

Commonwealth Diplomacy and the Partition of India

Ilyas Ahmad Chattha*

Two main questions will be re-examined in this study. First, why did British policy-makers wish to retain India within the Commonwealth before they ceded powers? Second, why did the Congress high command accede to the Dominion Status, and why did India and Pakistan remain within the Commonwealth after August 1947, despite earlier indications that they might quit it when a suitable occasion arose? This study will argue that the date of transfer of power was put forward as an inducement to persuade the Congress high command to retain India within the Commonwealth. The reason for this ‘hurried scuttle’ as Churchill phrased it, will be raised in this study, which is based largely on official British sources. In order to illustrate the advantages of an early transfer of power for Britain and India and the disadvantages for Pakistan, I intend to analyze how Mountbatten’s hasty decision intensified the simmering violence of 1947. This study is intended to contribute to the large debate on British policy touching the devolution of power in India and to enable us to see in perspective

* University of Warwick, UK. The author is indebted to professors David Hardiman and Margot Finn, whose critical scrutiny of his various drafts and exacting standards of scholarship helped him to avoid many errors in argument, style and grammar. Special thanks are also due to Professor Ian Talbot for his invaluable guidance in locating the primary sources for this study. In the cultural context of South Asia names of highly regarded leaders are often anteceded by titles. It is contemplated derisive to call them only by their names. However, I shall refer to them mainly by their surnames. No offence is intended. The author’s email address is ilyaschattha@hotmail.com

the events that led up to the hurried transition from empire to dominion and its shattering consequences.

The British divided and quit India on 15 August 1947. The previous year had been one of increasingly bitter struggle in the subcontinent. The political tensions that had built up over the years and, above all, the uncertainty from August 1946 made the situation very volatile. The outcome of the Second World War altered the military, economic and political position of Britain in the world and also brought a radical transformation of the political temper in India. The relationship between India and Britain took a significantly new shape. The immediate impact of the war intensified the Indian demand for Independence. A war-exhausted Britain's control over India severely weakened. Political discord and administrative exigency prompted the British to speed up the end of Raj. Both sides anticipated a possible quick withdrawal of the British. The British policy-makers wanted to quit India with honour by securing their diverse interests, and the chief question for them was how to carry this through most expediently.

A White Paper admitted in 1946 that Britain could not revert to its pre-war imperial role and that regional defence arrangements would be necessary in the future.¹ The viceroy, Lord Wavell wrote to Churchill: 'To my mind, our strategic security, our name in the world for statesmanship and fair dealing, and much of our economic well-being will depend on the settlement we make in India...if our aim is to retain India as a willing member of the British Commonwealth, we must make some imaginative and constructive move without delay.'² Wavell recommended to Attlee that 'it would be better for the interest both of ourselves and of India to remove our control as soon as possible and to leave India to determine their own future...I recommend the withdrawal of British control by stages, beginning with the South of India...the date I recommended for the final transfer of power was March 31st,

1 D. McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impacts 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), Vol.IX, p.347.

2 Wavell to Amery and Churchill, 24 October 1944, Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India, The Transfer of Power* (Henceforth *TOP*) (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970-1984), Vol.V, Document No.64, p.131.

1948.’³ Nevertheless, the Labour government dismissed Wavell’s plan of ‘phased withdrawal of British authority’ from India on the grounds that it was neither ‘politically realistic’ nor ‘acceptable to Parliament and to public opinion that India should be left in chaos.... World opinion would regard it as a policy of scuttle unworthy of [a] great power.’⁴ Bevin, the foreign secretary, who was trying to hang on to Britain’s position in the Middle East, disliked Wavell’s ‘defeatist attitude’, and wrote to Attlee that they needed a Viceroy to uphold the Empire. If India went Egypt, Malaya, Ceylon, and the Middle East would be lost. ‘I do beg of you to take a stronger line and not give way to this awful pessimism.’⁵ However, after the end of the war various factors were compelling Britain’s policy-makers to transfer power rapidly in India.⁶

On 20 January 1947, the British Prime Minister, Attlee announced with a dramatic proclamation in the House of Commons that it was His Majesty’s Government’s ‘definite intention to take the necessary steps to effect the transference of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948.’ At the same time Attlee declared that if by that date a constitution had not been framed to the satisfaction of all important

3 John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI: His Life and Reign* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p.708.

4 Cabinet C.M. (46) Confidential Annex to No. 181, 10 December 1946, *TOP*, Vol. IX, Documents No. 181, pp.319-320. Although Attlee was attracted to the idea of a deadline, he described Wavell’s Plan as ‘a counsel of despair.’ He felt that Wavell was viewing the situation in military terms. See John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *King George VI* (1959), p.706.

5 Bevin to Attlee, 1 January 1947, *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.236, pp.431-432.

6 After the Second World War, the number of British in the armed forces and administration had been so greatly reduced that the British policy-makers realized that it would be hard to prolong British political control in India. In the Indian superior civil services the strength had dropped from eleven hundred to five hundred and twenty. In the Indian armed forces the number had come down from 11,000 to 4,000. Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1951), p.353; Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British India* (London: Cassell & Company, 1963), p.96; Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.99. Britain’s global debt of some £ 2,135,000,000 compelled the disbandment of the armed services. For details see, R.J. Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), p.10.

parties in India, then Britain itself would have to decide to whom power should be transferred: 'whether as a whole to some form of Central Government, or in some areas to existing Provincial Governments... or in some other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people.'⁷ Attlee was convinced that the only way of resolving the Indian tangle was a speedy British departure from India. He thought such a decision would induce the Indian leaders to realize the need for expediency. 'Unless these men were faced with the urgency of a time limit, there would always be procrastination.'⁸ Against Churchill's criticism of imposing a time limit 'a kind of guillotine', Attlee refuted that 'you can not put the clock back in India.'⁹ It was also announced that Wavell would be replaced by Mountbatten in March 1947. The historical mission of Mountbatten was to end one regime and to inaugurate a new one peacefully, securing Britain's strategic and economic interests before ceding powers.

Mountbatten and events moved rapidly. He reached Delhi on 22 March. By mid-April he realized that Jinnah was determined on Pakistan and that Congress was prepared to let him have it. He felt the 'sheer logic of events' was becoming the deciding factor.¹⁰ Having decided on partition, Mountbatten turned to keeping India in the Commonwealth. By granting Dominion Status as early as possible, this 'most important single problem' might be solved.¹¹ He decided to bring forward the date of transfer, stating on 3 June 1947 that: 'the transfer of power is going to be much earlier...I think the transfer of power could be about the 15th of August.'¹²

There were significant differences between the announcements of the 20 February 1947 and 3 June 1947. The February statement

7 *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.438, p.774.

8 John Connell, *Auckinleck: A Critical Biography* (London: Cassell, 1959), p.853.

9 *Pakistan Times*, 26 April 1947, Abdul Malik and Razi Wasti Collections, Government College University, Lahore. (Henceforth *Pakistan Times*)

10 Viceroy's Staff Meeting, 11 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol. X, Document No, 119. p.191.

11 Viceroy's Staff Meeting, 19 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol. X, Document No. 177, p.329.

12 Viceroy's Report No. 8, 4 June 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, L/PO/6/123, Oriental and India Office Library Collection (Henceforth O.I.O.C.). For full text of partition plan, see text of 3 June Plan 1947, R/3/1/150, f.252, *TOP*, Vol.XI, Document No.44 and 45, pp.87-88.

of Attlee proclaimed that the day of transfer of power would be 'by a date not later than June 1948.' His Letter of Instructions of 18 March also stated that British authority would cease by the end of June 1948. The Letter stated that 'the date fixed for transfer of power is a flexible one to within one month.'¹³ There was a radical change in the 3 June statement by Mountbatten. He spoke of 'the transfer of power this year [1947] on Dominion Status basis to one or two successor authorities.' He explained that the political parties had been insisting on 'the earlier possible transfer of power' and that the 'most expeditious' and 'the only practicable way' was 'transfer of power...on the Dominion status basis to one or two successor authorities.'¹⁴

Later, on 29 June 1948, he justified the change in policy by maintaining that 'everybody wanted the greatest possible speed, everybody wanted the transfer of power to take place quickly. Indeed, why wait? For in waiting there would be the risk of continued and increasing riots.... So we went ahead and fixed a date.'¹⁵ Two commentators who were close to Mountbatten at that time have supported him in this. His press attaché, Alan Campbell-Johnson argued that 'by March 1947 the only alternatives were Pakistan or chaos.'¹⁶ W. H. Morris-Jones noted, 'if power were not transferred soon, there would be none left to transfer, none to inherit effectively.'¹⁷ There were however other views on the subject.

