

British Policy and the Transfer of Power in India

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Abstract

The political and economic situation that developed at the global front during the Second World War, coupled with the political consciousness and the anti-colonial attitude of the Indians, was a clear indication of the ultimate pack up of the British rule from India. Initially, the British tried different options to sustain or at least to prolong their departure, but eventually Prime Minister Attlee announced the decision of the British withdrawal on February 20, 1947. To execute the idea, Mountbatten was selected and was sent as the last British Viceroy to India. It was expected from the man with a career of unbroken success, that he would not only transfer the power in a peaceful environment but would also take all stakeholder on board while making the decisions. However, Mountbatten's friendship with Nehru and tilt towards the Congress has left many question marks on his credibility as well as on the objectivity of the process. His decision to fast forward the partition process resulted in a massive bloodshed on short term basis and permanent hatred and disputes for the generations to come. History of South Asia might have been different had the British adopted a policy for the transfer of power in India with better intensions and planning.

Key Words: British Policy, Partition Plan, Transfer of Power, Mountbatten, Nehru, Jinnah.

The post-World War II era witnessed the end of colonial rule in most parts of Asian and African continents. South Asia was no exception. The British realized that with the economic and military resources they were left with, it was difficult for them to control the expansive territory that was at a great distance from their country. The rise of political consciousness among the Indian natives and the beginning of anti-colonial political process further complicated the situation for the British. The economic conditions in South Asia were deteriorating and unemployment was increasing. Moreover, the reports of unrest among the youth, peasants and labors, and the communal riots that broke out first in Bengal and Bihar in 1946 followed by some other parts of India and then the ever increasing communal tension in the Punjab in early

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1947 made the British, specially the newly elected Labor government under Prime Minister, Clement Richard Attlee, realize that the earlier they made an announcement to leave India, the better it would be for them.

With the failure of the Cabinet Mission in 1946, Archibald Percival Wavell, the Viceroy of India, suggested to the Home Government that the British must recognize their failure to arrange a compromise and withdraw from India latest by March 31, 1948. He recommended that the withdrawal of the British should be a stage-wise process. He further suggested that the gradual withdrawal should start from the Hindu majority provinces and the British should leave the Muslim majority provinces in the north of India at the last stage (Connell, 1959: 852). The British Government rejected the plan presented by Wavell. However, the Government was seriously considering the British withdrawal from India at the earliest as they were well aware of the fact that the administrative machinery in India was fast running down.

After analyzing the situation, the British finally announced their decision to quit India on February 20, 1947. Attlee, addressing the British parliament said, "His Majesty's Government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transference of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948". He accepted the failure of Cabinet Mission to resolve the Indian problem, but he put the entire blame on the Indian political parties, Congress and the Muslim League, who to him, because of their differences were "preventing the Constituent Assembly from functioning as it was intended that it should". Though indirectly, in his statement Attlee had to admit the weakness of the British Government in maintaining law and order in their biggest colony (Ali, 2012: 43-46). Attlee's statement was by and large welcomed by both people and leaders in India. Nehru termed it as a "wise and courageous document." (Mansergh, 1980: 785-786). Jinnah also appreciated the British decision to quit. However, he had his reservations on the lack of clear cut policy regarding the future of Muslim majority areas in the statement.

The decision was made and announced but the important task of the execution of the plan was yet to be done. The modus operandi was to be worked out and the future status of India in post-British withdrawal era was yet to be decided. Here one must not forget that although the British had decided to leave India physically, their political, military and economic interests in the region would continue. The future status of India thus was very important for them and they very consciously wanted to leave India in a manner that suited their long-term interests. Likewise selection of the person to execute their plans in a way that met the requirement was equally important.

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The British as a nation always feel proud of their achievements and in keeping their traditions alive. They considered the unity of India, which was not achieved by any of their predecessors, who ruled the land, as one of their greatest achievements. They wanted to keep their achievement alive even after their departure. Moreover, they considered that the transfer of power to a unitary government with consent of the local political leadership would help them keep the future India within the Commonwealth. As the powerful majority community was strongly opposing the idea of partition, an act of dividing India by the British would offend Congress and result in breakup of relations between the bigger of the two States with Britain. The British also realized that the Indian army had served their interests well during the Second World War and thus to maintain their hold in the Indian Ocean they needed to keep the Indian army intact. They apprehended that in case of partition, the economic cooperation between the British Empire and the newly established States in South Asia would suffer (Ali, 1973: 117-118). The British were therefore convinced that leaving a united India would better serve their long-term political, military and economic interests better.

