

March 1946: The Moment of Decision

On March 23, 1946, three members of the British cabinet arrived in Karachi, India. Lord Frederick William Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India; Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade; and Mr. Albert V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty had been sent by their government on a special mission. These three men, who came to be known as the Cabinet Mission, had two main goals:

1. To help the Indian people reach an agreement that would establish a free and united India (hopefully within the British Commonwealth).
2. To create an interim government of Indian leaders that would assist the British Viceroy Wavell in governing India until it was granted independence.

“The issue of freedom and self-determination is therefore settled in principle.... Our talks will not be concerned with the question of whether India shall determine her own destiny—that is already decided—but with how she will do so.”

—Lord Frederick William
Pethick-Lawrence

In March of 1946, the three officials of the Cabinet Mission began a mission filled with difficulty. After fifty years of what Indian nationalists considered to be delaying tactics, the British government was willing to grant the Indian people their freedom. But first the Cabinet Mission had to play the role of an honest broker, gathering information from all the interested parties, following the guidelines given by its own government, and trying to develop a plan that would satisfy not only the various Indian factions, but the British government. Above all, the British government wanted these parties to agree to a plan that would recognize a united India and to cooperate in an interim government that would rule India

until independence was officially granted.

Who were the principal groups the Cabinet Mission would be negotiating with?

The Congress Party: The oldest and largest Indian political organization fighting for independence was the Congress Party. Its most important official leader was Jawaharlal Nehru, but its greatest moral leader was Mohandas Gandhi. Congress claimed to be the only truly national political organization but, although supported by some Muslims and other groups, by far most of its supporters were Hindus, who counted as approximately three-quarters of India’s population. Although differing in their views regarding the nature of an independent India, the leaders of Congress generally agreed that India should be a secular, democratic, parliamentary nation based on majority rule. Because of its overwhelming popularity among Hindus, Congress assumed that it would lead an independent India.

The Muslim League: Led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League had quite a different vision of independence. Recent elections held throughout India demonstrated that the Muslim League had the overwhelming support of India’s Muslims, approximately one-quarter of India’s people. Because of what it believed to be a history of religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims, the Muslim League refused to accept the concept of a government based on simple majority rule. This, it argued, would lead to rule by a Hindu-dominated Congress government and the oppression of the Muslim minority. Instead, by 1946, it was calling for a separate nation stretching across the northern portion of India, where most Muslims were living. The nation they envisioned would be called Pakistan, the “Land of the Pure.”

The Unionist Party: Besides Congress and the Muslim League, there were many other groups or political organizations, often with significantly different ideas. For example, the Punjab was a province in northern India that,

in 1946, was ruled by the Unionist Party in a coalition that included Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. The Unionists, led by the wealthy Muslim landowner Khizr Tiwana, were less

concerned about religious differences than they were in uniting to maintain their common agricultural interests against those Punjabis residing in the cities. Many in the Punjab were uneasy with the idea of independence, fearful that if India were partitioned, the creation of

TRY, TRY, TRY AGAIN



A cartoon depicts the task of the Cabinet Mission and Viceroy Wavell.

From the Hindustan Times.

Pakistan might also mean the partition of the Punjab.

The Sikhs— Punjab: The Sikhs were especially disturbed by the thought of partition. Although less than twenty percent of the Punjab’s population, they were

spread throughout the province, and partition of the Punjab would inevitably lead to their political division. Echoing the demands of the Muslim League, some Sikhs were calling for their own “land of the pure”—Khalistan.

In the coming days you will have the opportunity to explore the different positions of the parties surrounding the Cabinet Mission. Each of the positions is based on the interest and goals of that particular group. Identifying these interests and values will help you better understand the forces that have shaped history since that time.

Positions in Brief

Position 1: The Cabinet Mission

The Cabinet Mission has traveled from England to help India achieve its independence. As an honest broker, the Mission wants to give a full hearing to every interested party. It prefers that India become part of the British Commonwealth and cooperate with England defending South Asia against any Soviet encroachment. It believes that partition and the creation of Pakistan would be unwise. The creation of Pakistan will not help those millions of Muslims left behind in India. The British plan to stay in India until an agreement is reached, although the Cabinet Mission realizes that its position would be extremely difficult if the Congress Party launches a mass campaign that could lead to violence.

Position 2: The Congress Party

The Congress Party has, for the past twenty-five years, struggled for the freedom of India. Led by Mohandas Gandhi, Congress represents Indians of all religious faiths. The idea that Muslims are a separate nation is ridiculous; most are descendents of converted Hindus. Differences among Indians that others blame on communalism have really been caused by the British or by poverty. To solve these problems a strong central government is needed that will control defense, foreign affairs, communications, and have the power to tax. This government must be secular, democratic, and based on majority rule. The British should leave immediately, and allow Congress to negotiate in good faith with the Muslim League for a united, independent India.