Leonard Mosley gives us an alternative interpretation. He argues that it was Mountbatten's urgent wish and ambition to

13 Secretary of States to Mountbatten, *Mountbatten Papers*, 27 March 1947, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No. 13, 5/2/47 to 16/8/47, O.I.O.C.

14 Viceroy's Report No. 8, 4 June 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, L/PO/6/123, O.I.O.C.

15 Mountbatten's address to the East India Association, London, in 29th June 1948, cited by H. Philips, *The Partition of India: Twenty-Fourth Montague Burton Lecture on International Relations* (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1967), p.33.

16 Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (London: Robert Hale, 1951), p.354.

17 W. H. Morris-Jones, 'Thirty-Six Years Later, The Mixed Legacies of Mountbatten's Transfer of Power', *International Affairs*, Volume 59, Issue 4 (Autumn, 1983), p.623. Professor W. H. Morris-Jones was Constitutional Advisor to the Mountbatten during the last two months of the Viceroyalty, June-August 1947.

become the First Sea Lord, and he wanted to resume his Navy position. He holds that Mountbatten's decision to make an early transfer of power was taken at his own initiative. He even goes to the extent of saying that neither Churchill nor other Tory leaders were consulted and that Attlee, the Prime Minister, was 'shocked' by his announcement of antedating the transfer of power.¹⁸ Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre observe that 15 August was chosen by Mountbatten to coincide with the second anniversary of the surrender by the Japanese in the Second World War, which the authors consider to have been the 'most triumphant hours of his existence.'¹⁹ Mountbatten's biographer Richard Hough has pointed out an additional reason for precipitating the date of transfer of power. The November 1947 royal wedding was in Mountbatten's mind when he reduced the period allowed for the transfer of power.²⁰ However, all these statements and accounts appear contrary to what emerges from Mountbatten's own statement. In his final 'Report on the Last Viceroy' to His Majesty's Government in September 1948, he stated that 'the decision to transfer power on 15 August was not made hurriedly. An immense amount of thought was given to this part of the problem and the conclusion was reached that the advantage of an early transfer of power far outweighed the disadvantages.'²¹ From his chief of staff's record we learn that the date 15 August was settled with the approval of the British Cabinet when Mountbatten was in London in May 1947.²²

The pressure for the change of date did not come from the Indian side. For example, there is considerable evidence to show that the Muslim League was opposed to the immediate transfer of

18 Leonard Mosley, *The Last Days of the British Raj* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962), pp.134-135.

19 Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Freedom at Midnight* (London: Collins, 1975), pp.165-166.

20 Richard Hough, *Mountbatten, Hero of our Times* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), pp.218 and 225.

21 Report on the last Viceroy to H.M.G.'s in September 1948, Lionel Carter, *Mountbatten's Report on the Last Viceroyalty 22 March – 15 August 1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), p.286.

22 Lord Ismay, *The Memories of Lord Ismay* (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.422.

power by 15 August 1947. M. A. H. Isaphani, Jinnah's private secretary, maintains that the date 14-15 August 1947 was forced on Pakistan, that it was a Hobson's choice, that M. A. Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Abdul Rab Nishtar tried vainly to have the date of transfer delayed so that essential prerequisites such as distribution of assets, including the division of the defence forces and their equipment, could be tackled first.²³ On 7 April 1947, Jinnah told Mountbatten that to quit India prior to June 1948 would lead to 'chaos and bloodshed and civil war.'²⁴ In April 1947, Liaquat Ali Khan explained to Mountbatten 'that while the statement [20 February 1947] presupposed the coming into existence of Pakistan, and was therefore to be welcomed, the time limit was too short. A capital had yet to be chosen, government and administration to be organised, the inheritance of British India to be divided.'²⁵

The announcement of 3 June 1947 stated that 'the only practicable way' was 'transfer of power...on the Dominion status basis to one or two successor authorities.' It was not there in the statement of 20 February 1947 and the announcement made it clear that if a constitution was not worked out before June 1948 by a representative assembly, the British Government would have to hand over power 'to some form of Central Government for British India or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments or in such other way as may seem most reasonable and in the best interest of the Indian people.' Mountbatten was told in clear terms of the British government's policy: 'if by October 1 [1947] you consider that there is no prospect of reaching a settlement on the basis of a unitary Government for British India, either with or without the cooperation of the Indian States, you should report to His Majesty Government on the steps which you consider should be taken for the handing over of power on the due date ...you should aim at 1 June 1948 as the effective date for the transfer of

23 M. A. H. Isaphani, *Qaid-i-Azam As I Know Him* (Karachi: Forward Publications Trust, 1967), p.263.

24 Mountbatten's interview with Jinnah, 7 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.92, p.150.

25 Nicholas Mansergh, *History of Civilization: The Commonwealth Experience* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p.311.

power.²⁶ So this stipulation of the necessity of Dominion Status in the 3 June statement was a new element, and we have to ask why it appeared at this juncture and why the Congress accepted it.

It seemed quite possible that the Congress leaders would insist on outright independence rather than Dominion Status within the Commonwealth. They had all along been committed to complete independence. On 22 January 1947, the Constituent Assembly of India had unanimously decided that India should be an independent sovereign republic.²⁷ They had made every effort to turn down the Dominion Status-Commonwealth goal in favour of *Purna Swaraj*, or complete independence since 1928. On 26 January 1930, as president of Congress, Nehru had pledged for complete independence, and the Congress had reaffirmed it at Ramgarh session in March 1940. From 26 January 1930, the Congress had celebrated Independence Day every year. After the promulgation of a constitution for the country in 1950, this date was to be observed as the Republic Day in India.

To Nehru Dominion Status was nothing more than an interim arrangement. 'An ex gratia gift' from the British, it brought advantages to them in the long run because it increased their prestige and helped to produce goodwill.²⁸ The Commonwealth at that time consisted of self-governing Dominions and Dependencies and had no constitutional room for a Republic.²⁹ Nehru had pledged to a free Asia under Indian inspiration in which there was

26 Secretary of State to Mountbatten, *Mountbatten Papers*, 27 March 1947, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No. 13, 5/2/47 to 16/8/47, O.I.O.C.

27 Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 22 January 1947, *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.297, p.530; *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.150, p.261. The Muslim League was also committed to complete independence. On 22-23 March 1940 at Lahore, the historical gathering of Muslim League had passed a resolution that it stood for an independent State or States in the Northwest and East West of the subcontinent. See for detail, S. Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan, All-India Muslim League Documents, 1906-1947* (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1969-1970), Vol.II, p.340.

28 Nehru to M. Chalapathi Rao, 6 June 1947, S. Gopal, *Jawaharal Nehru: A Biography 1889-1947* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), Vol.I, p.356.

29 Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.119; R.J. Moore, *Making of the New Commonwealth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.6.

no place for Dominion Status for India. In October 1946, after taking office as minister for external affairs in the interim government, he affirmed, 'India is today among the four great powers of the world, [the] other three being America, Russia and China. But in point of resources India has a greater potential than China...in the modern world it is inevitable for India to be the centre of things in Asia.'³⁰ Britain did not appear in the list, presumably because the new India was conceived as the successor of the British in the East.

Nehru was emphatic that the small nation state 'can have no independent existence' that 'the days of small nations are over.'³¹ He considered Ceylon [now Sri Lanka] to be 'really part of India and wanted it to be included with the India federation. He saw Nepal as 'certainly a part of India.'³² During his visit to Malaya he suggested 'a common nationality between India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia.'³³ The chiefs of staff assured Nehru that Britain's 'whole inclination will be to endeavour to establish her hegemony in the Indian Ocean as long as Nehru is head of the Government.'³⁴ Patel shared Nehru's ambitions and aspirations and wrote to him that 'let India be strong and be able to assume the leadership of Asia.'³⁵

Nehru believed that the departure of the British would encourage self-reliance, that the 'severance from the Commonwealth would strengthen India's security', and that India would be freed from Britain's foreign commitments and animosities, while India herself was threatened by no major power. Nehru wrote to defence minister Baldev Singh, who was lobbying

30 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), pp.545-559, 545, 549, 550.

