistan. On the history of the Khanate see Riccardo Redaelli, *The father’s bow: The Khanate of Kalat and British India (19th-20th century)*, Firenze: Manent, 1997.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*



The analysis contained in this booklet described a very ambitious policy that put India at the centre of intricate connections, involving the Arab countries, South East Asia, and also the US. According to the External Affairs Department, the “Sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf” were in effect protectorates in special treaty relations with the British Government, which is responsible for their defence and the conduct of their foreign relations.

The presence of the United States and France was increasing in this region, where India had remarkable economic interests, as proved by the great number of Indian merchants living and dealing there. A balance between these potentially conflicting interests should be maintained.

India’s need has been served in the past by the maintenance of the Gulf as a British-controlled lake. But the emergence of the interests of oil and communications has brought American influence to this region, and it is to the common interest that Britain should show a united front with the U.S.A. in securing the peace of this region on which so much depends.<sup>109</sup>

The External Affairs Department was concerned about Iraq’s political influence on India. Iraq promoted the union of Arab countries and this ideal found “some echo among Muslim politicians and intellectuals in India”. Moreover, Iraq

voices the Arab dislike of the Jew, and any voice or action from Baghdad intended to defeat the process of Zionism will find a ready response in Muslim India. British policy in Palestine must therefore be directed not only with an eye on the Arab world but a degree of deference to Indian sentiments also.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

The Indian subcontinent was therefore associated to the Middle East not only from the strategic but also from the political point of view.

The booklet contained several observations reflecting British conceptions of foreign policy in Asia, rather than objective views on India's role in Asia and its foreign policy. The British took for granted that Britain's and India's views and requirements were coincident. The entire scope of the report was to suggest possible solutions to prevent the USSR's advance to India, from any side, at the cost of pointing at odd, even unscrupulous outcomes. China's authority on Sinkiang, for instance, was described as a safeguard for India against Russia's advance. To reach this objective, it was necessary

to maintain the integrity of Chinese rule in this region. An incidental result of the continuance of Chinese authority in Sinkiang should be the permanent denial of Tibet to any possible extension of Russian influence towards Lhasa from north.<sup>111</sup>

Sinkiang and Tibet were therefore strictly connected. The External Affairs Department was ready to sacrifice Tibet to safeguard India:

His Majesty's Government and the Government of India are prepared to recognize China as the suzerain of Tibet; but in view of the evident wishes of the Tibetan people, past history, and the absence of any national uniformity between Tibetans and Chinese, only in return for Chinese recognition of the Tibetan claim to autonomous status.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

When referring to the Government of India, it is not clear if the British officer who drew up the report referred to British Government in India or to the future Indian government. In the second case, even if the reaction of the government of independent India after the Chinese invasion of Tibet was comparatively soft, it does not mean that India fully recognised China's step. India's reaction to China's invasion of Tibet was probably dictated more by *real politik* than by any other consideration. It was also naïve to believe China would recognise Tibet as an autonomous region in the proper sense. Interestingly, China was considered less threatening than the Soviet Union.

Nepal was described as an Indian realm,<sup>113</sup> probably also in the attempt to counterbalance China's authority over Tibet and to contain the possible extension of China's authority over Nepal as well.

It is interesting to notice that Burma's importance to India was more military than economic:

Burma commands the Bay of Bengal and its occupation by a foreign power is no less perilous to India than would be that of Afghanistan.<sup>114</sup>

"Indo-China" and "Siam" were also considered buffer states, vital for India's defence.<sup>115</sup> To preserve a similar order, India needed some allies. With "a defence problem of such complexity, India cannot expect, in the first years of its autonomy, to achieve its objects without the aid of allies".<sup>116</sup> The only

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

possible ally was obviously Great Britain,<sup>117</sup> and the Commonwealth offered the framework:

In the past century this has been secured by the British Navy in union with the man-power and resources of India; and a common system united all South Asia from Suez to Singapore. With the transformation of the British Commonwealth a new organization and a new system is required; and India may not unjustly aspire to a leading role in this political construction, being the base from which tranquility must radiate over southern Asia. But, before India is committed to any international security grouping, it is necessary to consider how far an inter-Commonwealth defence organization can provide for any regional arrangement. Some form of regional organization may prove to be an essential of the modern world, and India's legitimate interest is to ensure that its demarcation is favorable.<sup>118</sup>

However, "an Indian Ocean security or economic region is unlikely to evolve of itself; it will need the backing of the Commonwealth".<sup>119</sup>

Most of the assumptions contained in this booklet reflected Britain's needs rather than India's requirements. The British expected the safeguard of India's interests in Asia would allow the continuation of Britain's influence on the region, even if India became independent.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. and Memorandum on post-war security in Indian Ocean, unsigned, undated. In the booklet, it follows the War Department Memorandum in reply to a paper.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