Option 3: The Muslim League

The Muslim League is concerned with the growing communal differences between Hindus and Muslims—differences that often lead to violence. Because of their irreconcilable religious beliefs and cultures, Hindus and Muslims are really two nations. While claiming otherwise, Congress is, in effect, a Hindu political party. The only solution to this problem is partition. However, Pakistan must

be viable—and include the Punjab and Bengal, especially the port of Calcutta. An independent Pakistan not only will protect Muslims within its borders; it also will protect those Muslims still residing in Hindustan (the real name of India). Only Pakistan will guarantee friendship, based upon national equality, between Hindu and Muslim.

Option 4: The Unionist Party

The Unionist Party bases its political philosophy on cooperation among Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh. It currently rules the Punjab through such a coalition. Unionists have a long history of loyalty to the British government; three-fifths of the Indian army is from the Punjab. In return, the British have favored the Punjab with large irrigation systems and generous land grants to ex-soldiers. A partition of the province to create Pakistan would upset all religious groups and could lead to violence. To maintain order, the British should remain in India until a final agreement is reached. When India becomes independent, the central government should have limited authority over provinces. The Punjab must maintain its local autonomy.

Option 5: The Sikhs—Punjab

Although a minority, the Sikhs call the Punjab their home. Almost all of their religious shrines are located there. Due in part to persecution by the Mughals, the Sikhs have become formidable warriors. They are the backbone of the British army. While in the past some Sikhs have supported Congress and others the Unionists, Sikhs are now united in opposing the creation of Pakistan. This could lead to placing all of the Punjab within the new Muslim nation. The Sikhs prefer a united India with a coalition of all parties. If however, there is a partition, they want the Punjab also partitioned and the creation of their own state, Khalistan, with the right to join either India or Pakistan. Sikhs will never submit to Muslim domination. They are quite willing to resist by force.

Position 1: The Cabinet Mission

The Cabinet Mission has traveled from England for the sole purpose of helping India achieve its independence. As an honest broker, the Mission wants to give a full hearing to every interested party. It comes with no pre-conceived settlement—that is up to the Indian people themselves. Of course, the Mission would prefer India to become part of the British Commonwealth, but that will be a decision for India to make.

The Mission is interested in reaching an agreement as quickly as possible. India faces major problems, including communal disturbances, inflation, and a terrible famine in Bengal. Delays only worsen these problems. In order to reach an agreement, Congress and the Muslim League need to cooperate. The Mission will do all it can to facilitate compromise.

The Mission does have definite opinions regarding what is best for India's future. It much prefers Plan A—a united India—rather than a divided one. Plan A would allow Muslim-majority provinces to join together and give them equal representation to Hindu-majority provinces in a central government. It would also avoid the problems partition could cause in Punjab and Bengal. Pakistan as a separate nation would not end communal problems—approximately 38 percent of Pakistan's northwest area and 48 percent of its northeast area would be non-Muslim, while twenty million Muslims would be left behind in Hindustan to face 188 million non-Muslims. In addition, a weak Pakistan would have difficulty defending its northwest border, a traditional route of invasion. There is evidence of a Soviet build-up on the Afghan border and Soviet agents moving south through Persia. Regarding an interim government, the Mission believes that some form of parity between Congress and the Muslim League would be best (perhaps a cabinet of five Congress, five Muslim League, one Sikh, and one Anglo-Indian—an Indian of both European and Indian ancestry).

Although Congress would like the British army to leave before a constitution and interim government are settled, Great Britain plans to stay until an agreement is reached. Anything less would be an ignominious retreat, which would weaken Great Britain's reputation throughout the world. However, the British government realizes that it could be placed in an extremely difficult position if Congress declares another campaign of non-cooperation.

In the past such campaigns have led to violence, and the British army is already stretched thin. If violence breaks out, the Indian army might not remain loyal. Four or five British divisions would be needed as reinforcements. They would be sent to India from such places as Palestine and Greece, which would weaken British authority in other parts of the world. The British military has prepared “breakdown” (emergency exit) plans in case of a general uprising, but any plan involving British withdrawal might lead to civil war and would certainly damage Great Britain's reputation. Therefore, it is imperative that the Cabinet Mission help Congress and the Muslim League reach a satisfactory agreement.

Beliefs and Assumptions of the Cabinet Mission

1. Great Britain is acting as an honest broker, favoring no side.

2. A united India is the best solution for all Indians. In addition, a united India would assist Great Britain more effectively in the defense of South Asia

than an India divided into two nations.

3. A negotiated settlement between Congress and the Muslim League is essential. Great Britain cannot afford involvement in an uprising started by Congress.

From the Historical Record

Lord Pethick-Lawrence's Press Conference at New Delhi, 25 March 1946:

“The discussions now to begin are preliminary to the setting up of machinery whereby the forms under which India can realize her full independent status can be determined by Indians.... The issue of freedom and self-determination is therefore settled in principle. We have now to work out in co-operation the means by which Indians can themselves decide the form of their new institutions with the minimum of disturbance and the maximum of speed.”