31 *Ibid.*, pp.569-70.

32 Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Henceforth SWJN) (New Delhi: 1986-1993), Second Series, Vol.II, p.470.

33 S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru. A Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975; London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), Vol.I, pp.309-311.

34 Laithwaite to Turnbull, 10 October 1946, *TOP*, Vol. VIII, Document No.425, p.689.

35 Patel to Nehru, 7 November 1950, Durga Das (ed.), *Sardar Patel's Correspondence* (Henceforth SPC) (Ahmadabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1972), Vol.X, pp.337-340.

to retain India in the Commonwealth, 'under no conceivable circumstance is India going to remain in the British Commonwealth whatever the consequences. This is not a question for me to decide or for few of us to decide. Any attempt to remain in the Commonwealth will sweep away those who propose it and might bring about major trouble in India.... If the British army officers leave, I shall accept that without losing a night's sleep.'³⁶ Nehru wanted some form of common nationality and friendly defence arrangements with Britain but only on the basis of independence.³⁷ He asserted, 'we shall seek to build anew our relations with England on a friendly and co-operative basis, forgetting the past.'³⁸ Whatever the reasons, the idea of Dominion Status made Nehru 'slightly seasick'³⁹ and he disclaimed the Dominion Status offer as 'fantastic nonsense.'⁴⁰ In his first meeting with Mountbatten on 24 March 1947, Nehru told the new Viceroy that he did not consider it possible, with the forces that were at work, that India should remain within the Commonwealth; nevertheless they did not want to break any threads. After this meeting Mountbatten felt the need to practice manipulation.⁴¹

There is considerable evidence that suggests that the date of transfer of power was advanced as an inducement to persuade the Congress to keep India within the Commonwealth. At that time, Dominion Status was accepted as a suitable device for accelerating the transfer of power. From the very outset, it was evident that Mountbatten was strongly committed to keeping India within the Commonwealth. In part, he was following instruction from London. Attlee had announced that the British government sought 'to obtain a unitary Government for British India and the Indian

36 Nehru to Baldev Singh, 14 April 1947 and 8 April 1947, S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru, op.cit.*, Vol.I, pp.352-53.

37 Mountbatten's interviews with Nehru, 24 March 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.11, p.11.

38 *TOP*, Vol.1, p.1665.

39 S. Gopal (ed.), *Jawaharlal Nehru* (Delhi, 1979-84), Vol.I, p.278.

40 *Pakistan Times*, 1 April 1947, Lahore.

41 Mountbatten's interviews with Nehru, 24 March 1 and 8 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document Nos. 11, 48 and 96, pp.131, 70 and 154.

States, if possible within the British Commonwealth.’⁴² Listowel, the Secretary of State for India, wrote to Mountbatten that every effort should be made that India and Burma ‘remain within the Commonwealth, everything will depend on our ability to bring home to the leaders of both countries during next few months the validity of this belief.’⁴³ From his press secretary, Alan Campbell-Johnson’s record of 5 April 1947 we learn that ‘his [Mountbatten’s] primary aim is to achieve a solution which inspires sufficient good feelings to enable the Indian parties to remain within the Commonwealth structure from the outset.’⁴⁴ His constitutional advisor, Morris-Jones noted: ‘the Commonwealth question was high on Mountbatten’s list of priorities from the very start.’⁴⁵ Ismay, Mountbatten’s chief of staff, asserted that ‘every effort should be made to keep India in the Commonwealth...in the next 18 months.’⁴⁶ Mountbatten’s official biographer has pointed out that his overriding priority was to keep India in the Commonwealth.⁴⁷ Apart from the statements of the commentators who were close to him, Mountbatten attested his determination to retain India within the Commonwealth: ‘I was one of those sentimental fools’, he told Krishna Menon, ‘that wanted nations to be within the Commonwealth.’⁴⁸ The opposition of Congress was an embarrassment to Mountbatten, who told Jinnah that he could not ‘possibly recommend to His Majesty’s Government that they should take on such a severe liability as the moth-eaten Pakistan

42 Secretary of State to Mountbatten, *Mountbatten Papers*, 27 March 1947, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No.13, 5/2/47 to 16/8/47, O.I.O.C.

43 Secretary of State to Mountbatten, 5 June 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No.13, 5/2/47 to 16/8/47, O.I.O.C.

44 Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, *op.cit.*, p.55.

45 W. H. Morris-Jones, ‘Thirty-Six Years Later, The Mixed Legacies of Mountbatten’s Transfer of Power’, *International Affairs*, Vol. Issue 4 (1983), p.626.

46 Record of Meeting held at the India Office to discuss India’s future relations with Commonwealth, 11 March 1947, *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.522, p.918.

47 Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London: Collins, 1985), p.469.

48 Mountbatten’s interview with Krishna Menon, 17 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.169, p.312.

was bound to be.’⁴⁹ Keeping India in the Commonwealth was declared by Mountbatten as his ‘single most important problem.’⁵⁰

The question that arises is why Britain, led by Mountbatten, was so determined to retain India in the Commonwealth before they ceded power. From the forties onward, the quest for a looser form of Commonwealth was exercising minds in many quarters. Ziegler wrote that in 1947 the Commonwealth was much more coherent and like-minded, flourishing within a strong framework of economic and military rights and obligations.⁵¹ It was widely expected that India would achieve independence not as Dominion Status but as a republic outside the Commonwealth, with no formal ties to ensure that she would contribute to imperial defence. The British policy-makers intended to maintain Britain’s position as a great power and saw the Commonwealth having an important role in this. They wanted to protect Britain’s economic and strategic interests east of Suez and in the Indian Ocean region. India had been the backbone of British power since the nineteenth century, providing four-fifths of the British defence efforts east of Suez during the Second World War.⁵² The British government considered that ‘to keep India within the Commonwealth of Nations...is of very great important to our future position in the world both economically and politically.’ The subcontinent should continue to be ‘the main support area in war’, offering the co-operation of its armed forces, the use of manpower, strategic air fields, and naval and military bases.⁵³ British chiefs of staff thought that one of the ‘essential measures’ required to assure British chances of survival and victory in a war was the

49 Viceroy’s Report No. 3, 17 April 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, L/PO/433, O.I.O.C.

50 Viceroy’s Staff Meeting, *Mountbatten Papers*, 19 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.177, p.329.

51 Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (1985), p.381.

52 M. Howard, *The Continental Commitment* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), pp.17-18.

53 Papers of the Office of Private Secretary to Viceroy, ‘India-Defence Requirements’, 1 August 1947, R.J. Moore, *Making of the New Commonwealth* (1987), pp.9 and 19.

maintenance of the united front of the Commonwealth.⁵⁴ Attlee advocated that 'it will be our aim to maintain the British Commonwealth as an international entity...if we are to carry our full weight in the post-war world with the US and the USSR it can only be as a united British Commonwealth.'⁵⁵

The major concern of Britain to India was strategic: India was the only major base from which the British could sustain large-scale operations in the Far East. If India left the Commonwealth, the British position in the North Indian Ocean would be weakened and oil supplies from the Persian Gulf could not be guaranteed.⁵⁶ Bevin foresaw Britain's interests to be in danger when India attained their independence 'unless all of us acted with great care.'⁵⁷ British chiefs of staff believed that India's defensive position would be weakened by the creation of Pakistan, and its 'strong and well-equipped' army would be destroyed, and he pressed that an established system of Commonwealth defence should be designed, which would include 'not only Pakistan, Hindustan and the Indian States, but also Burma and Ceylon.'⁵⁸

Historically speaking, any parley on the transfer of power since the forties was usually accompanied by ruminations on the participation of independent India in the imperial defence system. The Cripps Offer of March 1942 on Dominion Status had a stipulation that power would be transferred to Indians on the signing of a treaty to safeguard British interests.⁵⁹ In March 1946, the Labour government was only prepared to accept the

54 W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations, Origins and Impacts, 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1977). p.110; Anita Inder Singh, 'Keeping India in the Commonwealth, British Political and Military Aims, 1947-1949', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 20, Issue 3 (July 1985), p.471.

