

Jinnah Pleads the Case for Pakistan Before the Cabinet Mission, 16-23 May 1946

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During the elections of 1945-46 the All Indian Muslim League secured more than 90 per cent of votes for the Muslim seats. Consequently, in his Pakistan Day message on 23 March 1946, Mohammad Ali Jinnah declared:

We have secured a thumping verdict throughout India by and through the recent elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures showing a clear result of not less than 90 per cent Muslim votes cast in favour of Pakistan. This is a crystal-clear verdict of our people. Let me state in unequivocal terms that we are determined to establish Pakistan by negotiations, peacefully, if possible, but if necessary, we are prepared to shed our blood, if that is going to be the test and fire through which we are required to go. Therefore, I urge upon you to organise yourselves and be prepared for every eventuality undoubtedly and fearlessly and let there be no faltering. Achievement of Pakistan to us means our very existence — failure means our extinction and all that Islam stands for in the subcontinent.¹

This was a most appropriate statement to show to the Cabinet Ministers, who landed at Karachi seaport on the same day i.e. 23 March 1946, the zeal and enthusiasm with which Jinnah was pleading the case for Pakistan. The Cabinet Mission consisted of Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and Mr. A.B. Alexander,

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1. *Times of India* (Bombay), 23 March 1946.

First Lord of Admiralty. The Mission arrived in Delhi on 24 March.²

Immediately after their arrival the Mission members along with the Viceroy Lord Wavell involved themselves in discussions with various political leaders and representatives of the people to chalk out a workable constitution for the future of the British India. They met Jinnah, Nehru, Gandhi, Azad and others, and granted interviews to them individually and collectively and sometimes in delegations, but these parleys did not produce any amicable settlement. The Cabinet Mission and Viceroy had no other option but to unilaterally announce their own proposal on 16 May 1946 known as the Cabinet Mission Plan by which the provinces were grouped into three categories — A, B, and C — within a loose union government. This also could not appease the Indian parties — each one having their own interpretation of the controversial clauses resulting into clarifications and sub-clarifications on the part of the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy. Finally, when this led to long delays in the formation of the Interim Government based on the Cabinet Mission Plan, the Mission decided to leave India on 29 June for Britain leaving to the Viceroy to solve all the controversial points particularly those relating to para 8 of the Plan.³

In the recent past, a noted journalist and analyst of political developments, Mr. Irshad Ahmad Haqqani, in his articles published in an Urdu newspaper⁴ pleaded that Jinnah was not as staunchly committed to the creation of Pakistan by partitioning the British India as for solving the political and economic problems of the Muslims living in the Muslim-majority areas in the north-west and north-east of the Subcontinent. This observation has been claimed to be based on Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman*,⁵

2. I.H. Qureshi, *The Struggle of Pakistan* (first printed in 1965; Karachi: University of Karachi, 1988), pp.208-09.

3. *Ibid.*, pp.225-26.

4. For instance, see his articles in the daily *Jang* (Rawalpindi, Lahore), 7-8, 10 June and 7 August 2003. Dr Safdar Mahmood in his articles appearing in the daily *Khabrain* (Lahore, Rawalpindi), 1-5 August 2003, successfully tried to counter Haqqani's argument favouring to Ayesha Jalal.

5. Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.174-207.

originally her doctoral thesis completed under the supervision of Dr. Anil Seale and submitted to the Cambridge University in 1982. Starting with the counting of Jinnah's 'failures' since 1928, the work is of propaganda nature.⁶ Ultimately, she comes to the conclusion that for Jinnah Pakistan was nothing but a "bargaining counter" in order to keep himself up in the forefront of politics since the time he left the Congress.⁷ Ayesha Jalal, however, fails to prove her point of view convincingly. She confuses various matters, for example, while dealing with the Cabinet Mission we come across such observations as "Jinnah hoped to persuade Congress to accept the Mission's proposed all-India federal scheme as a lesser evil."⁸ Thus, her whole argument is aimed at confusing Jinnah's role and is against the facts. She heavily relies on the British sources and pays little heed to those favourable to the projection of Jinnah's viewpoint. Stray references to certain newspapers, like the *Dawn*, or, for that matter, to the *Quaid-i-Azam's Papers* are there but these sources have been used quite cursorily. Besides, the newspapers of balanced opinion like the *Times of India* have been completely ignored. Hence, this is not a balanced study as, for example, that of Stanley Wolpert. It falls in the category of propaganda material and cannot be considered an academic work of substantial importance.