Attlee considered unitary Government for British India and the Indian States as the “definite objective” of His Majesty’s Government (Mansergh, 1980:972-974) and to implement this objective decided to replace Wavell and bring in a new viceroy to undertake the important task of the transfer of power. All previous efforts made by Wavell to solve political problems in India during 1946, including the Simla Conference, formation of an interim Government and London talks failed to deliver results. It was also an acknowledged fact that Wavell was not popular with the Labor Government. But the main factor that caused the Cabinet in London to take a decision to affect Wavell’s withdrawal was the pressure from Congress (The Times, 1946:November 23).¹ As early as August 1946, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had informed Attlee that Wavell had failed to control the problems in India (Pyarelal, 1958: 257). Jawaharlal Nehru also approached his influential British friends to exert pressure on the British Government for the change of viceroys (Mosley, 1961: 46) and when Wavell was recalled, Nehru was a relaxed man (Brecher, 1959: 337). Attlee, who had doubts in his mind as to whether Wavell and the Indian

¹ Wavell apparently lost popularity with the Congress because they thought that he was taking the side of the Muslim League. They blamed him for not accepting the Congress demand to dismiss the Muslim League Ministry in Bengal during the communal riots of 1946. Also when Muslim League refused to enter the constituent assembly and the Congress insisted on turning the League out of the interim government, Wavell refused to endorse the Congress proposal. However, a careful reading of the personal diary of Wavell makes it clear that he never enjoyed the confidence of Jinnah and the Muslim League.

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politicians “could really understand each other”, (Hodson, 1985: 190) at last made a decision to replace him.

Attlee and his Government, who were looking for somebody to replace Wavell, made an offer to Louis Francis Albert Victor Nicholas Mountbatten, a naval officer and statesman, with a brilliant career of unbroken success, on December 18, 1946. Aware of some potential problems that he could face at the hands of the Indian leadership, Mountbatten made it clear before Attlee that he would only accept the offer if he received an invitation from the Indian leaders or at least be given assurance that they would welcome him. In his meeting with Mountbatten on January 1, 1947, Attlee informed him that it was not feasible to secure an open invitation from the Indian leaders. However, he assured him that he would face no opposition from them either (Hodson, 1985: 194-203). After a long series of discussion between the two and exchange of letters between them, eventually Mountbatten decided to accept the offer.

On March 18, 1947, Mountbatten, the Governor-General designate received his departure orders from Attlee with the instructions that he should do his utmost to persuade all parties to work together to achieve the ultimate goal of “United India within the British Commonwealth”(Mansergh, 1980: 972-974). Here it is pertinent to note that His Majesty’s Government had rejected Wavell’s demand for fixing of a date but acceded to the same demand when made by Mountbatten (Moon, 1974: 457). Mountbatten was also given freedom to act on his initiative as the man on the spot, a right that had been denied to Wavell. Mountbatten had the authority and full support of the British cabinet behind him. This support was so strong that the cabinet went to the extent of replacing Pethick Lawrence as the Secretary of State for India by Earl of Listowell whom Mountbatten found more convenient to work with (Bandopadhyaya, 1991: 315).

Immediately after receiving his departure orders, Mountbatten along with his wife, Edwina, and daughter, Pamela, left for Delhi. He had a two point agenda to implement: i) transfer power to the Indian people, and ii) avoid the partition of India. Mountbatten was convinced that the only way he could satisfy the public opinion in India was to announce as early as possible a generally accepted decision on how power was to be transferred on or before June 1948. He wanted to make an announcement latest before the end of May 1947 (IOR, L/PO/6/123). In order to execute his plan at the earliest, he was in such a hurry that he reached Delhi on March 22, 1947 when Wavell was still there. This was a significant departure from British tradition that the outgoing Governor-General used to depart before the arrival of his replacement so that the new Governor-General would take charge of the office immediately after

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his arrival. Mountbatten had to wait for two days to take over the charge when Wavell left the Indian soil from the port of Karachi on March 24.