Meeting of Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy's Executive Council, 26 March 1946:

“For full success the Council felt that a settlement must demand the agreement of all the main elements in India's national life. Compromise was essential as between the Congress and the Muslim League. To make concessions to Congress alone would mean suppressing the Muslims. This would be an ultimate embarrassment to any settlement. The Muslims must not be allowed to veto political advance in the same way as there must be no dictation by Congress. Compromise must be found between the demand of the Congress for majority rule at the Centre and the extreme form of Pakistan as defined by the League.”

Meeting of Cabinet Mission and Viceroy Wavell, 10 April 1946:

“The Viceroy said that he agreed with Sir W. Croft that both plan A and plan B were on merits unsatisfactory but that the only alternatives were (a) a strong Centre which would lead to trouble with the Muslims, or (b) full

Pakistan which would lead to trouble with the Congress, which we could not face except by withdrawing into Calcutta, which would be likely to be a very disturbed place in such conditions.”

Prime Minister Clement Attlee to the Cabinet Delegation, 13 April 1946:

“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.”

Letter from Viceroy Wavell, 24 April 1946:

“However absorbed we may be in the constitutional problems, the food situation is even more urgent. We thought we might just pull through our imminent crisis on the Washington allotment of 1,400,000 tons of wheat and 146,000 tons of rice for the first half year; and it has caused us consternation to find that this was apparently not a firm allotment, and that we are unlikely to get more than a proportion of what was promised.”

Meeting of Cabinet Mission and Viceroy Wavell, 16 May 1946:

“(Commander-in-Chief) General Auchinleck said that in his opinion there was no hope of the Indian Army being kept together if one part of India separated from Hindustan. The Army was entirely integrated as between

communities and even battalions were composed of mixed units. To reorganize the Army into Hindu and Muslim armies would mean a complete reorganization and he did not think any British officer would be interested in undertaking it. In his view there were only two alternatives in the circumstances envisaged. One was repression and the other was departure. He could not feel sure that the Army would remain loyal under a policy of repression.”

Meeting of British Cabinet, 5 June 1946:

“The Cabinet were informed, in this connection, that there were already indications of slightly increased concentrations of Soviet troops to the north of Afghanistan; and there was also some evidence that Soviet agents were moving southward through Persia.”

Defence Committee Paper prepared for British Cabinet, 12 June 1946:

“If, however, the Indian armed forces did not remain loyal we are informed by the local authorities that we would be faced with the

necessity of providing five British divisions for India, with the consequent abandonment of commitments in other areas hitherto regarded as inescapable, serious effects on our import and export programmes and world-wide repercussions on the release scheme. The only alternative to this would be the ignominious withdrawal from the whole of India.”

From a speech to Parliament given by Sir Stafford Cripps, July 1946:

“The difficulty arises, not from anyone’s underestimate of the importance of the Sikh community, but from the inescapable geographical facts of the situation ...it will be seen that what they demand is some special treatment analogous to that given to the Muslims. The Sikhs, however, are a much smaller community, five and one-half as against ninety millions, and, moreover, are not geographically situated so that any area as yet devised—I do not put it out of possibility in the future—can be carved out in which they would find themselves a majority.”

Position 2: The Congress Party

For the past twenty-five years, under the inspired leadership of Mohandas Gandhi, the Congress Party has struggled for the freedom of India. It is the only party that is truly national in scope, having as members Indians from all backgrounds, including Muslims. In fact, for the past seven years, the President of Congress has been Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a Muslim scholar. The idea that Congress is a Hindu party is ridiculous. Congress stands for a secular, democratic government, similar to what Great Britain enjoys. As such, it believes in majority rule and opposes communal voting and separate electorates, which are undemocratic. Minority rights must be respected. To claim that India is two nations is to misunderstand its history. The vast majority of Indian Muslims are descended from those who converted from Hinduism. Is Gandhi's own son, who converted to Islam, no longer an Indian? If two nations were created, what of those minorities left behind—would Muslims living in India or Hindus in Pakistan be non-citizens? This is obviously absurd. As Gandhi has said, the creation of Pakistan would mean the “vivisection” of India—a horrible tragedy.

The so-called communal problems between Hindus and Muslims, to which the Muslim League constantly refers, are vastly overstated. In general, Hindus and Muslims get along well; for centuries they have lived side-by-side. Communal disturbances are more likely the fault of the British, who historically have used the concept of divide-and-conquer to keep Indians from uniting against foreign rule. The real problem of India is not communal but rather economic and linked to poverty. To solve these economic problems, a strong central government is needed. Besides defense, foreign affairs, and communications—a central government needs some control of finances (perhaps taxation) and the ability to act in emergency situations. In addition, the Indian states, despotisms that do not allow their subjects democratic rights, should not be allowed to remain independent but should come under the control of the central government.