***Thinking out a possible partition: The Mody-Matthai memorandum***

Immediately after the end of World War II, the British authorities began to prepare the transfer of powers and to familiarise with the idea of Pakistan. In September 1945, Sir Homi Mody<sup>120</sup> and John Matthai<sup>121</sup> released “A Memorandum on the Economic and Financial Aspects of Pakistan”.<sup>122</sup> The

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<sup>120</sup> Sir Hormasji Peroshaw Mody (1881-1969), better known as Homi Modi, was a famous and influential Parsi industrialist, banker and politician. Among other appointments, Homi Mody was the Chairman of the Bombay Millowners Association in 1927 and from 1929 to 1934 and Chairman of the Indian Merchants Chamber in 1928. He was appointed Director of the Tata Group in 1939 and served the company until 1959. Homi Mody was a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1929 to 1943 and from 1941 to 1943 a member of the viceroy’s Executive Council with the Supply Portfolio, Governor of Bombay in 1947 and Governor of Uttar Pradesh from 1949 to 1952. He distanced himself from the Congress because, as a “constitutionalist”, he did not appreciate Gandhian “political philosophy and methods” : Stanley A. Kochanek, *Business and Politics in India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974, p. 145 and [upgovernor.gov.in](http://upgovernor.gov.in).

<sup>121</sup> John Matthai (1886-1959) was an outstanding economist from Kerala. He was appointed member of the Tariff Board in 1925 and subsequently its Chairman. Matthai had several public appointments as an expert in finance, commerce, and statistics. He was appointed member of the Finance Committee of the provisional Government in 1946 and, after the independence, he had been the first Finance Minister of India. Matthai held this position until 1951, when he returned to Kerala. Subsequently he was appointed Vice Chancellor of Kerala University: [www.jmctsr.org](http://www.jmctsr.org).

<sup>122</sup> IOR, R/3/1/105, the memorandum is printed and dated 12 September 1945.

memorandum had been originally submitted to the Sapru Committee,<sup>123</sup> of which Mody and Matthai were members. Modi's and Matthai's task was to verify the economic sustainability of Pakistan. In public debates, it was generally assumed that separation would "weaken the resources of the country and impair its capacity of defence"<sup>124</sup> and jeopardise both India and Pakistan. The memorandum was largely inspired by Reginald Coupland's text *The Constitutional Problem in India*.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> The Sapru Committee was appointed in November 1944 by the Standing Committee of the Non-party Conference. The Committee had the task to examine the communal problem under the judicial and constitutional point of view, after the breakdown of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, who chaired the Committee, selected 29 members representing all communities. In its final session, in April 1945, the Committee passed fifteen resolutions were, among other, the partition of India was strongly opposed, the abolition of separate electorates was demanded and it was established that no province or state was entitled to secede. The committee also submitted to Viceroy Lord Wavell a list of fundamental rights to be included in the future Constitution.

Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru (1875-1949) was an outstanding lawyer and a statesman born in Aligarh, from a Kashmiri Brahmin family. Sapru was a pro-British liberal who received several appointments within the Indian Government. He had been member of the Governor General Executive Council and worked at the Round Table Conference in London. Throughout the constitutional debate, Tej Bahadur played a moderating role between Muslims and Hindus. In spite of his opposition to the Congress policy and the Gandhian nonviolent mass campaigns, he was respected as an eminent jurist by the Congress politicians.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>125</sup> Reginald Coupland, *The Constitutional Problem in India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1945.

Mody and Matthai took for granted that the zones which would have merged with Pakistan were Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab and the NWFP to the west and Assam and Bengal to the east. However, at the moment of writing the memorandum, it was not yet clear which method would have been chosen to “demarcate” the boundaries of Pakistan. Before entering a detailed study of the economic features of the lands that should form Pakistan, the memorandum took into consideration three possible ways of aggregating the territories of the future state:

- a. the entire provinces with Muslim majorities would join Pakistan
- b. only “contiguous districts” in each province, rather than entire provinces, would join Pakistan.

According to the second solution, the “districts with a predominantly non-Muslim population” would “remain attached to the rest of India”.<sup>126</sup>

A third possibility was the “demarcation of Pakistan according to economic zones”, based on Coupland’s recommendations to divide India along “natural economic regions” represented by the basins of the Indus and the Ganges, the deltaic region, and the Deccan Plateau. This delimitation was approximately but not totally coincident with the province-wise demarcation.

Apart from considerations on the revenue-expenditure relation in the different solutions, the memorandum established that, under the agricultural point of view, the position of Pakistan was somehow better than that of India, because the western part of Pakistan was comparatively more advanced. From the commercial point of view, in case of district-wise separation,

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<sup>126</sup> A Memorandum on the Economic, p. 2.