Mountbatten wasted no time and started working to find a solution. In line with the briefing he had received from Attlee before his departure to India, he first tried to explore the option of a unitary form of government in accordance with the Cabinet Mission Plan. He met with the Congress, the Muslim League and Sikh leaders. He did not realize how difficult his task was until he met Mohammad Ali Jinnah. After discussing the issue with Jinnah, Mountbatten soon understood that it was not as simple to execute his two-point agenda. In his discussions with Mountbatten, Jinnah urged a “surgical operation” for India (Mansergh, 1981: 137-39). Jinnah made it clear that no other solution except “full Pakistan” could possibly bring peace to India, since anything short of that would result in more strife and bloodshed (Mansergh, 1981: 163-64). Jinnah outrightly rejected the proposals of the Cabinet Mission Plan and called for early hand over of the power (MSS, EUR F. 200/191).

In his six meetings with Jinnah between April 5 and 10, 1947, Mountbatten tried his best to convince Jinnah, but could not find any change in the latter’s opinion. It was troublesome for Mountbatten to realize that Jinnah and his Muslim League were not at all ready to even consider the idea of united India for negotiations. Though himself, yet not convinced of the idea,² Mountbatten decided to look for other options as well (Mansergh, 1981: 295). On April 11, for the first time, he talked about possible partition and directed Hastings Lionellsmay, his Chief of Staff, to work out new plans. (Mansergh, 1981: 192) By mid-April two possible plans for transfer of power were under consideration. One was Plan Union, which was Cabinet Mission plan with few modifications and the second was Plan Balkan which offered a “truncated Pakistan” (Mansergh, 1981: 207-209).

Mountbatten called for the Governor’s Conference on April 15 and 16 and placed Plan Balkan before them for their comments and discussion. In his address to the governors and / or their representatives, he made it clear that the Prime Minister had instructed him not to look after the “British interests during his Viceroyalty” but to make it evident to the world that the decision about the future of India was based on “Indian opinion rather than a British

² In the Governors’ Conference held on April 15 and 16, 1947, Mountbatten said that he was yet not prepared to abandon hope for a United India. He firmly believed that Pakistan could not survive for long but he was providing the Muslim League a chance to fail on its own merits. In his letter to the Secretary of State on April 17 he wrote that “the scheme of Partition should be such as will not debar the two sides from getting together”.

decision". However, he felt that no Indian leader, except Nehru, understood the gravity of the situation. He believed that the "partition of India would be a most serious potential source of war." To him "a quick decision would also give Pakistan a greater chance to fail on its demerits". He added that the "great problem was to reveal the limits of Pakistan so that the Muslim League could revert to unified India with honour."(IOR, L/PO/6/123)

Mountbatten claimed that he consulted the Indian leaders at every step during the development of the new plan, but the reality was bit different. In the light of the opinion of all the eleven governors or their representatives, Mountbatten and the principle members of his personal staff revised the draft plan. It was then that they decided to discuss the outline of the plan with important political leaders. However, according to H.V. Hodson, the actual plan was only shown to Nehru and Jinnah by the Viceroy's Personal Secretary, Eric Mieville (Hodson, 1985: 293). Jinnah actually had to wait for seven days to get the copy of the preliminary draft. After having a look at the draft Jinnah rejected it and bluntly said "that is your scheme, not mine"(IOR, L/PO/6/123). He strongly opposed the idea of the division of the Punjab and Bengal and blamed the British for doing it on Congress' demand. He warned them that by doing so they would "commit a grave error" and predicted that such an act would lead "to terrible consequences, to confusion, to bloodshed" (Dawn, 1947: May 1). Nehru, on the contrary, was overall satisfied with the Plan (IOR, L/PO/ 6/123).

Mountbatten decided to call for a conference at Simla on May 15. The idea was to invite the leaders and working committees of all the important Indian political parties and try to convince them to accept united India as envisaged by the Cabinet Mission. In case of any deadlock, Mountbatten was ready to "fire his last shot" by announcing the partition plan (IOR, L/PO/6/123), prepared by him and his team and openly opposed by Jinnah. Besides the division of Punjab and Bengal, Jinnah was not comfortable with the Mountbatten's idea of keeping the unity of Indian Army. He wanted a complete division of the forces on communal lines, before the partition, so that the conflict of the troops with their respective government, in the post-independence phase, could be avoided (Dwarkadas, 1968: 221). In order to avoid a direct clash with Jinnah, Mountbatten changed his strategy and instead of calling for the Conference sent Ismay to London for getting the approval of the Plan by the British Cabinet, which they did without any hesitation.