Almost all the British writers and Congress intellectuals are unanimously of the view that Jinnah was very serious for the achievement of Pakistan and had there been no Jinnah, there would not have been Pakistan or at least, the chances of its creation were quite remote. Even the British Cabinet Ministers and the Viceroy Lord Wavell were also convinced that it was very difficult to sidetrack Jinnah from the path of Pakistan. Before coming to the British India, Sir Stafford Cripps, "as a far-seeing statesman", had said in January 1946, that "it is far better to expedite means of arriving at a permanent settlement in which the question of Pakistan must form a major issue."⁹ He even prepared a secret note for the purpose of tackling Jinnah by the Mission when he came to

6. *Ibid.*, p.8.

7. *Ibid.*, p.187.

8. *Ibid.*, p.187.

9. British Library (OIOC), London, L/PO/6/115.

meet them in which some tactical suggestions were raised to pressurise Jinnah so that he did not emphasize division of British India. The purpose of all this background preparation on the part of Britain was to avoid the “partition” issue.¹⁰ In another outline case prepared for the same purpose it was suggested that Jinnah should be made to realize that his case for Pakistan was “not capable of justification”.¹¹ In short, several other background preparations were also made on the basis of which Jinnah was invited to meet the delegation on 4 April 1946.

The extensive homework done by the British Indian Government for tackling Jinnah included the checking by the Viceroy and his intelligence agencies how far the AIML was behind Jinnah and in the event of failure of talks with the Cabinet Mission what Jinnah intended to do. Consequently, a detailed note on the subject prepared under the guidance of the Viceroy submitted to the Mission on 28 March 1946, besides acknowledging that “the Muslim League seems to be solidly behind Jinnah”, explained:

If the situation arises in which the Muslim League are by-passed, I think they will be able to mobilize violent resistance on a large scale. In the Punjab they are busy contacting and training demobilised soldiers and are even women to use arms. I am told that Jinnah is getting letters from Muslim soldiers still in the Army, saying that they will fight for him. Any final breakdown in negotiations due to unreasonableness on Jinnah’s part will not appreciably lessen the strength of this violent resistance.¹²

It was in the backdrop of such realizations that the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy Lord Wavell met Jinnah on 4 and 16 April 1946 and the latter pleaded with them the case for Pakistan with full determination and sound arguments as follows.

According to Jinnah, the areas inhabited by the Muslims in majority belonged to “a different culture based on Arabic and Persian instead of Sanskrit origins”, “their social customs were entirely different and “they admire[d] different qualities in their

10. British Library (OIOC), London, IORL/P&J/10/32.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

heroes” in history.¹³ Replying to a question by A.V. Alexander about the nature of Hindu-Muslim differences in terms of races and religion, the Quaid said:

70% of Muslims were converts from Hindus. A large body was converted before any Muslim conqueror arrived. Muslim missionaries came from Arabia and converted large number of Hindus, not singly but by whole sub-castes together, 10 to 20 thousand people at a time. These Muslim converts were made outcastes by the Hindus. They were thrown out of every department of social life. Therefore, you find millions who have stood for centuries under the umbrella of a totally different civilization to their own. There are in India two different civilizations with deep roots side by side. They are totally different. The only solution is to have two “steel frames”, one in Hindustan and one in Pakistan.¹⁴

Other matters relating to defence, sovereignty, agreements between the two states, and joining the UNO were also discussed in detail in this meeting and Jinnah tried to convince them about the genuineness of the demand for the creation of Pakistan as a sovereign and independent country.¹⁵

In his second interview with the Cabinet delegation and the Viceroy on 16 April 1956, Jinnah pressed them for two things.¹⁶ First, he wanted the acceptance of the principle of Pakistan with six provinces — NWFP, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Bengal and Assam, and second, Calcutta should be clearly marked as a Pakistani area.¹⁷ The other matters, like territorial adjustment on the basis of non-Muslim population in Pakistani areas, he argued, could be discussed later. But the delegation made it clear to him that “the full and complete demand for Pakistan” had “little claim of acceptance”.¹⁸ However, it could not deter Jinnah from the demand for Pakistan and in his Presidential address to the AIML Legislators’ Convention held in Delhi on 7 April 1946 in which

13. Record of Interview between the Cabinet Delegation and His Excellency the Viceroy and Mr. Jinnah, President of the Muslim League, on Thursday, the 4th April, at 10.00 a.m., *ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Nicholas Mansergh and Pendrel Moon, *The Transfer of Power 1942-47: Constitutional Relations between Britain and India*, Vol.VII (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1982), pp.280-85.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

360 Muslim League Legislators participated, he made it clear to the powers that be that the British Government should desist from handing over power to the Congress, because it “would not hold for 48 hours”.¹⁹ He also declared that “so far as Muslim India is concerned, the conception of a united India is impossible. If any attempt is made to force a decision against the wishes of Muslims, Muslim India will resist it by all means and at all costs.”²⁰ “We cannot accept,” he emphasized, any “proposal which would be, in any way, derogatory to the full sovereignty of Pakistan.”²¹