Pakistan would suffer from the loss of the port of Calcutta, which would be hardly compensated by the development of Karachi and Chittagong.

As far as industrial development was concerned, Pakistan was less favoured than India, on which it had to rely for the production of certain consumption goods. Both Pakistan areas lacked iron and manganese, but they had “great possibilities as regards the development of hydro-electric power”.<sup>127</sup>

The “crux of the problem” was defence. The “establishment of new frontiers between Pakistan and Hindustan” would increase the expenditure on defence.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, “With a powerful Soviet Russia on the north-west and a new China on the east”, it was unreasonable to reduce the defence expenditure. The two zones of Pakistan as an independent state could maintain the existing standards of public administration and living, but their revenues would not be sufficient to secure an adequate defence of the country. An “agreed policy between Pakistan and the rest of India in the sphere of economic development and defence”<sup>129</sup> was therefore strongly recommended. Interestingly, Mody and Matthai were looking at rising forms of economic cooperation in Europe as an example.

Obviously, a united India was preferable to a truncated one. The only acceptable alternative was the development of a free trade area between India and Pakistan:

India satisfies the requirements of an optimum unit for economic development in terms of area, population and resources more than any other single country in the world except the United States of

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.



America and Soviet Russia. In spite of her population of 389 million, the density of population in India taken as a whole is smaller than in most countries of the world. She has enough space of her own and the variety of climates and soils makes it possible for her to produce most agricultural commodities in general use. The mineral resources of the country, though in certain respects deficient, are on the whole adequate to make her a “powerful and reasonably self-sufficient industrial nation”. Her population again constitutes a sufficiently large potential market. These advantages will be lost if India is divided into separate states without a common economic policy.<sup>130</sup>

Partition was still seen as an extreme choice:

From the point of view of defence and of economic development, with which defence is closely bound under modern conditions, it is therefore inevitable, if the division of India into separate states is found necessary for political reasons, that Pakistan and the rest of India should continue to act in close cooperation in these essential matters.<sup>131</sup>

However extreme, this choice was increasingly taken into consideration by the British rulers. This memorandum influenced the point of view of the British authorities, as proved by the subsequent correspondence, which resumed several concepts developed by Mody and Matthai.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

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***Thinking out a possible partition: The October 1945  
External Affairs Ministry memorandum***

In October 1945, the External Affairs Department drew up a memorandum entitled “The next step in India”.<sup>132</sup> With reference to the election planned for 1946 and the struggle between the League and the Congress regarding the Muslim homeland, the memorandum acknowledged the complex situation in Bengal, Punjab and the NWFP. In these provinces, the Muslim League was not certain to gain the majority and, even in case the Muslim League could secede in these areas, its victory would be based on unstable coalitions. Before setting up the Constituent Assembly and starting the constitutional debate, it was necessary to bring “the parties together on some minimum basis of agreement”. A decision could be taken in advance regarding Muslims:

So far as the Muslims are concerned, the principle of a Muslim homeland should be accepted subject to territorial adjustment to meet the claim of the Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab and of Hindus in Bengal.<sup>133</sup>

The memorandum suggested the boundaries of the new states should be defined by an international commission of experts, which, however, never materialised.

Regarding the second decision:

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., the memorandum is dated 10.10.1945 and is enclosed to a handwritten note from the External Affairs Department, India Office, to Sir E. Jenkins, 15 October 1945, signed by G. Wint, who wrote in absence of Olaf Caroe. Sir. Evan Jenkins was the Governor of Punjab.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

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2) It should also be laid down so far as the States are concerned that the monarchical form of government and the continuation of existing dynasties will not be open to discussion in the Constituent Assembly.<sup>134</sup>

As far as the first decision was concerned, the India Office asserted it was necessary to secure the Congress acceptance of the proposal before approaching Jinnah. The British believed the Congress would not refuse the proposal that was, according to them, very similar to the offer that Gandhi made to Jinnah a year earlier.<sup>135</sup>

External affairs issues should be negotiated on the basis of a specific treaty which should deal with three aspects:

- (a) The strategic and military arrangements between India and England in the future;
- (b) British commercial interests in India and Indian commercial interests in the British Empire;
- (c) special obligations of the British Government in India if any.<sup>136</sup>

The treaty should be drafted in a way to avoid the feeling among the Indians that the British Government was “limiting India’s freedom” and “imposing new shakle (sic) on her”. It was necessary “to disarm suspicion in India”.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