The situation in India changed when Ismay was in London. Mountbatten accompanied by VappalaPangunniMenon, Reforms Commissioner and Constitutional adviser to the Viceroy, went to Simlain the first week of May. Later on, Nehru accompanied by Krishna Menon also reached Simla and stayed with Viceroy as his personal guests. First V.P. Menon told Mountbatten

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that he was not convinced with the Plan sent to London and instead of solving the problems of India it might lead towards a civil war (Menon, 1959: 363). Later Mountbatten broke his impartiality as Viceroy and showed the approved draft of Plan to his guest, Nehru. The Congress president, who had earlier approved the Plan, after having a second look at the document in the light of his latest discussions with V.P. Menon rejected it. Nehru had reservations about the phrasing of the draft and thought that it might lead to the balkanization of India. He wanted that the provinces which were joining India to be termed as "constituting the Union of India" and those joining Pakistan as "contracting out of the Union of India" (Mansergh 1981: 696). He claimed that the draft earlier shown to him was rough and did not cover many things which were included in the final draft (Mansergh 1947: 762-763).

Nehru informed the Viceroy that the plan would be equally unacceptable to the Muslim League and the Sikhs (IOR, L/PO/6/120). It is important to note here that Mountbatten did not bother to consult Jinnah or any other Muslim League leader and accepted what Nehru said on their behalf. The Viceroy even had no intentions to discuss the idea with Jinnah "until after the announcement of the Plan" (Mansergh 1980: 729-730). Even the Round Table, which was planned to take "important leaders" of India into confidence and was scheduled on May 17 at Delhi, was postponed till June 2, so that Jinnah did not have adequate time to react. Though in his letter to Attlee Mountbatten gave a different excuse for the postponement of the meeting and wrote, "I am sorry about this especially after the splendid way the Cabinet Committee have worked to meet earlier date". (Mansergh, 1980: 771-72). All this shows that Mountbatten was only interested in sharing his ideas and intentions with Congress and especially its president, Nehru, and other parties, especially Muslim League, were kept in the dark.

Mountbatten was ready to pacify Nehru at every cost. He exchanged nine telegrams with the India Office in the following twenty four hours and then called a meeting of Viceroy's personal staff on May 11, in which Nehru was also invited as a special guest. Nehru expressed his reservations about the draft and said that he would only give his consent to the new draft (Tinker, 1970: 354-355). Mountbatten was happy that his "hunch" to show the Plan to Nehru had saved him from committing a "great error" and protected him from "embarrassment" both in "London and in Delhi". He asked V.P. Menon to "draft something to which he [Nehru] will agree" (IOR, R/3/1/153). To the satisfaction of the Viceroy, Menon revised the plan and got his new draft approved from Nehru, which Mountbatten sent to Britain before he left for Delhi on May 14.

This suggests that the final draft of the Plan for the transfer of power, which was sent to London, was actually authored by V.P. Menon, the only Indian in

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the Viceroy's Personal Staff and a close friend of Sardar Vallabhai Patel. He himself admitted that he was keeping Patel informed of all the developments taking place at Simla (Menon 1959: 371). Furthermore, it was not only approved by Nehru but it also accommodated many of Nehru's demands and suggestions. On the contrary, Jinnah and the Muslim League were completely ignored during the finalization process. The final plan was opposed by key members of Mountbatten's team including Ismay and George Abell. However, Mountbatten insisted on calling it as the final solution and threatened to resign in case the British high ups refused to accept it (Aziz, 1987: 178). He got personally involved in the entire episode as he himself flew to London along with V.P. Menon to plead the case, in person, for the revised Partition Plan before the British Government.

India-Burma Committee of the British cabinet approved the Plan without even minor alteration. When few members of the committee inquired about the repercussions of the Plan on the Punjab, Mountbatten silenced them by saying, "no solution could now be found which would not result in some disorder". Mountbatten told the members of the committee that he would share the Plan with Jinnah and Nehru on June 2 and would give the two of them twenty four hours to get it endorsed by the Working Committees of their respective parties. He also took permission from the cabinet to himself settle "points of minor importance" so that he could take a "quick decision" (IOR, L/P&J/10/79). Attlee and his cabinet also gave their consent to the Plan in a meeting which did not last for long.