55 R.J. Moore, *Making of the New Commonwealth* (1987), p.9.

56 Wavell to Pethick Lawrence, 13 July 1946, *TOP*, Vol.VIII, Document No.26, pp.56-57.

57 Secretary of State for India to Mountbatten, 12 April 1947, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No.13, O.I.O.C.

58 Attlee to Cabinet Delegation and Wavell, 13 April 1946, *TOP*, Vol. VII, Document No.105, p.261.

59 Amery to Linlithgow, 1 March 1942, *TOP*, Vol.I, Documents Nos.262, 265 and 273.

recommendation of an Indian constituent assembly for independence if 'satisfactory arrangements' were made for the defence of the Indian Ocean area.⁶⁰ On 8 November 1946, the Cabinet Defence Committee affirmed that the military aspects of a future treaty between India and Britain had received consideration from the British, although it had never been mentioned to Indian leaders.⁶¹ Strategic and economic considerations received top priority in official memos and discussions during the negotiations for the transfer of power in 1946-1947.

Attlee wanted to protect British interests either with a reciprocal defence treaty with an independent India or on the basis of Dominionhood within the Commonwealth. He instructed Mountbatten that His Majesty's Government's objective was to reach a settlement for 'a unitary Government for British India and the India states, if possible within the British Commonwealth.' He pointed out 'the need for continued collaboration in the security of the Indian Ocean area'; at a suitable date H. M. G. would send out military and other experts to help negotiate an agreement.⁶²

In January 1947, King George VI told Mountbatten: 'it would be a pity if an independent India were to turn its back on the Commonwealth.'⁶³ The King believed that it was essential that India remained within the Commonwealth. London could continue to be, inter alia, the financial and mercantile centre of world. If India refused to join, the Afro-Asian nations which in their turn would gain independence in the years to come would almost certainly follow her example. Collins and Lapierre reported that Queen Victoria's two great-grandsons, King George VI and Mountbatten, agreed to a 'private decision' to keep India within the Commonwealth. Mountbatten, in the weeks ahead, devoted much 'thought, persuasiveness, and cunning to maintain a link

60 Anita Inder Singh, 'Imperial Defence and the Transfer of Power in India, 1946-1947', *International History Review*, Vol.4, (Nov. 1982), pp.570-576.

61 Monteath to Machtig, 8 November 1946, *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.17, p.31.

62 *Mountbatten Papers*, 27 March 1947, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No.13, 5/2/47 to 16/8/47, O.I.O.C.

63 Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, *Freedom at Midnight* (1975), pp.32-33.

between India and his cousin's Crown.'⁶⁴ Later on 15 April 1947 the Viceroy told Sir C. Trivedi in 'strict confidence' of the King's sentimental attachment towards 'India not to sever her connection with the Crown.'⁶⁵ The insistence on India retaining its link to the Crown was to be an overriding factor in Mountbatten's negotiations. At the time it was seen as a matter of the greatest importance for Britain.

Once in India, Mountbatten promoted the idea that India would be the chief loser if she left the Commonwealth: 'India had everything to gain by remaining in [Commonwealth], and we [Britain] nothing to lose by her going out; that the British officers would leave the Indian army if India did not take the first step to keep within the Commonwealth and, in consequence, India will have a rotten army and lose all the benefits of the Commonwealth.'⁶⁶ He adopted a strategy, which he called 'the delicate manoeuvre', of steering Nehru and Patel towards membership by ensuring that they would hear not from him, but from other Indian leaders, how India would be the gainer, in particular how India would be gravely disadvantaged against Pakistan if she was outside the Commonwealth when Pakistan remained within it.⁶⁷

In his 25 March 1947 meeting with Mountbatten, Patel raised the matter of reshuffling the establishment in accordance with his own choice and demanded the delegation of powers from the Secretary of State for India to the government of India. But contrary to Patel's demand, Mountbatten insisted that 'a formula to keep India within the Commonwealth had to be first worked out.'⁶⁸ On 11 April 1947 during his interview with Mountbatten when Rajagopalachari was arguing that Indianisation of the services

64 *Ibid.*, pp.32-33.

65 Mountbatten's Interview with C. Trivedi, 15 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.150. p.261.

66 Mountbatten's interview with Krishna Menon, 17 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.169. p.312.

67 W. H. Morris-Jones, 'Thirty-Six Years Later, The Mixed Legacies of Mountbatten's Transfer of Power', *International Affairs*, Issue 4 (1983), p.626.

68 Minutes of the Viceroy's second staff meeting, 26 March 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.20, p.24.

could be completed without any grave loss of efficiency only in 'five to ten years', the Viceroy replied by providing a short cut solution, namely that India should not leave the Commonwealth.⁶⁹ On 15 April when Trivedi told Mountbatten regarding a resolution in the Constituent Assembly about an independent sovereign republic, Mountbatten lectured him on the imminent threat of Russia to India and its economic fragility and set out the pros and cons of India remaining within the Commonwealth, arguing that: 'it would be wise to include India in the Commonwealth.'⁷⁰ On 16 April 1947 during his meeting with defence minister Sardar Baldev Singh, a firm believer in India's staying within the Commonwealth, Mountbatten stated: 'I had had sufficient hints from both Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Liaquat Ali Kahn to show that Pakistan would want to remain in the British Empire, and receive assistance from British officers.... Congress would be ill advised not to accept the same advantages.'⁷¹

Mountbatten considered the future of the Indian army and the services would be the 'biggest bargaining point' in persuading the Congress to retain India in the Commonwealth. He told Ismay that Pandit Nehru could not do without all the British personnel.⁷² Whitehall threatened the Congress high command that India would have to face the enmity of the British and its students would not be admitted to the British institutions including the Imperial Defence College if India remained out of the Commonwealth. Mountbatten advised Krishna Menon to lobby in favour of remaining within the Commonwealth. He told him of the disadvantages for India if she remained out while Pakistan alone joined: 'not only [would] they

69 Mountbatten's interview with Rajagopalachari, 11 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Documents No.121, p.195.

70 Trivedi's interview with Mountbatten on 15 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.150, pp.260-261. Sir Chandulal Trivedi was the governor of Orissa and after partition he became first governor of Indian Punjab. During the Second World War when Mountbatten had served as Commander-in-Chief in the Southeast Asian command, Trivedi had been working as the Secretary of the defence department under his subordination.

71 *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.161, pp.285-286. Also see, Viceroy's Staff Meeting, Uncirculated Record of Discussion No.9. *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.170, p.314.

72 Minutes of the Viceroy's second staff meeting, 26 March 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.20, Item 5, p.24.

[Muslim League leaders] be able to get the same equipment as Hindustan, but could do a great deal better, since they could obviously get secret equipment not available to anybody not within the Commonwealth, and they could go to our schools and make use of our experimental establishments, and keep up-to-date.' He continued: 'In fact, backed by British and American arms and technique, Pakistan...armed forces [would be] immensely superior to those of Hindustan...and I presumed that places like Karachi would become big naval and air bases within the British Commonwealth.' Mountbatten noted that Krishna Menon 'absolutely shuddered' and asked 'How can we prevent it?' The Viceroy told him 'by the simple expedient of being in the Commonwealth yourselves; and there can be no question of Pakistan getting ahead of you.' Menon seemed, as Mountbatten stated, 'rather smitten' with this idea.⁷³ Having consulted the Congress leaders, Menon reported to the Viceroy: 'Unless you take the first step and approach us, nothing will be done' and suggested that 'a new step' might be taken by inviting Nehru for 'some fresh air in Simla.'⁷⁴ Mountbatten's obsession with the Commonwealth link gave the Congress high command a lever over the Viceroy which they utilised to the full.