At the end of 1945, the British authorities took into consideration the practical aspects of a possible partition. In the memorandum “Demarcation of ‘Pakistan’ areas”<sup>138</sup> the distribution of population on the North West and North East of India was examined, with an analysis of percentages of majorities and minorities in the respective areas, according to the ethnic and religious groups. The scheme included the provinces that in 1947 effectively formed Pakistan. It defined two areas: a Western zone embracing the NWFP, “British Baluchistan”, and the cities of Multan, Rawalpindi and Lahore, which subsequently would be incorporated into the Pakistan part of Punjab; and an Eastern zone including “the Rajshahi, Dacca, and Chittagong divisions of Bengal” and Assam. This “demarcation” predated the effective scheme of partition of 1947. Moreover, it referred to Pakistan as a “separate state” including the above-mentioned areas, unlike the cabinet Mission Plan of 16 May 1946, which referred to the same territories as Muslim-majority provinces within a united Dominion of India.

### ***The chiefs of staff's red lines for the Cabinet Mission***

The Cabinet Mission, wanted by the newly elected Prime Minister Clement Attlee in early 1946, was a final step towards the transfer of power within a constitutional frame aimed at overcoming the opposition between the Congress and the Muslim League about India's future political settlement. The Cabinet Mission arrived in India on 14 March 1946. The works of the

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid. The memorandum is unsigned and undated, but it might have been written at the beginning of 1946. It is enclosed to a letter to Abell dated 23 January 1946, signature unclear, most probably Loneman.

delegation had been carefully prepared and followed by the Chiefs of Staff Committee. On 1st March 1946, the India Office required the chiefs of staff's "views on certain questions concerning the defence of India for information of the Cabinet Minister's delegation which is leaving for that country in the near future".<sup>139</sup> In view of "a change in the status of India", the India Office considered the possibility of maintaining relations with India under a treaty. The chiefs of staffs' reply was very careful:

Our military and political policy must develop concurrently; it will not therefore be possible for us to go into any detail until the political provisions of any treaty have been further elaborated, and we do not consider that we should at this stage do more than state the general principles which must govern our military policy in relation to a self-governing India.<sup>140</sup>

This wait-and-see policy was meant to give room to the adoption of the most suitable solution pending future political developments in India. According to this principle, the British could not "afford to allow the negotiations to break down" and, in case of difficulties, they should modify their requirements, rather than abandon the negotiations.

However, the chiefs of staff clearly drew what they viewed as red lines that could not be crossed lest the whole defence system in South Asia crumbled. These red lines included as a main objective the continuing control of Indian airfields and ports on the west coast, "essential for the effective control of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf".

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<sup>139</sup> IOR, L/WS/1/1044, report of Joint Planning Staff, India – Future Defence Requirements, 11 March 1946.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

India is the natural supporting base for British forces operating in the Persian Gulf area or in South East Asia (Burma, Siam, French Indo-China and Malaya). In addition, it is a vital link in our air communications in the Far East. Moreover, the airfields in N.W. India are the nearest we have to the industrial areas of the Urals and Western Siberia”.<sup>141</sup>

Also, India was important for its “industrial and supply potential”. This had been enhanced by the realisation that, at that time “the largest known reserves of thorium, an element of increasing importance in the exploitation of atomic energy”, had just been discovered in Travancore.<sup>142</sup>

It was expected India would join the British Commonwealth, which was viewed by the British planners as assuming an increasing importance in British defence policy after the end of the war. India would benefit from an alliance with Britain in terms of military assistance and protection as well as modernisation of the armed forces and equipment, and maintenance of internal security. British forces should station in India for some time after independence and use India as a “base” for British operations in the area.

As an alternative, it was supposed to sign a treaty with India, which should cover an area “lying between the Middle East and the present South-East Asia”<sup>143</sup> and involved the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Nepal, Ceylon, and Burma. It should be a Regional Security Agreement under article 52 of the United Nations Charter. The implementation of the treaty should be conditioned

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., draft of a note The Treaty – Defence provisions from the India Office, dated 1946, certainly of April-May.

by a new Constitution and the negotiations for the constitution and the treaty should proceed simultaneously. The India Office was aware that “the details of the agreement are likely to be highly contentious” and might encounter the opposition of Indian leaders. The requirements were “that India should be internally at peace” and, in case of war, have a government capable to have a central unified control to co-ordinate the military operations and supplies. India “should maintain adequate sufficient and well-equipped land forces” and gradually develop sea and air forces. One of the most objectionable points was

India should agree to the stationing in India both in peace and war of a strategic reserve of British land and air forces to assist in regional defence but not available for internal security duties. The use of these troops would have to be controlled by an authority responsible to H.M.G. and they would have to be under the direct administration of H.M.G. in every respect.<sup>144</sup>

Consequently, India should provide installations, especially aerodromes, facilities, and accommodation for the stationing British forces. A combined British and Indian command should be set up, “under a Supreme Commander appointed by H.M.G.”, who should respond to both governments. A sufficient number of senior British officers should be retained in India, “in order to ensure the continued efficiency of the Indian forces”. The Indian government could receive the services of British forces for frontier operations, under consultation at all stages of “a British authority responsible to H.M.G.” and “approval to their use”. Although this requirement was not conditioned by the constitutional settlement, it might be

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

felt that the North-East Frontier is of such importance to regional security that H.M.G. should undertake a continuing obligation in respect of it.