As to an interim government, Congress regards the British as an army of occupation and would prefer it to leave immediately and let the Indian people work out their government by themselves. Since this is unlikely to happen, Congress believes that the interim government should function with real power and authority, like the British cabinet. Congress opposes the idea of parity with the Muslim League. Representing so much more of the population, Congress deserves more members in the government. In addition, the Muslim League has stated that the only Muslims able to join the government must come from the Muslim League. This is intolerable. The Muslim League has no right to tell Congress whom it may nominate.

While Congress is willing to negotiate in good faith with the Muslim League, it looks forward, not only to independence, but to a national government strong enough to meet the needs of all its people. It is growing impatient and will not wait much longer.

Beliefs and Assumptions of the Congress Party

1. Congress is the only truly national political party in India. It is secular and democratic and would establish that type of national government, making sure that minority rights are protected.

2. “Pakistan” is a terrible idea. It is founded on an ill-conceived “two-nation”

theory that has no basis in history. It would be a terrible tragedy for all Indians.

3. India needs a strong national government. While Congress is willing to discuss the idea of federation, the central government must have enough real powers to function effectively.

From the Historical Record

Summary of Maulana Azad’s (President of Congress) comments to Cabinet Mission, 3 April 1946:

“Congress feels great difficulty with regard to the Provinces which are claimed by the Muslim League to be parts of the so-called Pakistan. In Bengal there is a large Hindu population in the west while in the Eastern Punjab there is a Hindu-Sikh majority. On the principle of self-determination these areas cannot be in a Muslim State, but if they are taken away what is left is not sufficient for separate existence.... It is perfectly true that the feelings that have been raised among the vast bulk of Muslims today in respect of Hindu-Muslim differences have affected a large body of the Muslims and they have talked everywhere on Pakistan without understanding what it means. According to Mr. Jinnah a Muslim resident in Hindustan would be an alien. His (Mr. Azad’s) own honest and sincere view was that the kind of Pakistan they were talking about would be injurious and harmful and do the Muslims no good. A reduced Pakistan would not be adequate to maintain itself. Further, a large Muslim population in other parts of India will, by the creation of Pakistan, be left under a purely Hindu Raj.”

Summary of Mohandas Gandhi’s comments to Cabinet Mission, 3 April 1946:

“Mr. Jinnah had never in concrete terms given a definition of Pakistan. His Pakistan was a sin which he (Mr. Gandhi) would not commit....

“The two nation theory is far more dangerous. The Muslim population is a population of converts—only a microscopic minority are

not. They are all descendents of Indian-born people. Jinnah is sincere but his logic is utterly at fault especially as a kind of mania possesses him.... He (Gandhi) asked Jinnah whether his own (Gandhi’s) son who had gone over to the Muslim religion changed his nationality by doing so.”

Letter from Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 27 April 1946:

“The Congress has never accepted the division of India into predominantly Hindu and predominantly Muslim Provinces. It however recognizes that there may be Provinces which are willing to delegate to the Central Government subjects in the optional list, while others may agree to delegate only compulsory subjects like Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Communications.

“The Congress has agreed that residuary powers are to vest in the Provinces, but the use of the word ‘sovereign’ in that connection would tend to cause misunderstanding. I would, therefore, request that the word may be taken out.”

Letter from Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 28 April 1946:

“As you are aware, we have envisaged a Federal Union of autonomous units. Such a Federal Union must of necessity deal with certain essential subjects of which defence and its allied subjects are the most important. It must be organic and must have both an executive and legislative machinery as well as the finance relating to these subjects and the power to raise revenues for these purposes in its own

right. Without these functions and powers it would be weak and disjointed and defence and progress in general would suffer.”

Letter from Maulana Azad to Lord Pethick-Lawrence, 6 May 1946:

“...the basic issue before us was that of Indian independence and the consequent withdrawal of the British army from India, for there can be no independence so long as there is a foreign army on Indian soil. We stand for the independence of the whole of India now and not in the distant or near future. Other matters are subsidiary to this and can be fitly

discussed and decided by the Constituent Assembly.”

Letter from Mohandas Gandhi to Sir Stafford Cripps, 8 May 1946:

“As to merits, the difficulty about parity between six Hindu majority Provinces and the five Muslim majority Provinces is insurmountable. The Muslim majority Provinces represent over nine crores [one crore equals ten million] of the population as against over nineteen crores of the Hindu majority Provinces. This is really worse than Pakistan.”