A crucial development was Mountbatten's 'Plan Balkan', which proposed leaving to each province the choice of its own

73 Mountbatten's interview with V.K. Krishna Menon, 22 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.200, p.372. Krishna Menon was Nehru's confidant and associate. He served as a 'contact man' between Mountbatten and Nehru. See Lionel Carter, *Mountbatten's Report on the Last Viceroyalty 22 March-15 August 1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), p.126; Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (1985), p.371. Krishna Menon was staying in Delhi, Mountbatten noted, 'specially in the hope of being of use to me... to help give the background of what was going on in Congress circles, and to help me to put over any points that I found too delicate to handle myself directly.' See R.J. Moore, 'Mountbatten, India, and the Commonwealth', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. XIX, (1981), p.14.

It is interesting to point out that Jinnah also tried for a secret bargaining agreement with Mountbatten, through the Nawab of Bhopal, on the stipulation that if the Muslim nation granted Pakistan as Muslim League had deemed it rather than imposing a moth-eaten country, Pakistan would remain within the Commonwealth. See, Minutes of Viceroy's Fourth Staff Meeting, 28 March 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.29, p.36.

74 Mountbatten's interview with Krishna Menon, 17 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.169, p.312.

future to join the existing constituent assembly, or form new groups, or stand apart from either.⁷⁵ This plan was wholly contrary to the 20 February 1947 announcement of Attlee, since in that statement there was no reference to power being transferred to each province of British India. Again, Attlee's Letter of Instructions of 18 March 1947 to Mountbatten left no room for doubt. Attlee instructed: 'if by October 1 you consider that there is no prospect of reaching a settlement on the basis of a unitary government for British India, either with or without the cooperation of the Indian States, you should report to His Majesty's Government on the steps which you consider should be taken for the handing over power on the due date...you should aim at 1 June 1948 as the effective date for the transfer of power.'⁷⁶ So there was no scope for convening and drafting the 'Plan Balkan' within the 20 February framework and the 18 March Letter of Instructions. Mountbatten could not be ignorant of the fact that the inevitable consequences of the proposals [Plan Balkan] to transfer power to each province, would be to invite the Balkanisation of India. Particularly some of the major Princely States would try to emerge as independent kingdoms.

Why did Mountbatten devise the Plan Balkan? It can be understood only as a tactic to twist the Congress leaderships' arm to keep India within the Commonwealth by threatening the dismemberment of India. It is hard to believe that Mountbatten had ever been serious about the practicality of the plan. It was dawn up with a view to rejection, so that a rival proposal could be imposed in the resulting confusion.⁷⁷

75 Viceroy's Staff Meetings, Uncirculated Record of Discussion, 12 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol. X, Document No. 129, p.207. Various authors give the Balkan Plan different name, for example, Mountbatten Plan, Ismay Plan, or 3 May Plan. N. Mansergh called it 'Dickie-Bird Plan.' Nicholas Mansergh, *History of Civilization: The Commonwealth Experience* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p.312.

76 Secretary of Sates to Mountbatten, 27 March 1947, Mss Eur; F 200/176, No. 13, *Mountbatten Paper*, O.I.O.C.

77 Different opinions on the Plan Balkan, see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman* (1985), p.254; R.J. Moore, 'Mountbatten, India, and the Commonwealth', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. XIX, (1981); *Making of the New Commonwealth* (1987), p.17; Y. Krishan, 'Mountbatten and the Partition of India', *History*, Vol.68, No.222. (February 1983), p.33; Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *The*

Mountbatten showed the 'Plan Balkan' of 2 May 1947 to Nehru who turned it down outright. His basic point was that the draft plan did not recognize the fact that the Indian union was the successor authority to the British government in India from which certain states wanted to secede. He said that the picture presented by the proposals was 'an ominous one' and would create many 'Ulsters' in India, which would, he warned, produce 'fragmentation and conflict and disorder and unhappily also, a worsening of relations between India and Britain.' 'If my reactions were so powerful', Nehru concluded, 'you can well imagine what my colleagues and others will think and feel.'⁷⁸ Alan Campbell-Johnson noted that Nehru was convinced that the plan involved a major departure in principle from the original draft prepared by the Viceroy and his staff. Mountbatten was well aware that he had engineered this plan with a view to rejection. As he told his press attaché that he had only given the Plan to Nehru on 'a hunch.... Without that hunch, "Dickie Mountbatten would have been finished and could have packed his bag".' He said that most of his staff, with natural caution, had been against his running over his Plan with Nehru, but by following his advice rather than their advice he had 'probably saved the day.'⁷⁹

When Mountbatten found that Nehru was bitterly opposed to the draft and was casting around for a way out, new proposals were communicated in strict secrecy in the second week of May. The man who forged the eventual compromise was the Viceroy's Reforms Commissioner, V.P. Menon. Mountbatten described him 'one of the most statesmen-like minds I have ever encountered.'⁸⁰ According to Mountbatten's predecessor, Wavell, Menon was known as 'Patel's man' and his 'mouthpiece.'⁸¹ George Abell,

Final Phase of the Struggle for Pakistan (Lahore: United Publisher Ltd., 1975), pp.109-110; Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, *op.cit.*, pp.138-254.

78 Nehru to Mountbatten, 11 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.402, p.756. Also see, V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power* (1957), pp.362-63.

79 Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (1951), p.89.

80 D. Mackenzie Brown's review of V.P. Menon's book '*The Transfer of Power in India*', in *The American Historical Review*, Vol.63, Issue 2 (Jan., 1958), p.426.

81 Penderel Moon (ed.), *Wavell, The Viceroy's Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.384, 408 and 412.

Mountbatten's Private Secretary, once testified that V.P. Menon was 'perhaps the biggest personal factor in our success.'⁸² Menon's revision of the Plan Balkan proposed to transfer power 'on the basis of Dominion Status before June 1948', to 'one or two successor authorities' and 'within the British Commonwealth.'⁸³ This would permit independence before the new constitutions were written and the new Dominions would be able to a large extent to adopt whatever constitutional changes they wished. The Crown would act on the advice of ministers. Full sovereignty, as provided by the Statute of Westminster, would be granted. This mode of severance would also be more acceptable to British opinion because Commonwealth continuity would be preserved.

V.P. Menon had already obtained Patel's approval of this scheme. He was keeping him informed of the development in Simla and was 'delighted by the turn of events.' Menon considered that nobody could have been better aware of the situation in the country than Patel. He told Patel that by accepting Dominion Status the Congress would be warmly welcomed by the British, and 'would by this single act have gained its friendship and goodwill.' Dominion Status was being eagerly grasped as the procedural device to speed the transfer of power. Patel assured, conditionally, 'if power could be transferred at once on the basis of Dominion Status, he for one would use his influence to see that the Congress accepted it.' He publicly stated that the present government should be given all privileges of Dominion government. Menon was justified in thinking that he was the first to obtain Patel's approval to the idea of transfer of power on the basis of Dominion Status. The Menon Plan, which was fashioned in less than three hours, was to outline the plan of the arrangement under which the British left India three months later and the country was to be partitioned into dual Dominions, India and Pakistan. 'I had only two or three hours in which to prepare an alternative plan and I set to work on it at once.'⁸⁴ This plan

82 See, f.n. 80, above.

83 India and Burma Committee. I.B. (47) 28th Meeting, 28 May 1947, L/P&J/10/79, O.I.O.C.

84 V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power* (1957), pp.359 and 365.

assuaged the Congress's concerns about fragmentation of India and paved the way for a compromised Pakistan, involving the partition of both the Punjab and Bengal, which Jinnah had hitherto constantly spurned.

Nehru was equally delighted by the early scheme of the desirable transfer of power on Dominion Status basis. He suggested a transfer of power by June 1947 would be desirable to the existing Central Assembly and any suggestion that Pakistan should be created straight away should be ruled out.⁸⁵ It was significant that while these crucial discussions were taking place, Jinnah and the League were in the dark as to how the final plan was being evolved. For preventative measures, it was suggested, if Pakistan was not ready to accept this plan, His Excellency should continue to act as a Viceroy for Pakistan and as a constitutional governor-general for the union. If even by June 1948 Pakistan was not properly constituted, full power could be transferred to an executive appointed by its Constituent Assembly.⁸⁶ Persuading the Viceroy to fall in with the Congress plan, Nehru and Patel were ready to make a larger offer, India's entry in the Commonwealth, by compromising on the two major manifestations of the Congress' creed since the late 1920s — unity and full independence of India. Mountbatten sought a way out of the deadlock that he had helped to create. His squash play had begun to work. Congress leaders' eagerness for an early de facto transfer of power and Mountbatten's strong belief in the Commonwealth accelerated the partition process. They moved as rapidly as possible to a solution that none of them liked, and pressed forward its implementation.