At the Muslim Legislators’ Convention the tone of the speakers was strongly against the Union Government. They were not ready to accept any formula at the cost of Pakistan. Feroz Khan Noon even went to the extent of saying that if the British were not ready to help in the creation of Pakistan, the Muslim India would be compelled to seek Russian help.²² This convention discussed the issue of Pakistan and the way to achieve it for three days i.e., 7-9 April 1946.²³

From 5-8 May 1946, at Simla, a tripartite conference was arranged, attended by the Muslim League, Congress and British Cabinet delegation.²⁴ But it also failed to bring about any settlement because of the determination of the Muslim League delegation headed by Jinnah not to accept anything at the cost of Pakistan. Details of the correspondence and the parleys held with the Cabinet Mission were released to the press and published in the newspapers on 20 May 1946.²⁵ Though a confusing debate took place on the formation of groups, Jinnah successfully tackled this challenge.²⁶

When all these efforts of the Cabinet Ministers and the Viceroy failed to bring about an agreement between “the two main parties”, they at their own, but with “full approval of His Majesty’s

19. *Times of India*, 8 April, 1946.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Times of India*, 11 April 1946.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Transfer of Power 1942-47*, vol.VII, pp.425-75.

25. For instance see *Times of India*, 20 May 1946.

26. *Ibid.*

Government in the United Kingdom”, announced in a press statement issued from New Delhi on 16 May 1946 that “an Interim government may be set up at once” to carry on the administration of the British India, and a Constituent Assembly be formed to frame the future Constitution of India on the basis of the following principles:²⁷

- a. Government of the Union of India embracing both British India and the States shall deal with the subjects of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications;
- b. All subjects other than the Union subjects shall be under the purview of the provinces;
- c. Any group or province shall have the authority to opt out of the Union after the lapse of 10 years with the consent of the majority of its legislature;
- d. A federal legislature, which will also act as Constituent Assembly, shall be composed of 385 members (292 from British India and 93 from Indian States). 292 members from British India will be elected from three sections — A, B, and C. Section A will consist of 187 members coming from the provinces of Madras, Bombay, U.P., Bihar, C.P. and Orissa, Section B will consist of 35 members from the Punjab, NWFP, and Sind (with a representative from the British Baluchistan), while Section C will consist of 70 members from Bengal and Assam.
- e. First job of the Constituent Assembly would be to frame the future Constitution of India. Thereafter, the provincial representatives will divide up into three sections — A, B, and C, and proceed to settle the provincial constitutions. Provinces were authorized to opt out of the groups in accordance with sub-clause VIII which is as follows: “As soon as the new constitutional arrangements have come into operation, it shall be open to any Province to come out of any group in which it has been placed. Such a decision shall be taken by the new legislature of the province after the first general elections under the new Constitution.”
- f. If the Union Constituent Assembly decided for the Transfer of Power, a Treaty between the United Kingdom and the Union Constituent Assembly will be negotiated.²⁸

27. *Transfer of Power*, Vol.VII, pp.582-91.

28. *Ibid.*, p.590.

Before coming to the aforementioned conclusions, the statement of the Cabinet delegation and the Viceroy recognized in all fairness that Muslims of British India were right in expressing that “peace in India must be secured by measures which will assure to the Muslims a control in all matters vital to their culture, religion, and economic or other interests.”²⁹ It also unequivocally declared that the Muslim League “insisted that the principle of Pakistan should first be acknowledged.”³⁰ The statement also acknowledged that “this decision does not, however, blind us to the very real Muslim apprehensions that their cultural and political and social life might become submerged in a purely unitary India, in which the Hindus with their great superior numbers must be a dominating element.”³¹ Despite these realizations the Cabinet Mission did not accept the Pakistan demand because they could not risk annoying the Congress.³²

Jinnah’s reaction to the Cabinet Mission’s statement of 16 May was expressed in his press statement of 22 May, issued from Simla, wherein he not only critically evaluated the Mission’s statement but deplored:

that the Mission should have negated the Muslim demand for the establishment of a complete sovereign State of Pakistan, which we still hold, is the only solution of the constitutional problem of India and which alone can secure a stable government and lead to the happiness and welfare, not only of the two major communities, but of all the peoples of this sub-continent. It is all the more regrettable that the Mission should have thought fit to advance commonplace and exploded arguments against Pakistan and resort to special pleadings, couched in a deplorable language which is calculated to hurt the feeling of Muslim India. It seems that this was done by the Mission simply to appease and placate the Congress.³³

29. *Ibid.*, p.584.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, p.586.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Times of India*, 23 May 1946.