Mountbatten came back from London with the approved Plan on May 31. He was back to business immediately after his arrival in Delhi. On the same day, he wrote to his governors that they could no more wait till the "constitutions for both Hindustan and Pakistan had been framed and all the negotiations about partition settled". To him, it would take a long time and till then "things would get more difficult" and there was every likelihood of a "chaos". So he suggested for "provisional administrative plans for partition". He further emphasized that he had informed the British Government about the "possible dangers and difficulties" during the enforcement of the Partition Plan, yet Attlee's Government showed their faith in Mountbatten and his team (Mansergh 1982: 29-31). On June 1, Mountbatten had a meeting with his staff in which he discussed the issue of princely states in details. He informed them that in order to avoid the balkanization of India, as feared by Nehru, the states will not be allowed to have Dominion status (Mansergh, 1982: 32).

As already planned, on the morning of June 2, Mountbatten called a meeting of the Congress, Muslim League and Sikh leaders to share the Plan, approved by the British cabinet, with them. He talked about the hurdles, including the Sikh

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problem and the issue of the future of Calcutta, that he faced while finalizing the Plan. He told them that the decision in the meeting would have “a profound influence” not only on India but also on “world history”. He gave the copies of the Plan to Jinnah and Nehru and asked them to discuss it with the Working Committees of their respective parties. However, he only gave them few hours for this most important exercise and compelled them to give their verdict latest by “mid night”. He asked the leaders to “accept” the Plan in the spirit of peace, and try “to make it work without bloodshed”. He also wanted the leaders to keep the plan secret until it was approved in the British House of Commons (IOR, L/P&J/10/817).

For Nehru, the Plan was neither new nor difficult to accept. It had incorporated most of his demands. Yet he made it clear that “there could never be complete approval of the plan from Congress”. However, as expected, after some discussions with his party, he gave his verdict in favour of accepting the Plan. On the contrary, the Plan showed in the meeting came as a shock for Jinnah. Although the Plan provided for the creation of Pakistan, it was lacking details demanded by Muslim League. Jinnah protested against the partition of the Punjab and Bengal and repeated his proposal of holding a proper referendum in the two provinces. He urged Mountbatten to give him some time. He was of the view that such big decisions should not be taken by the leaders and the Working Committee alone and the real stakeholders, the masses, should also be taken into confidence. He said that Muslim League being a “democratic organization” had “to go before their masters, the people for a final decision”. The Viceroy rejected his request on the plea that “there were times when leaders had to make vital decisions without consulting their followers”(IOR, L/P&J/10/817).

The Plan was contrary to the League’s demands like transferring power to the provinces as they existed; of providing the option of a United Independent Bengal; of holding plebiscites in Bengal and Punjab; and of holding fresh elections in North-West Frontier Province. According to the Plan the Hindu majority provinces were automatically made part of India while the Muslim majority provinces were not directly given to Pakistan but were only given an option to decide about their future. Jinnah visited Mountbatten again at night and once more tried to convince him to give Muslim League some more time to think, something for which Mountbatten was not at all ready.

Jinnah was absolutely dissatisfied with the Plan, yet, he was left with no choice but to accept it as a “compromise or a settlement” (IOR, L/P&J/10/81). He knew it very well that in case of the rejection of the Plan the only alternative was the demission of “power on the basis of the existing Government of India Act 1935 with modifications as necessary, i.e., to demit Provincial subjects to

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existing Provincial Governments and Central subjects to existing Central Government”(IOR, L/P&J/10/79). That would obviously mean that the British would leave India without partition by handing over power to the Interim Government, with Nehru in charge. Mountbatten had already threatened Jinnah that his delaying tactics might cost him Pakistan(Campbell-Johnson, 1972: 102-103). Jinnah, who knew that any other option was disastrous to imagine (QAP, F. 1020/62-5), decided to opt for the lesser of the evil and was obliged to accept the draft Plan.However, he made it clear that the final approval of the Plan by the All India Muslim League could not come before June 9 when the Council of the party was due to meet.