Position 3: The Muslim League

Since Islam appeared in India over four hundred years ago, two completely different cultures have emerged. Hinduism, the religion of India's majority, is an exclusive society based upon the caste system. Hindus worship many gods, even cows. On the other hand, Muslims are democratic by nature—each Muslim is brother to his fellow Muslim—and strictly monotheistic. These differences would be more easily discernible were it not for the British holding India as one colony. As it is, India's history is filled with communal violence. Because of this, in 1906 Muslim leaders formed the Muslim League and asked Great Britain for communal safeguards, such as separate electorates. Under Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the Muslim League tried to work with Congress, as shown by the Lucknow Pact of 1916. Unfortunately, Congress turned its back on these communal protections with the Nehru Report of 1928.

This is not surprising since Congress, despite its claim to be secular, is clearly a Hindu party. In their campaigns of mass protest, both Tilak and Gandhi made constant references to their religious beliefs. When Congress finally achieved power in several provinces after the 1937 elections, its party anthem, an ode to Hindu goddesses, was to be sung by all school children, Muslims included. Muslims need Pakistan to avoid Hindu domination. Muslims living in Hindu areas, with no chance of being part of Pakistan, are even more supportive of a Muslim nation than those living in majority areas. These minority Muslims know that their rights in Hindustan will be better protected, because Hindus would fear what might happen, in case of trouble, to the Hindu minority in Pakistan.

Creating Pakistan from only Muslim-majority areas may not be enough to make the new nation viable. The Cabinet Mission's Plan B is unacceptable. The Muslim League rejects what Jinnah calls a "moth-eaten" Pakistan—shorn of parts of the Punjab and Bengal, especially Calcutta. The Muslim League will give the Sikhs in Punjab every consideration in Pakistan but not a communal veto. The Muslim League might be willing to discuss the Cabinet Mission's Plan A. However, the central constitution should deal only with defense, foreign affairs, and communications. The central government should not be allowed the power of taxation but could only request money from groups or provinces. No important communal decision could be taken without the agreement of both major communal groups.

Regarding the interim government, parity between Congress and the Muslim League is necessary (perhaps a cabinet of five Congress, five Muslim League, and one Sikh). The only Muslims participating in the government should be chosen by the Muslim League. Congress Muslims are merely "window dressing" and traitors. Ideally, the Cabinet Mission and Congress will see the wisdom in the creation of two equally independent and sovereign nations—Hindustan and Pakistan. Only that will solve the grave communal problems that plague India.

Beliefs and Assumptions of the Muslim League

1. Hindus and Muslims are two separate nations. There will always be communal violence if these two peoples are forced to live together.

2. The only real hope for Muslims is Pakistan. However, for Pakistan to survive, it must include some areas

where non-Muslims form a majority.

3. If the Muslim League is to discuss anything less than an independent Pakistan, the proposal must include a weak central government, communal safeguards, and the opportunity in the future to establish Pakistan.

From the Historical Record

Summary of M.A. Jinnah's comments to the Cabinet Mission, 4 April 1946:

“Nowadays we talk of British India and say that India is one. Mr. Jinnah considered that that could not stand examination for a moment. India is really many and is held by the British as one.... The Muslims have a different conception of life from the Hindus. They admire different qualities in their heroes; they have a different culture based on Arabic and Persian instead of on Sanskrit origins. Their social customs are entirely different. A Hindu will wash his hands after shaking hands with a Muslim. No Hindu will let Mr. Jinnah have a room in his building. Hindu society and philosophy are the most exclusive in the world. Muslims and Hindus have been side by side in India for a thousand years but if you go into any Indian city you will see separate Hindu and Muslim quarters.... How are you to put 100 Muslims together with 250 millions whose way of life is so different? No Government can ever work on such a basis and if this is forced upon India it must lead us to disaster.”

Summary of H.S. Suhrawardy's (Chief Minister of Bengal and member of Muslim League) comments to the Cabinet Mission, 8 April 1946:

“His impression of the last election was that the Muslims were determined to have Pakistan. They felt that their whole existence depended on it. In it they would be able to live as a nation in peace and honour. If they did not get it, there would be endless bickering. The Hindus would use their power to oppress and emasculate them. There was an intense feeling among the masses that their whole fu-

ture depended on the creation of Pakistan, and only through it could their economic uplift be secured. The issue had gone far beyond the stage of slogans and statements, and was not a mere bargaining counter. This view referred also to the areas in Bombay and Madras and elsewhere in which Muslims were in the minority....

“...unless a Pakistan State in which Muslims were in a majority was created, the Muslims in the minority Provinces would be ground down. They would like to feel that there was somewhere to which they could go in the last resort.”

Summary of Mohammad Ismail's (President of the United Provinces Muslim League) comments to the Cabinet Mission, 8 April 1946:

“The Hindu outlook on life was based on exclusiveness and was thus fundamentally different from that of the Muslims, which was based on the principle that all men are equal. There was a greater difference between Hindus and Muslims than between Dutch and Belgians, yet nowadays no one expected the two latter to join up in a single state.”