It would not seem possible to accept an arrangement under which an Indian government has unfettered discretion in frontier policy and policy towards Afghanistan and at the same time is able to call upon British troops and air forces to deal with incursions and disturbances arising in the field of that policy.<sup>145</sup>

A financial agreement should be reached regarding the incidence of costs of the British troops stationing in India. The India Office was aware this point was “highly controversial” because any new Indian government was likely to refuse “the continuance of defence expenditure at the pre-war levels”. A possible arrangement was, as during the war, that India meet the expenditure of the maintenance of the troops while Great Britain provided equipment and training. Regarding the defence of India and Britain’s economic and strategic interests in India and the Middle East, the Labour’s aims and its “commitment to empire”<sup>146</sup> did not differ from those of the Conservatives. Attlee, who was defence minister until 1946, accorded to defence the same priority of his Conservative predecessor.

At this stage, Pakistan still represented a complication because it was considered “indefensible and probably incapable of maintaining the forces required” and, in case Pakistan would be overrun, India would be indefensible as well. However, Pakistan was not totally rejected as a possible option. In case Pakistan materialised, only advisable an adequate co-ordination between Indian and Pakistan forces was advisable. The most

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> A. Inder Singh, *The Origins*, cit., pp. 145-146.



attractive aspect was that, most probably, Pakistan under Jinnah's leadership would opt to remain within the British empire and to join the British Commonwealth, and, ultimately, be part of the British defence system:

H.M.G. should not commit themselves in advance to implement the outcome of each of two separate Constitution-making Bodies if in the result two such Bodies have to be set up. There is reason to think that Jinnah envisages Pakistan within the Empire and receiving substantial defence assistance from H.M.G. On this assumption he relies upon the passage in the Cripps' Offer which says that non-acceding Provinces may retain their existing constitutional position but shall receive the same full status as the Indian Union.<sup>147</sup>

On 11 April, the Cabinet delegation sent a telegram to the British Government, addressed to the prime minister and the viceroy. The telegram started as follows:

On our directive we are enjoined to see that any scheme that we accept makes adequate provision for the defence of India and the adjoining areas.<sup>148</sup>

***The Cabinet Mission's negotiation and the relevance of the strategic imperative***

The delegation had already prepared Schemes A and B to be discussed: respectively a united India with Hindu majority and Muslim majority provinces, or two separate states, a Hindu

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<sup>147</sup> IOR, L/WS/1/1044, draft note The Treaty.

<sup>148</sup> IOR, R/3/1/105, telegram from Cabinet Delegation to Cabinet Office, 11th April 1946.

majority India and a Muslim majority Pakistan. The delegation related the two options to the defence of India.<sup>149</sup> In case of separation,

the defence would not be very effective as small Pakistan would itself be weak and it would be strengthened only in so far as it would rely upon its treaty with Hindustan.<sup>150</sup>

According to the Cabinet Mission delegates, under Scheme B, the two countries would be tied up by a “Treaty of alliance offensive and defensive”.

The Cabinet delegation was under pressure to find an agreement, because it was “the first requirement towards an effective Defence”. If an agreement would not be reached, the delegation feared widespread chaos in India as a consequence and the impossibility of implementing the defence of the region. The Cabinet delegation would prefer an agreement under Scheme A, but this might “prove impossible of attainment”.

We hope, therefore, that you will agree to our working for an agreement on the basis of Scheme B if this seems to us to be the only chance of agreed settlement.<sup>151</sup>

The viceroy approved this line of conduct.<sup>152</sup> The prime

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<sup>149</sup> As known, Scheme A entailed a united India “with a loose federation at the Centre charged primarily with control of Defence and Foreign Affairs”. Scheme B featured two separate countries. Pakistan should include the Muslim majority Provinces: Baluchistan, Sind, NWFP and Western Punjab in the North West; Eastern Bengal excluded Calcutta, the Syalkot District of Assam in the North East. *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

minister acknowledged a settlement under Scheme A was preferable, but if Scheme B was the only possible chance of agreement, he allowed the delegation to work for a settlement under Scheme B.