On June 3, Mountbatten again had a meeting with the same group, whom he met a day earlier. The idea was to take the final verdict. While summing up the meeting, Mountbatten concluded that though all the parties were not in “complete agreement” with the plan and their leaders had raised quite a few objections but by and large they all had “accepted” the Plan “in principle”(Mansergh 1982: 72-73). The Plan was once again approved by the British cabinet in their meeting held on the same day (Mansergh, 1982: 80). Finally, at seven in the evening, Mountbatten formally announced the Partition Plan in his broadcast speech on All India Radio on June 3, 1947.Mountbatten’s speech was followed by the broadcast addresses delivered by Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh. Muslim League Council, in its meeting held on June 9 and 10, was not pleased with the proposed partition of the Punjab and Bengal. Anyhow, it authorized Jinnah to accept the fundamental principles of the Plan and workout all the details related to it (Pirzada, 1970: 568). All India Congress Committee, on the other hand, while accepting the Partition Plan, in a resolution, made it clear that “picture of India we have learnt to cherish will remain in our hearts and our minds”. The resolution further hoped that “when the present passions have subsided, India’s problems will be reviewed in their proper perspective and the false doctrine of two nation theory in India will be discredited and discarded by all”(The Times, 1947: June 1).

The British approach was not different from that of Congress. They did accept partition but without shedding the idea of united India from their mind. Mountbatten accepted on June 4 that in his opinion “united India was, of course, the right answer but only if communal feeling and goodwill allowed it”(Mansergh, 1982: 110).Hoping against hope, he wanted to see the reunification of India and considered Pakistan a “tent”(Campbell-Johnson, 1972: 87), obviously something temporary.The Secretary of State for India, Listowel, wished while speaking in the House of Lords on July 16, that when the disadvantages of separation become apparent in the light of experience, the two Dominions will freely decide to reunite into a “single Indian dominion”(Gwyer, 1957: 686). As late as on July 19, 1947, while speaking in

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the House of Commons Attlee hoped that in course of time the two Dominions of the sub-continent would again become one great member state of the British Commonwealth of Nations (Sherwani, 1969: 250-51). With such approach, they continued working to achieve their ultimate goal.

Besides, the preparation and announcement of the Partition Plan, the selection of date for the transfer of power to the indigenous people was another important task before the British administration. In his speech in the British Parliament on February 20, 1947, Attlee had the realization that alongside the duty of the British to maintain civil administration and to provide defence to India, they also had to work out many complicated issues before leaving the country. He, therefore, suggested that ample time was required in order to take preparatory measures regarding the above mentioned issues. To him, the final transfer of authority could not take place before June 1948 (Mitra and Mitra 1990: 142-143). Even Mountbatten realized about the scarcity of time. In his meeting with Wavell on March 22, 1947, it was discussed that the Indian politicians had failed to understand that how little time there was left for the British to plan to arrange the transfer of power before leaving India in June 1948 (Mansergh, 1980 :1011-1012). As late as April 22, 1947, Mountbatten argued in his staff meeting that establishment of an organized administration for the future state of Pakistan would take at least a year (Mansergh 1981: 359-60).

Despite the realization that inadequate amount of time was being on a task of such historical magnitude, Mountbatten pushed ahead for a debate on moving the timelines of transfer of power earlier than June 1948. The idea of altering the date for the transfer of power was presented to Mountbatten by V.P. Menon as early as in late April 1947. Menon told Mountbatten that he could use the idea of transferring power earlier than June 1948 as a bargaining chip with Congress, not only against Congress acceptance of the partition of the country but also for the acceptance of the Dominion status for the post-independence India, by the Congress leaders (Sohail, 1991: 37). Mountbatten, who wanted Dominion status for India at any cost, appreciated the idea. He was well aware that an earlier date for the transfer of power was prone to create problems for the future of Pakistan but that would interest the Congress leaders.

The Congress was ready to accept Pakistan only with certitude of it being a nonviable entity both administratively and economically (Tucker, 1950: 257). To achieve this objective they knew that inadequacy of time given to Jinnah and the Muslim League would work in their favour. Mountbatten discussed the issue of an earlier date for the transfer of power with Nehru during latter's visit to Simla. Nehru is reported to have agreed with Mountbatten that it might be

possible to frighten Jinnah into cooperation on the basis of the inadequacy of time available (Beg, 1986: 705). Patel himself admitted that he had agreed to Partition on the condition that Jinnah will have to “swallow a truncated Pakistan” and that the power should be transferred within “twomonths” (Panjabi, 1962: 155). Thus, Patel had insisted upon an early transfer of power with complete conviction that it would mean a “still-born Pakistan” (Khan, 1973: 47).