Summary of M.A. Jinnah's comments to Cabinet Mission, 16 April 1946:

“Mr. Jinnah expressed doubts as to whether this arrangement (two federations) would work in practice. Matters would have to be decided every day in regard to defence. From what had been said he had not been able to get anything which would enable him to say that the Union idea was worth considering....

“Mr. Jinnah said that no amount of equal-

ity provided on paper was going to work. Equality could not exist between the majority and minority with the same Governmental system....

“Mr. Jinnah said that once the principle of Pakistan was conceded the question of territory of Pakistan could be discussed. His claim was for the six Provinces but he was willing to discuss the area. Mr. Alexander asked whether he rightly understood Mr. Jinnah to say that if Congress would make a proposition on the basis of the first of the two alternatives [Plan A] he would be prepared to discuss it.

“Mr. Jinnah said he was ready to do anything that did not prevent Pakistan from being, in the Delegation’s [Cabinet Mission] own word, a ‘viable’ State economically, strategically and politically but on that he must insist. The Lahore Resolution contemplated a transitional period. He must tell the Delegation that the only way in which there could be a peaceful transference of power was that defence should remain in the interim period under British control.”

Memorandum by Sir Stafford Cripps, 18 April 1946:

“It is admitted by the Muslim League that a Pakistan confined to the Muslim majority areas alone—that is to say, excluding the Eastern Punjab, all Assam, except the district of Sylhet, and Western Bengal including Calcutta—would not be viable and would therefore be impracticable.”

Summary of M.A. Jinnah’s comments to Sir Stafford Cripps, 18 April 1946:

“Mr. Jinnah agreed that there would have to be a common foreign policy and defence policy and said that force of events would lead to it in any case. He was, however, firmly opposed to any Legislature or Executive even on the basis of equal representation.”

Summary of M.A. Jinnah’s comments to the Cabinet Mission, 26 April 1946:

“Mr. Jinnah had said that Plan B was definitely unacceptable. He was prepared, however, to consider Plan A if the Congress was prepared to consider it....”

Position 4: The Unionist Party

The Punjab province in northern India is noted for its rural nature and agricultural wealth. For centuries local landowners, who often cooperated with one another to maintain power, have dominated it. These rural power holders supported the British in the Great Mutiny of 1857. In return, the British supported the landowners—passing laws that protected their property and influence from city dwellers. The British have also helped to create large irrigation systems, which has led to the commercialization of wheat, cotton, and sugar. They also gave generous land grants to ex-soldiers. All this created a strong bond of loyalty between the British and Punjabi landowners. In World War I, for example, three-fifths of the Indian army was recruited from the Punjab.

Another characteristic of Punjab society has been the peaceful coexistence of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities. Although western Punjab is mostly Muslim and the eastern portion Hindu and Sikh, it is common for the same family to have branches among all three religious groups. Muslims total 16.2 million people; there are 12.2 million others. Traditionally, politics have tended to be based on consensus. The Unionist Party follows this philosophy of consensus. Its leadership comes from wealthy landowners, its members are farmers from throughout the province, and its supporters are rural religious leaders. Sir Chhotu Ram organized the great agricultural caste of Jats (Hindus, Muslim, and Sikhs) on an economic, non-sectarian basis, to support the Unionists, who won the 1937 provincial election. The Congress Party has refused to form coalitions in their provinces; the Unionist Party is a coalition. It has been successful in creating additional irrigation systems and developing a system of rural libraries. When World War II broke out, it supported the British whole-heartedly.

Since the end of the war, inflation, rationing, and shortages have hampered the Unionist Party. The Muslim League has capitalized on people's dissatisfaction, appealed to the panacea of "Pakistan," and won the elections, gaining 75 of the 175 legislative seats. However, because of its communal nature, it could not form a majority government. In contrast, the Unionist Party, with only eighteen seats, has formed a government—with the help of Congress and the Sikhs.

The Unionist Party (and its leader, the wealthy Muslim landowner Khizr Tiwana), adamantly opposes any settlement that means the partition of Punjab. If the whole of Punjab enters Pakistan, most Muslims will be pleased. However a partition will upset those Muslims not included in Pakistan. Khizr also believes that Muslims from various parts of India might not get along in Pakistan (due to different languages, etc.). In addition, separation from India will mean that Punjabis could no longer enter the Indian army, which will greatly hurt the provincial economy. Some Unionists may secretly want the British to stay, but if India does become independent, they would want their province to be free of any domination by the center. To maintain law and order, the British should remain in India at least until a final agreement is reached. The Unionist Party and its leader, Khizr Tiwana, are not in a strong position to negotiate. However, he and his party are confident that the British will not betray their most loyal friends in India. The Punjab should remain whole and, as much as possible, keep its local autonomy.

Beliefs and Assumptions of the Unionist Party

1. The Punjab has traditionally been a society based on the cooperation of three religious groups. This cooperation has been the basis of the Unionist Party and, in the past, led to its greatest successes. This cooperation has also reduced communal tensions.