Mountbatten's fixation with the Crown link made him somewhat oblivious to the Congress high command's motives to accept it. Congress leaders perceived that temporary Dominion Status within the British Empire under the rapidly implemented

85 See Nehru's Plan, Minutes of Viceroy's Tenth Miscellaneous Meeting, 8 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.350, p.673. Also see, V.P. Menon, *Transfer of Power* (1957), p.360.

86 Minutes of Viceroy's Tenth Miscellaneous Meeting, 8 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.350, Item 3, p.675.

plan would be to their benefit as most of British India would come under the control of the Congress-controlled government in New Delhi. They had ambitions for a strong centre rather than the 16 May Cabinet Mission plan with its groupings and sections and its weak centre, which the Muslim League had accepted. To pave the way for a compromised Pakistan and to allay post-partition problems, they felt it was strategic to endure allegiance to the Crown for a few months. Their object was to pressurise Jinnah, forcing the Muslim districts prematurely into a birth, which they were unlikely to survive.

The Congress leaders pondered the idea that it would be well-nigh impossible for Pakistan to establish and consolidate itself within this extremely short period and sooner rather than later it would be absorbed back into India. The Congress wanted to counter the surge in popularity of the League, by advancing the date of partition. In the wake of Attlee's announcement that by June 1948 British political power in India would be completely withdrawn, the political complexion of the provinces like the Punjab and NWFP had so completely changed in favour of the Muslim League that any attempt to hold up the transfer of power would have resulted in yet more popularity for the Muslim League in these provinces. The author of the rapidly formulated partition plan asserted: 'If there was delay [on the question of partition], the uncertainty might lead to renewed agitation on the part of Jinnah and consequent deterioration in the political atmosphere.'⁸⁷ More than two years later, addressing the Constituent Assembly in 10 October 1949, Patel said: 'I give you this inner history which nobody knows. I agreed to partition as a last resort, when we had reached a stage where we could have lost all...they [the Muslim Leaguers] wanted the whole of *Punjab, Bengal and Calcutta*.... Mr. Jinnah did not want a truncated Pakistan but he had to swallow it... I made a further condition that in two months' time power should be transferred...Show me any instance in the history of the

87 V.P. Menon to Patel, 10 May 1947, Durga Das (ed.), *SPC* (1972), Vol.IV, Document No.118, pp.113-114.

British Parliament when such a Bill in Parliament was passed in two months. But this was done.’⁸⁸

The Congress accepted the partition plan with a wish of reunification. Most of the Congress leaders subscribed to the view that Pakistan would not be economically and militarily a viable state and would be ‘bound to come back later’ into the motherland, India, within six months. As Menon prophesied, ‘our slogan should now be divided in order to unite.’⁸⁹ Patel thought that Pakistan would be created to remerge into India. He wrote to Bozman that ‘we nurse the hope that one day Pakistan will come back to us.’⁹⁰ This was a commonly held view among many Congress politicians.

On 14 June 1947, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution accepting the 3 June partition plan, included a convincing exposition of the indispensable unity of India, ‘no human agency can change the shape of *India* and her final destiny. ... the A.I.C.C. earnestly trusts that when the present passions have subsided, India’s problems will be viewed in their proper perspective and the false doctrine of two nations in India will be discredited and discarded by all.’ Azad who seconded the resolution, claimed: ‘The division is only of the map of the country and not in the hearts of the people, and I am sure it is going to be a short-lived partition.’⁹¹ The hope of reuniting India was expressed by Kripalani: ‘Such an India can win back the seceding children to its lap...for the freedom we have achieved cannot be complete without the unity of India.’⁹² Patel believed that ‘India is one and indivisible, one cannot divide a sea or split the running waters of a river.’ Speaking to Delhi citizens during the Liberty Celebration on 11 August 1947, he declared: ‘we took these extreme steps after

88 Hugh Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom? India and Pakistan 1947* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.121.

89 Durga Das (ed.), *SPC* (1972), Vol.IV, pp.113-114.

90 Patel to Bozman, 11 July 1947, Document No. 120, Chopra, P.N., (ed.), *The Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel* (henceforth CWSVP) (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1998), Vol.XII, p.129.

91 Menon, *Transfer of Power* (1957), pp.384-385.

92 M. Brecher, *Nehru, A Political Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp.377-778.

great deliberation. In spite of my previous strong opposition to partition, I agreed to it because I was convinced that in order to keep India united it must be divided now.⁹³ He was strongly convinced that Pakistan would ‘collapse in a short time.’⁹⁴

Nehru also saw Pakistan as a ‘temporary phenomenon’⁹⁵ and believed that sooner or later she would be compelled by force of circumstances to return to the fold. General Taker epitomized the Congress Working Committee’s attitude when he stated: ‘well, if the Muslims want Pakistan, let them damned well have it and with a vengeance. We shall shear every possible inch off their territory so as to make it look silly and to ensure that it is not a viable country and when they have got what’s left we’ll ensure that it can’t work economically.’⁹⁶ Thus the creation of Pakistan was accepted as a calculated move so that the seceding areas could be forced in such a position where they could hardly continue their existence.

It must be remembered that prior to Mountbatten’s arrival in India, the Congress Working Committee had reconciled itself to the partition, and a statement of the Committee implied a partition of the Punjab and Bengal, because eastern Punjab and western Bengal had no intention of being cut off from the Indian union. ‘The truncated Pakistan that remains will hardly be a gift worth having.’⁹⁷ Nehru and Patel had come to the conclusion that there was no alternative to at ‘least temporary secession’ and firmly believed that this would lead to ‘a reintegration of India.’ Nehru asserted that ‘I have no doubt whatever that sooner or later India will have to function as a unified country. Perhaps the best way to reach that stage is to go through some kind of a partition now.’ Nehru affirmed this wish to Brigadier Cariappa when he stated: ‘It

93 *Bombay Chronicle*, 12 August 1947, cited in P.N. Chopra (ed.), *CWSVP* (1998), Vol. XII, Document No.139 and 142. pp.153 and 161.

94 Maulana A.K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1959), p.207.

95 S. Gopal, *Jawaharal Nehru, A Biography* (1975), Vol.I, p.356.

96 Francis Taker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassell, 1950), p.257. Also see, M. Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (1959), p.377.

97 Nehru to Krishna Menon, 23 February 1947, S. Gopal, *Jawaharal Nehru: A Biography 1889-1947* (1975), Vol.I, pp.340-342.

was wise to let events have their course for a while so that they might return on their own to the normal equilibrium. But of one thing I am convinced that ultimately there will be a united and strong India. We have often to go through the valley of the shadow before we reach the sun-lit mountain tops.⁹⁸ Mountbatten's chief task, therefore, was merely to work out the detail and effect of the partition demanded by the League, and accepted by the Congress and British government.

Mountbatten offered the hope that later reunification would be facilitated by Dominion Status. Persuading Nehru to accept the transfer of power on the Dominion basis, Mountbatten argued: 'if truncated Pakistan were now conceded it would return to India later, whereas delay [will] exacerbate agitation.'⁹⁹ He reported to London that he felt 'strongly that the scheme of partition should be such as will not debar the two sides from getting together, even before the transfer of power...'¹⁰⁰ Menon argued to Mountbatten that once the two governments started negotiating, they might 'ultimately come right round to the view that an impassable barrier cannot be created between the two Indias and that after all a unified Constitution is better for all concerned.'¹⁰¹ Had a strong India and a truncated Pakistan agreed to remain within the Commonwealth it was on the agenda that Pakistan could rapidly 'revise the miscalculation of its sectarian manifestations.' Contemplating that a mutilated Pakistan would be 'bound to come back later' to the Union, Mountbatten told Liaquat Ali Khan that 'he felt some saving clause must be introduced in the final announcement of decision.' He observed, 'given a year's education and experience of *difficulties*, what Partition of India, resulting in a truncated Pakistan involved, to find this out they [India and Pakistan] might gain a very difficult outlook.' He added, 'perhaps

98 Nehru to K. P.S. Menon and Brigadier Cariappa, 29 April 1947, *Ibid.*, pp.343-344.

99 Mountbatten's Staff Meeting, 10 May 1947, R.J. Moore, 'Mountbatten, India, and the Commonwealth', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. XIX, (1981), p.27; V.P. Menon to Patel, 10 May 1947, Durga Das (ed.), *SPC* (1972), Vol.4, Document No. 118, pp.113-114.