The prime minister explained the views of the chiefs of staff, who reckoned that “a loose all India federation”<sup>153</sup> was far better than the adoption of Scheme B, but recognised it was impossible to achieve. An agreement on Scheme B was preferable than “no agreement at all”, in spite of the “disadvantages” it involved. The main flaw in Scheme B was that

Pakistan lies across the two entrances to India from Peshwar (sic) to the sea in the West and from the Himalayas to the sea in the East. In her hand would lie the responsibility to bar or open the road into Hindustan. Air bases from which India can be attacked lie in Soviet (sic) Central Asia and in Western China. The easiest and quickest routes to the large cities of India from these bases lie over the territories of Pakistan, both in the West and East of India. Similarly the air bases from which counter-measures can be taken lie mainly in Pakistan. It can therefore be said that the territory of Pakistan is vital to the defence of India as a whole.<sup>154</sup>

One of the main shortcomings of Scheme B was that separation would destroy the integrity of the Indian army “which is now strong and well-equipped”. The chiefs of staff envisaged the risk that, if divided, the forces of India, Pakistan, and the States would just combine their respective weakness and develop separate tactical views and objectives. Even in the slight chance that all acted in favour of the defence of India, the “co-operation

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., telegram from the prime minister to the cabinet delegation and the viceroy, personal and top secret, received on 13 April 1946.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

would be far from easy unless all acknowledged a central directing authority". Furthermore, the area that would form Pakistan had no industrial infrastructures: Karachi was "at the end of a long and vulnerable railway" and Chittagong was "in a similar exposed position". The chiefs of staff predicted Pakistan would rely upon India for the production of arms in case of war. It was expected Pakistan would not be capable to defend India in case of war.<sup>155</sup>

To sum up, Scheme B will have to be accepted if the only alternative is complete failure to reach agreement and consequent chaos. But India will be confronted by grave dangers as a result of this partition, and if Scheme B has to be adopted, every effort should be made to obtain agreement for some form of Central Defence Council to be set up which will include not only Pakistan Hindustan and the Indian States, but also Burma and Ceylon.<sup>156</sup>

After the failure of the 16 May Plan that, ultimately, was based on Scheme A, the settlement of India went on according to Scheme B. The final result of the Cabinet Mission was, therefore, the sanction of India's partition.<sup>157</sup>

***The British (failed) search for a treaty of mutual military assistance between the U.K. and independent India***

During the negotiations, it became increasingly clear that Nehru would head the Indian government once independence

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> The subject of the Cabinet Mission negotiation is too wide to be properly treated here. For a comprehensive study of India's partition see A. Inder Singh, *The Origins*, pp. 142-235.

was reached. This created uncertainty among British authorities. Although, during the Cabinet Mission negotiations, the British delegates and the viceroy seemed to lean towards Nehru and the Congress, they were nevertheless concerned about Nehru's views regarding India's foreign policy and future relations with the United Kingdom. On 20 May 1946, the chiefs of staff discussed a letter received from General Auchinleck, where he warned that the "new Indian Government" might demand the withdrawal of the British forces, including the R.A.F., from India.<sup>158</sup> This event

would have very serious implications as regards the availability of communications and bases between the Middle East and South East Asia Zones.<sup>159</sup>

In a subsequent report, the chiefs of staff carefully examined the event that "a centralised Indian government comes into power, which will provide for unified control of defence"<sup>160</sup> and required the withdrawal of British forces. India's strategic importance was described as follows:

- (a) India possesses great man-power resources. We shall therefore require to use India as a main support area.<sup>161</sup>
- (b) Airfields in India provide the nearest bases for attack on industrial areas of the Urals and Western Siberia, and are essential for the maintenance of our communications to the Far East.

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<sup>158</sup> IOR, L/WS/1/1044, Chiefs of Staff Committee Report Implications of withdrawal of British troops from India, 21 May 1946.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, Chiefs of Staff Committee report Withdrawal of British Forces from India – Effects on strategic requirements, 20 June 1946.

<sup>161</sup> The British and American strategists and army officers had become aware of India's importance as a supply base during the war.

(c) Bases in India are important to our command of the Indian Ocean, in particular to the maintenance of our communications to South East Asia and the Persian Gulf.<sup>162</sup>

For these reasons, Indian armed forces should remain modern and efficient, while India should be politically stable, “to ensure her security as a military base and as a source of both manpower and industrial war potential”.<sup>163</sup> The British Military expected to be able to rapidly introduce British forces in case of war and India would accept British military assistance.