2. The Punjab has benefited greatly from its association with Great Britain.

Its loyalty will certainly be recognized by the British in their negotiations with Congress and the Muslim League.

3. The best future for the Punjab is to remain close to the status quo. That includes an intact province with as much local autonomy as possible.

From the Historical Record

Sir Khizr Tiwana's conversation with Jinnah (no date):

“On one occasion he (Khizr, a Muslim) reputedly retorted to Jinnah, ‘There are Hindu and Sikh Tiwanas who are my relatives. I go to their weddings and other ceremonies. How can I possibly regard them as coming from another nation?’”

Sir Khizr Tiwana's memorial on the death of Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, 1942:

“The best way to perpetuate the memory of the departed leader is to continue the work which was dear to (his) heart, namely protection of communal harmony and unconditional support for the prosecution of the war.”

Press release announcing an end to the Jinnah-Sikander Pact, April 1944:

“Khizr concluded his statement with a warning that, ‘the disunity of different communities could only spell disaster.’”

From the tract, Helpless Peasant, by Sir Chhotu Ram (no date):

“Leave religion to the four corners of the [Hindu] temple, the [Muslim] mosque, and the [Sikh] Gurdwara. Release yourselves from the bondage of the Maulvis, the Pandits and the Granthis [all religious leaders]. Do whatever you feel in observing your religious tenets but keep it strictly outside politics.”

Summary of a meeting between Sir Khizr Tiwana and Cabinet Mission, 5 April 1946:

“Sir Stafford Cripps inquired what would be the effect on the Punjab if it were agreed, or decided in default of agreement, to establish

Pakistan. Sir Khizr replied that this depended on what basis the new State were to be set up. If it included the whole of the Province as it now existed, the Muslims would be very pleased. If, however, the two and a half divisions with non-Muslim majorities were to be excluded from Pakistan, when the Muslims in this area came to realize their fate and when the Muslims of the Province as a whole came to realize what benefits in the way of military pensions, etc., they had lost, a reaction would probably set in. If Mr. Jinnah had been required at an earlier stage to define Pakistan, and if its financial and other implications had been worked out, perhaps the demand for it would not have been so strong....

“If there were to be any all-India central Government at all, it should be a weak one. He did not like to specify what subjects should be entrusted to the Centre, but admitted that they would probably have to include foreign affairs, defence and communications.... He admitted that...the British would have to stay on in India until some agreement were reached. No patriotic India wanted anything but full self-government, but if law and order were to be preserved, independence could only come on the basis of agreement between communities.”

Comments by M.R. Jayakar (former Judge, Federal Court of India) to Cabinet Mission, 11 April 1946:

“To illustrate the absurdity of the two-nation theory, he gave the example of Mr. Gandhi, who is Hindu, and his son who is a Muslim convert. How could they belong to two different nationalities? The idea was

grotesque. A Punjab Muslim had more in common with a Punjab Hindu, than a Punjab Muslim and a Madras Muslim.”

From a letter by Sir E. Jenkins (new Governor of Punjab) to Viceroy Wavell, 15 April 1946:

“The Ministers are not a happy team. Khizr, who (to quote one of his friends) is now ‘a General without an Army’,...makes no secret of his opinion that our difficulties are of our own making, and that the Pakistan issue would never have arisen in its present shape if moderate politicians like himself had been given the support they deserved.... Khizr himself continues in public to say that he believes in Pakistan, and that the Unionists are a purely provincial party—so one wonders how much ‘support’ would have been needed for his purposes.”

Position 5: The Sikhs—Punjab

The Sikhs are a small minority within India and even a minority in the Punjab (where there are four to five million Sikhs out of approximately twenty-eight million people). Almost all Sikhs call Punjab their home and almost all of their religious shrines are located there. The Sikhs began their history as a peaceful people devoted to their religion. While still religious, they have learned over the centuries the necessity of defending themselves. Persecuted by the Muslims of the Mughal Empire, they became fierce warriors. They helped to save the British in the 1857 Mutiny. Since that time Sikh soldiers have been the backbone of the Indian army.

The Muslim desire to make politics communal disturbs the Sikhs. The 1916 Lucknow Pact, which gave Muslims separate electorates and reserved seats, totally ignored the Sikhs. In 1928, while Jinnah was again pushing Congress to maintain communal protections for Muslims, Sikh leaders were denouncing the use of caste or religion to determine in any way the form of national government. As a result of the 1937 elections, the Sikhs split their support. The Khalsa National Party joined the Unionist coalition to run the Punjab government and supported the British. Other Sikhs have supported Congress. The Unionist Party's leader, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, took Baldev Singh, a prominent Sikh industrialist, into his coalition government. However, promises made to the Sikhs were not kept.