100 Viceroy's Personal Report No. 3 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.165, p.301.

101 Note by V.P. Menon, undated, *TOP*. Vol.X, Document No.222, pp.439-40.

the decision now taken should be made subject to ratification at a future date in about a year's time.'¹⁰² V.P. Menon himself made the consequential comment, 'I agreed with His Excellency's observations because our slogan should now be divide in order to unite.'¹⁰³ Cripps also viewed the 3 June plan as a temporary severance of the seceding areas, and advised Morris-Jones to make a study of such joint organization as the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the International Postal Union.¹⁰⁴

The initiative in evolving the Dominion model had come from the old colonies. The decisions and events in one colony or dominion had provided precedents for others. It can be argued that the British government was following the precedent set in the case of other Dominions, where unity had come about by the initiative of certain colonies for closer association, others coming in later, and in some instances not at all. In the case of Canada the original Dominion of 1867 consisted only of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Manitoba came in 1870, British Columbia in 1871, and Prince Edward Island in 1873. Newfoundland, which was included in the original constitution, did not join until 1949. In Australia, New South Wales came in after a second referendum in 1899, and Western Australia also joined in after a referendum in 1900. New Zealand decided to stay out altogether and became a separate Dominion. Similarly, in the case of South Africa, Natal had insisted on having a special plebiscite.¹⁰⁵

The only existing impassable hindrance was Jinnah. He opposed the 'V.P. Menon Plan' as it entailed the partition of both the Punjab and Bengal, something that Jinnah had hitherto constantly spurned. He dubbed the plan 'monstrous' and a 'shock' and said it would lead 'to bloodshed...to confusion...to terrible

102 Minutes of Viceroy's Eighteenth Staff Meeting, Addendum No.185, 19 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol. X, Document No. 185.

103 V.P. Menon to Patel, 10 May 1947, Durga Das (ed.), *SPC* (1972), Vol.4, Document No. 118, pp.113-114.

104 W.H. Morris-Jones to S. Gopal, 11 March 1970, S. Gopal, *Jawaharal Nehru, A Biography 1889-1947* (1975), Vol.I, p.356.

105 W. David McIntyre, *Colonies into Commonwealth* (London: revised edition, 1974), chapters 2-4.

consequences.¹⁰⁶ He had found the June 1948 deadline too early to transfer power. When Mountbatten categorically told him that the timetable could not be delayed, Jinnah asked desperately, ‘how do you [British] propose to leave by June 1948; is it your intention to turn this country over to chaos and bloodshed and civil war?’¹⁰⁷ Jinnah called for a transfer of power that would occur steadily and smoothly. He urged the Viceroy and H. M. G. not to fall into the ‘trap’ set up by the Congress and ‘commit a grave error.’ He clearly told the Viceroy that ‘he would be sorry if [Mountbatten] were taken in by the Congress bluff.’¹⁰⁸ He was conscious that Congress leadership, in compromising its demand for full independence, was accepting the Dominion Status to cripple the idea of Pakistan. ‘The Congress want to inherit everything, they would even accept Dominion Status to deprive me of Pakistan’, Jinnah stressed. The troika saw Jinnah unable to thwart their ‘Plan They’ and ‘Plan We’¹⁰⁹ and left for him ‘the only possible solution in the circumstances’— to approve their decision.¹¹⁰ There was much justification in Campbell-Johnson, Mountbatten’s press attaché’s observation that ‘Pakistan was brought into existence on the nod.’¹¹¹ A deal to speed up the transfer of power at the price of India agreeing to keep within the Commonwealth and to promote a reduced Pakistan was connived.

Events now took a dramatic turn when the Congress high command suggested to the Viceroy through C. Trivedi and V.P. Menon that the Congress would, with an early transfer of power, be prepared to retain the ‘Union inside the Commonwealth’ and

106 *Dawn*, 13 May 1947.

107 Mountbatten’s interview with Jinnah, 7 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.92, p.150.

108 Jinnah’s press statement titled ‘Beware of the Trap (Reproduced from *Dawn* dated the 1st May 1947), *TOP*, Vol.X, Annex 1 to 276, p.544. Also see, Mountbatten’s interview with Jinnah, 8 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.101, p.159.

109 Mountbatten referred the V.P. Menon Plan as the ‘Congress Plan’, ‘Plan They’ and ‘Plan We’, Mountbatten to Ismay, 13 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.424, p.800.

110 Mountbatten’s interviews with Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, 7 June 1947, *TOP*, Vol.XI, Document No.101, p.191.

111 Alan Campbell-Johnson, ‘Mountbatten and The Transfer of Power’, *History Today*, Vol.47, Issue 9 (September 1997), p.38.

even accept 'Dominion Status.'¹¹² Mountbatten was now concerned about the 2 May Plan (Plan Balkan) which Ismay and Abell had taken to Whitehall. He recognized that their 'departure was premature' and a 'number of difficulties inherent in the draft Plan...had arisen' and 'difficulties would have to be faced and Lord Ismay would have to be informed of them.'¹¹³ The Viceroy immediately cabled Ismay that he had not expected to pull off this coup, 'but the situation has been completely changed by Patel and Nehru coming forward themselves.' Here was the 'greatest opportunity ever offered to the Empire and we must not let administrative or other difficulties stand in this way.' India would 'remain indefinitely in the Commonwealth', and there was a 'sporting chance' that it would remain there for 'all time; but will also get over the difficulty of Jinnah having already indicated Pakistan's insistence on not being kicked out of the Empire.' He emphasized, 'I rely on you both [Ismay and Abell] to give this your full backing.' 'Speed the pace of independence' was the 'essence of the contract'; otherwise 'we will miss the opportunity.'¹¹⁴

Ismay, by mentioning Mountbatten's concern, emphasized to Attlee, who was already bewildered by the Viceroy's volte-face and who had received his 'radical revisions' as 'bombshells', the need for the early decision on transfer of power and stressed that 'the Viceroy was most anxious that a decision on his proposal should be taken without delay.' And, considering that there was 'the risk of leakage' and probable obstinate opposition by Jinnah, Ismay recommended 'it would be advisable to allow the Indian leaders 48 hours for consideration of the proposed statement. The short period suggested by the Viceroy would not afford them adequate time to reach agreement on any modifications of the

112 Mountbatten to Secretary of State for India, 8 May 1947, L/P&J/10/79, O.I.O.C; Mountbatten to Ismay, 8 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.360, p.699; The Retention of India within the Commonwealth, Minutes of Viceroy's Twenty Seventh Staff Meeting, 7 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.339, p.659, item 2.