These observations became the basis to draft a treaty of mutual military assistance between Great Britain and India. Between 20 June and the beginning of July 1946, the Joint Planning Staff was preparing the military clauses to be included in the treaty with India. Civilian and military staff from the India Office, the Joint Planning Staff, and the War Staff were discussing the issue.<sup>164</sup>

Article 1 of the first draft of the treaty established

The Government of the United Kingdom ... and the Government of India ... recognize that the defence of their territories is of vital importance to the one no less than to the other, and they accordingly agree thereby to consult and co-operate to each other to the fullest possible extent in all matters relating thereto.<sup>165</sup>

India should undertake to allow the British forces to supplement the Indian air and naval forces, in case of inter-

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<sup>162</sup> IOR, L/WS/1/1044, Withdrawal of British Forces from India.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, letter from T. Haddon, Ministry of Defence to Sir David Monteath, 2 July 1946. David Monteath (1887-1961) was a civil servant working at the India Office and the last Permanent Undersecretary for India and Burma (1941-1948).

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national emergency, and to “provide the operational and administrative base facilities required for the support of the British forces”<sup>166</sup> operating in India or in the adjacent areas. A list of the “mutually agreed” bases was enclosed to the text as Annexure C, but unfortunately it is not in the file. In particular, the Indian government was supposed “to agree to grant to the British Government ... the use of airfields for long range strategic bombers”.<sup>167</sup> The Indian forces had to remain modern and efficient to assist the British forces and, for this purpose, the Indian government should accept the assistance of British officers and instructors. The British government undertook to provide “arms, ammunitions, equipment, ships and aeroplanes of the latest available pattern”.<sup>168</sup> The British forces should “be under their own Commanders”, appointed by and directly responsible to the British government. The cost of equipment and assistance should be met by the Indian government. The conclusion of the treaty was the “condition of implementing the new constitution”.<sup>169</sup> Such a Treaty has never been subscribed, at least not that version. This was a basic draft, probably subject to development after negotiations with Indian leaders.

When drafting the treaty, the British officers counted the chickens before they hatched. They expected to “freely” negotiate the treaty with the new Indian government, but they

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, Draft articles of agreement for a Treaty between the United Kingdom and India – first draft, marked “Top Secret”.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, Note on meeting with Sir D. Monteath, Sir W. Croft, General Mayne and representatives of the War Staff and Political Department on the 29 July, 1946.

were also aware that “negotiations of its actual terms” might carry “some distance with the Interim Government”.<sup>170</sup>

Nehru had already expressed his views regarding the treaty in unequivocal terms at the 10 July press interview:

When the Congress stated that the constituent was to be a sovereign body, the Cabinet Mission’s reply was more or less “yes”, subject to two considerations: first, a proper arrangement for the minorities, and secondly, a treaty between India and England. I wish the Mission had stated that both these matters were not controversial. ... It is also obvious that if there is any kind of peaceful changeover, in India, it is bound to result in some kind of a treaty with Britain.

What exactly the treaty will be I cannot say. But if the British Government presume to tell us they are going to hold anything in India, because they do not agree either in regard to the minorities or in regard to the treaty, we should not accept that position ... if there is the slightest attempt at imposition, we shall have no treaty ... and, therefore, these two limiting factors to the sovereignty of the constituent assembly are not acceptable to us.<sup>171</sup>

The attitude of the Indian leaders, and in particular of Nehru, made the high ranks of the British army and administration uncertain about future military co-operation with the Indian government. On 30 August 1946 Lord Ismay wrote to the prime minister, warning that if India opted for independence, rather choosing the dominion status,

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> A. Inder Singh, *The Origins*, Quoting S. Gopal, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, New Delhi, 1972-1979, pp. 242-243.



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the chances of obtaining even our minimum requirements are remote, since the Indians will probably be just as suspicious and jealous of their new found sovereignty as the Egyptians had been.<sup>172</sup>

Regarding Nehru's position, the British military staff could not ignore that

Nehru has already referred in public statements that it is in his intention that India should remain detached from both the two main blocks in world affairs and should not become "the plaything of the great powers". It might well seem to an independent Indian Government that their interest lies in remaining neutral in any world conflict, that they are not vulnerable from any direction except from Russia through Afghanistan, and that if we become involved in war with Russia we should not have the strength necessary to protect India from being overrun in the early stages.<sup>173</sup>

***India's partition as the most convenient option for the preservation of British interests in South Asia***

After the failure of the Cabinet Mission, the British government knew partition was almost unavoidable and suspected that the Congress would not accept any external

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<sup>172</sup> IOR, L/WS/1/1044, Copy of a minute (C.O.S. 1046/8) dated 30 August 1946, from General Ismay to the prime minister. Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay (1887-1965) was a prominent British Indian army officer and a close assistant and military adviser of Winston Churchill. He served with equal loyalty and impartiality also Labour prime ministers.

<sup>173</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1045, Notes for Sir David Monteath at Chiefs of Staff meeting, unsigned, undated but presumably from September 1946.

interference or conditioning in its defence and foreign policy. The British military officers maintained the apparently non-committal attitude they adopted when the Cabinet Mission negotiations started and they maintained it until the eve of India's independence and partition, in June 1947. Not only did they not openly suggest to Indian leaders to opt for partition, but they did not even openly discuss it among themselves and did not publicly support any decision favouring it.