In 1940, Jinnah and the Muslim League began to call for the creation of the sovereign state of Pakistan. Sikhs feared that this would mean either the partition of Punjab or, even worse, the entire province forced under the rule of a Muslim nation. In 1943, Master Tara Singh suggested that Muslim districts in the Punjab be separated, and the rest of the Punjab become a new state where no community would hold the majority.

The Sikhs maintain their preference for a united India with a coalition of all parties. In such a case, Sikhs would have some power. If Pakistan were created, the Sikhs would be forced under the tyranny of either Hindu India or Muslim Pakistan. They would prefer an independent state, called Khalistan, with the right to join either of the two larger ones. The majority of Sikhs are located in the eastern part of the Punjab; those in the west might be willing to migrate eastward. Sikhs and Muslims have never been friendly, and Sikhs would not submit willingly to Muslim rule and perpetual Muslim domination.

The Sikhs are willing to serve in an interim government. However, Sikhs wonder why Hindus and Muslims each would be given the right to decide as a community on communal issues (a communal veto), but Sikhs are not given the same protection. The Sikhs have been extraordinarily patient while larger groups are discussing their fate. However, the Sikhs' warrior reputation is well founded. They will resist, by force if necessary, subjugation by Pakistan or any communal group.

Beliefs and Assumptions of the Sikhs

1. The Sikhs in the Punjab have been most comfortable in a situation where no one community has an absolute majority. In such a situation, their relatively small numbers still can translate into political power.

2. The creation of Pakistan would have a terrible effect on the Sikh community.

Sikhs either would fall under Muslim domination if Pakistan claimed the entire Punjab or, if the province were split, be subject to either Hindu or Muslim authority.

3. If the major parties do not seriously consider the Sikh position, Sikhs are not afraid to resist by force.

From the Historical Record

From a letter by Master Tara Singh to Prime Minister Attlee, 23 October 1945:

“The cry of Pakistan is being raised more and more loudly by Muslim Leaguers who openly assert that, in accordance with the Cripps Offer (of 1942), the whole of the Punjab as constituted today will be liable to separation from the Indian Union if there is a bare majority in favor of such separation. The Muslim population in the Province is about 56 percent. Non-Muslims, especially Sikhs, are quite determined to resist—if necessary, by force of arms—being included in Pakistan, or being put under any sort of communal domination.... I most earnestly request...that efforts will be made to meet the Sikh demand of having an effective voice in the Government of the Province which is their homeland.”

Summary of comments by Master Tara Singh to the Cabinet Mission, 5 April 1946:

“Master Tara Singh said that he stood for a united India and for some sort of Coalition Government of all communities otherwise he thought that there may be trouble. To divide India would be a very troublesome course and a risky game. If there were a division, the Sikhs could not, in his opinion, remain either in Hindustan or Pakistan.... In view of the communal position prevailing in India the Sikhs would be bound to be under either the Muslims or the Hindus if there were two States. The Muslims and Hindus were not united and would remain antagonistic for some time. In that situation the Sikhs in a united India would have some bargaining power but if there were division of India they

would be under the majority of one community or the other. In that case, therefore, he wanted a separate independent State with the right to federate either with Hindustan or Pakistan.”

Summary of comments by Sardar Baldev Singh to the Cabinet Mission, 5 April 1946:

“The Viceroy...enquired what would happen to the Sikhs if Mr. Jinnah’s idea of division of the Punjab was carried out. Sardar Baldev Singh replied that the Sikhs would then not be able to live. Mr. Jinnah had said that numbers alone do not count; what did count in the Sardar’s view was the political importance of community, and in that respect he felt that the Sikh position was deteriorating.... He thought that if a solution were found by dividing the Province, a transfer of population designed to increase the Sikh proportion would be feasible. He had, so far, had no contacts with the Sikh states, but thought they would come into a federation.... The Viceroy enquired what would be the position of the Sikhs in the Army if India were divided. Sardar Baldev Singh replied that Sikhs in the Pakistan Army would not feel secure. The Muslims and the Sikhs have never been friendly, and though it would be impracticable to exclude Sikhs from the Pakistan forces, no reliable army could be based on a divided India. He reiterated his view that a single India with safeguards for minorities was the solution.”

From a letter by Governor Jenkins (Punjab) to Viceroy Wavell, 15 April 1946:

“Master Tara Singh saw me on his return

from Delhi, and seemed really concerned at the approaching departure of the British. He demanded either Khalistan [a name given to a proposed Sikh state], with transfers of population, or a new State stretching from the Jumna to the Chenab, in which he said the Sikhs would not be oppressed.... The comparative calm of the Punjab at the moment is certainly deceptive.”

From a letter by Gyani Kartar Singh (leader of Akali Party, associate with Master Tara Singh) to the Cabinet Mission, 28 April 1946:

“...the question of North-West Pakistan is not a League-Congress affair to the extent to which it is a Sikh-Muslim one.”