First Mountbatten considered October 1, 1947 as suitable date for the transfer of power (Mansergh, 1981: 872-74) but then in dramatic fashion hesettled on August 15. He discussed this issue with the Indian leaders in his meeting with them on June 2 (Mansergh, 1982: 55), though no such thing was mentioned in the text of the Partition Plan. Only two days later in a Press Conference, when Mountbatten was discussing of a probable date of transfer power in 1947 instead of 1948 he “accidentally” talked about August 15 (Hodson, 1985: 319). Once mentioned, everyone started talking about the new date, as if that was announced as the official date. The British Government also accelerated the process of the preparation forleaving India at the earliest and the British Parliament duly endorsed the date of the transfer of powerproposed by Mountbatten. The Indian Independence Act, which made provision for setting up in India “Independent Dominions” with effect from the “fifteenth day of August, nineteen hundred and forty seven” to be known respectively India and Pakistan (Indian Independence Act, 1947: 127), was passed without any amendment on July 15 by the House of Commons. The very next day it was passed by the House of Lords and on July 18 it received the Royal assent when King George VI signed it.

All this suggests that Jinnah and his team had just seventy one days at their disposal to plan and prepare everything that was adequate to run a state likely to encounter all kinds of setbacks and problems at the very time of its birth. Liaquat vigorously protested that it would be impossible for Muslim League to set up a new state within a limited span of two months after the announcement of the Plan, but his protest was disapproved (Afzal, 1967: 207-223). Jinnah and his close associates remained busy, till the last moment, to negotiate details of partition with the British and the Congress leadership and thus were left with no time to plan the future of independent Pakistan. Not to talk about a constitution, an administrative plan, an economic strategy, or a well framed foreign policy; at the time of the creation of Pakistan, the new state even had no institutions, no administrative machinery, no logistic support and no trained man power to run a sovereign state. The treasury of the new country was empty and there was hardly an organized and equipped army which could protect it from the external threats. In short, the stage was set for the collapse of the new state.

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The hurried partition not only created problems for the Muslim League leadership. It also left the British themselves with a very little time to plan their withdrawal properly. Being the outgoing rulers, it was the duty of the British to leave India after settling the pending issues but the matters in the country were so complicated that it was not possible for them to settle all, rather even few of them in the short span of seventy one days. Demarcation of boarders, future of princely states, division of both financial and military asserts, safeguard of minorities, and the future administrative set up in independent India and Pakistan were few of the so many problems which remained unresolved till the departure of the British. It was the ill planning and hurry on the part of the British which resulted in the riots and vast scale migration which accompanied independence.

Even if Mountbatten would not have decided to leave India in haste, the situation at the time of the British departure would not have been ideal. The flawed Partition Plan was bound to create problems. Lack of a clear-cut policy regarding the princely states, and the contradiction between theory and practice on the accession issue, was bond to create troubles like Kashmir, a state which is considered as the nuclear flash point even after the beginning of the twenty first century. Partitioning Punjab and Bengal also proved to be a wrong move on the part of British administration. Division of Punjab resulted in the communal violence, which engulfed the whole province and the matter was not settled till almost all the Hindus and Sikhs migrated from West Punjab and there was no Muslim left in the East Punjab. The impact of this dissection is still hammering the Punjabis especially the Sikhs. Over whelming majority of Sikhs are left in East Punjab and almost all of their holy shrines are in the western part. They have to get a visa to attend their religious ceremonies. The story of Bengal partition is no different. It left a bad impact not only on the Bengali nationalism but also on the economic and political life of the province. Even in 1971, when Bangladesh was established it was without the financial, cultural and administrative hub of the province, Calcutta. Acceptance of the idea of independent united Bengal presented by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy was probably a better answer to the problem.

To conclude, it was the British agenda to leave India the way they wanted it to be, had created insolvable problems for the region. Their ideal to leave India united and attempts to achieve it till the last movement, and even when they failed to do so they did not concede and tried to create a situation where there were chances for the fulfillment of their dream ultimately, if not created at least enhanced the hatred and enmity between India and Pakistan. History of this region might have been different, if Mountbatten, instead of getting involved in the affairs and becoming a party himself, would have acted as a neutral umpire.

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