However, between the end of 1946 and June 1947, they carefully examined four alternatives: a united and independent India within the British defence shelter; a united and independent India outside it; a united independent India within the British Commonwealth; and a fourth alternative, profusely discussed between September 1946 and June 1947, namely partition. The military implications of this event were examined and finally this option cancelled all others: if partition materialised, the requirement to make India part of either the British defence system or the British Commonwealth was less compelling. The British military and politicians had carefully considered the possibility that India entered the Commonwealth since 1944, and had carefully and systematically scrutinised all options, included partition between April 1946 and the summer of 1947.<sup>174</sup> These options were examined and discussed against the backdrop represented by the British government's overriding objective of preserving Britain's hegemony in South and Western Asia after the end of World War II.

Britain privileged an Asian order gravitating toward a united India, but since 1942, when British interests in South Asia seemed to be at risk not because of the war but because of India desire of unconditioned political freedom, the British government

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<sup>174</sup> The correspondence contained in IOR L/WS/I/985 and L/WS/I/1044, for instance, is redundant of records on the subject.

developed an alternative solution, based on the partition of the Indian subcontinent. In other words, when it was clear that the most convenient option for the preservation of Britain's economic and strategic requirements in the region was India's partition, the British administrators allowed it, without doing much to avoid it and without doing much to avoid the human tragedy and all political consequences that followed.

Claude Auchinleck, who strongly opposed the partition of the army, ultimately contemplated the possibility to detach parts of territory of the Anglo-Indian Empire for British strategic requirements. In a note of April 1945, Auchinleck observed Baluchistan had "few facilities" at that time but, although roads, railways, a port and more airfields were required, these shortcomings were not insuperable. Even though irrigation should be improved by modern technical systems, the country was considered "extremely fertile" and its climate good. Ultimately, strategic considerations prevailed on concerns. General Auchinleck wondered whether a self-governing India would

include Baluchistan in its boundaries. The country is a financial burden on India at present – the inhabitants are not Indians – the language is not Indian – in fact Baluchistan pertains to Central Asia rather than to India. The population is sparse and it might be possible to colonise the country with Poles or other Europeans who can not (sic) find asylum elsewhere.

The advantage of Baluchistan as an "Imperial" enclave containing a strategic land reserve of air and land forces would be great indeed not only to the whole Commonwealth so far as our interests in Southern Asia and the Indian Ocean are concerned but also to India which it would automatically protect against invasion from Afghanistan.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> IOR L/WS/1/985, Note on Baluchistan as an "Imperial" enclave,

Baluchistan would become the largest of the four provinces which formed Pakistan.

The viceroy and the high ranks of the British army, who until the last moment were uncertain if independent India would be divided or united, endorsed the partition when, at a meeting with Lord Mountbatten in early May 1947, Jinnah undertook that Pakistan would opt for the Dominion Status, and therefore remain within the British Commonwealth.<sup>176</sup>

According to Anita Inder Singh,

The British favoured a transfer of power to a united India, which would keep the army undivided, and be of the greatest advantage to them strategically.<sup>177</sup>

This is certainly true, but it is equally true that the British did not seriously oppose the idea of Pakistan and, with their apparently inept attitude, ultimately favoured its creation. After all, with India's partition, Britain could take advantage from either state: of both wings of Pakistan for their strategic position, and of India for its prestige and resources.

There is no evidence that Great Britain had an active role in causing partition. The British authorities have not conspired to divide India. They have never loudly proclaimed its necessity

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signed by the Command in Chief in India, General Auchinleck. The record refers to a report PHP (45) 15 (O) of April 1945 concerning Baluchistan and is among papers of 1946.

<sup>176</sup> IOR L/WS/1/1030, Copy of a minute from dominion secretary to the prime minister dated 9 May 1947. The examination of the sources relating to the final events that brought to India's partition and to the issue of India entering the Commonwealth is still going on. The findings will be published in a subsequent essay.

<sup>177</sup> A. Inder Singh, *The Origins*, p. 151.

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and have never publicly supported it. However, they have discussed it confidentially, especially from the second half of 1946. This discussion resulted in the conclusion that, if a decision between unity and partition was required, Britain's defence interests were the priority, even at the cost of dividing the Indian subcontinent.<sup>178</sup> If British interests could not be ensured by a united India, they should be by Pakistan. When it became clear that Pakistan could better secure Britain's interests, the viceroy and his staff suddenly decided to divide India. This was in Spring 1947.

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<sup>178</sup> IOR, R/3/1/105, telegram from Cabinet Delegation to Cabinet Office, 11th April 1946.

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