113 Minutes of Viceroy's Twenty Sixth Staff Meeting, 5 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.314, p.617.

114 Mountbatten to Ismay, 11 May 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, L/PO/427, O.I.O.C.

plan.’¹¹⁵ On 14 May, Attlee raised the matter of what Mountbatten called ‘Nehru’s bombshell’, with his senior colleagues in the India and Burma Committee stating that ‘a substantial change in the attitude of the India leaders as a result of the conversations which the viceroy had been holding during the past few days in particular, the raising at this stage of the possibility of early attainment of Dominion status by India...seemed to have produced a radical change in the situation.’ Attlee emphasized to the committee that a critical position in India, Burma and Ceylon had made the matter urgent. ‘The Associated States of the Commonwealth’ might provide an umbrella under which a number of states might be brought together, including India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon. Pakistan and Ceylon’s leaders had been pressing for Dominion Status, which would enable them to meet challenges after Britain ceded powers. The committee proposed to call Mountbatten in London for further explanations of his latest views and intentions of the present attitude of the Indian leaders.¹¹⁶

Mountbatten played his cards with such consummate skill that the Congress leadership was driven to accept Dominion Status. To the economists he pointed out the preferential advantages that India would enjoy; to strategic analysts he stressed the benefits that Commonwealth membership would confer on Pakistan, the crippling loss to the Indians if they were deprived of similar assistance. Persuading Congress to remain within the Commonwealth, he even used dubious tactics. He told K. Menon a blatant untruth that he had received the strictest instruction not to make any attempt to keep India within the Commonwealth.¹¹⁷ He told his staff that he was ‘using the Pakistan threat to remain in as a lever to help Congress to take the plunge.’¹¹⁸ His press attaché Campbell-Johnson was correct when he observed that this strategy

115 India and Burma Committee. I.B. (1947) 21st Meeting, L/P&J/10/79, ff 405-9, 5 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.320, p.626.

116 India and Burma Committee. I.B. (47) 24th Meeting, L/P&J/10/79, ff 260-2, 14 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol. X, Document No. 437, pp.820-821.

117 Philip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (1984), p.382. Also see, Mountbatten’s interview with Krishna Menon, 17 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No. 169, pp.311-12.

118 R.J. Moore, ‘Mountbatten, India, and the Commonwealth’, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. XIX, (1981), p.17.

‘was a master stroke on many grounds.’¹¹⁹ The scholars H. R. Tinker and R. J. Moore have seen the whole episode of the successful negotiations of an early transfer of power on the basis of dual Dominionhood as Mountbatten’s diplomatic coup.¹²⁰ However, Mountbatten described the whole process of bringing forward the transfer of power ten and a half months earlier as an ‘open diplomacy.’¹²¹

Those historians and intellectuals who blame Jinnah and the Muslim League for destroying the sacred unity of India ask: why did two staunch nationalists, Nehru and Patel, accept Dominion Status rather than the full independence to which they had been committed since the adoption of the Purna Swaraj resolution at Lahore in 1929? Why did they totally reverse the Congress policy of acquiring power with full independence as a united India? Further, why did this elite manipulation betray the common people who had sacrificed their life for independence and unity? The Congress had repeatedly declared that ‘no other status except that of full independence for the whole of India’ would be agreed to.¹²² The Dominion Status which the Congress accepted in 1947 was a solution that had been spurned in the August Offer of 1940 and the Cripps Offer of 1942.

The August offer concluded with the hope that, as a result of Indian co-operation in the war, a new understanding would emerge paving the way to ‘the attainment by India of that free and equal

119 Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (1951), p.355.

120 H.R. Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom* (London: 1967), pp.10 and 159; Jawaharlal Nehru at Simla, May 1947, ‘A Moment of Truth?’ in *Modern Asian Studies*, No. 4, (1970), pp.349-58 and 350; R.J. Moore, *Making of the New Commonwealth* (1987), p.15; ‘Mountbatten, India, and the Commonwealth’, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol.XIX, (1981), p.5.

121 Lionel Carter (ed.), *Mountbatten’s Report on the Last Viceroyalty 22 March – 15 August 1947* (2003), p.391.

122 Nicholas Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1952* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), Vol.II, p.619. August 1937 at Wardha and on 15 September & 10 October 1939, A.I.C.C. had passed a resolution, acclaiming, that no other status would be accepted except the full independence for the whole of India. ‘We Indians as Camp followers of Imperialistic Britain would not being ordered about to fight her battles and preserve her interests.’ ‘The people in India in recent past made great sacrifices to secure their own freedom and establish a free and democratic state of India.’ *Ibid*, Vol.I, pp.318 and 514.

partnership in the British Commonwealth.’¹²³ The Cripps offer of 1942 held out that the new Dominion was to be ‘associated with the United Kingdom and the other dominions by a common allegiance to the Crown, but equal to them in every respect, in no way subordinate in any aspect of its domestic or external affairs.’¹²⁴ Full Dominion Status, as defined by the 1931 Statute of Westminster, was promised in these developments as the British goal in India and the British government had declared that it should come into being the earliest possible moment after the war. Inspired with the desire for India’s complete freedom, the Congress leaders turned down these developments by demanding complete independence and the immediate exit of the British.

Commenting on the August offer as an example of divide and rule tactics¹²⁵ and the Cripps offer as an ‘ill-fated proposal’,¹²⁶ the A.I.C.C. sanctioned the ‘Quit India’ resolution on 8 August 1942 demanding full independence and an immediate end of British rule, and the start of a mass civil disobedience campaign on the widest possible scale to achieve this end.¹²⁷ From August to September the government of British India faced the most serious rebellion since the revolt of 1857, and it was handled with the same severity. To quell the disturbances ‘more than fifty-seven battalions of British troops were deployed’, followed by the arrest of all-important Congress leaders and the detention of over 5000 people without trial.¹²⁸ There were large-scale killings and disorders in Bihar and Eastern U.P. and in many other parts of India. India remained under virtual military rule for the next three years. The

123 Nicholas Mansergh, *History of Civilization: The Commonwealth Experience* (1969), pp.297-298.

124 Nicholas Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1952* (Oxford, 1953), Vol.II, pp.614-615.

125 D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma, Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* (Bombay: Jhaveri and Tendulkar, 1951-54), Vol.6, p.11.

126 Menon, *Transfer of Power* (1957), p.136.

127 Quit India resolution, *TOP*, Vol.II, p.470. For full text of 8 August 1942 resolution see M. Gwyer and A. Appadorai (eds.), *Speeches and Documents on the Indian Construction 1921-47* (Bombay: printed in London, Oxford University Press, 1957), Vol.II, pp.541-544.

128 Linlithgow to Churchill, 31 August 1942, *TOP*, Vol. II, p.662; S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru. A Biography* (1975), p.300.

Muslim League's reaction to the Congress resolution of Quit India was hostile. It accused the Congress of attempting not only to coerce the British government into handing over power to the Congress, but also to force the Muslims to submit and surrender to the Congress terms and dictation. Jinnah saw the Quit India Campaign as 'blackmailing and coercing the British' to transfer powers immediately to a Hindu Raj under the aegis of the British bayonet.' Wavell called it 'a mistaken and unprofitable policy.'¹²⁹ Amery described Nehru and Gandhi as 'niggling unpractical creatures.'¹³⁰ Despite all this, what Congress obtained precisely five years later was as Hodson pointed out not the fulfilment of its cherished goal, but an acceptance of the long-standing British offer of Dominion Status.¹³¹

Mountbatten attained the advantages of hasty transfer of power by arguing that the Dominion Status here and now would achieve a 'terrific world-wide enhancement of British prestige' and it would put the coping-stone on the 'framework of world strategy from the point of view of Empire Defence', as well as conveniently bringing about 'the early termination of present responsibilities, especially in the field of law and order.'¹³² This explains why Mountbatten found it indispensable and expedient to depart from his mandate regarding the schedule for transfer of power, to pass over the protestations of the Muslim League, and to disregard his own governors and army chief's apprehensions about the disastrous effect of this scheme on the region, people and armed forces and services regardless of whether it was a 'bombshell' in the corridors of the Whitehall.

The hurried decisions and actions of Mountbatten might only be explained in the context of India remaining in the Commonwealth by securing Britain's interests in South Asia. Had the powers not been transferred before June 1948, the Congress would have no choice but to demand full independence. Attlee

129 Menon, *Transfer of Power* (1957), pp.141 and 154.

130 Amery to Linlithgow, 2 Feb. 1942, *TOP*, Vol.I, p.517.

131 Hodson, 'Can Lord Mountbatten's Plan for India be applied to the Irish Question?', *The Times*, June 19, 1974.

132 Mountbatten to Ismay, 11 May 1947, L/PO/427, O.I.O.C.

argued in the House of Commons that ‘delay in granting self-government always led to more and more extreme demands.’¹³³ But if, by hastening the process of transfer of power, they could secure India’s acceptance of the Commonwealth and could avoid being ‘responsible for [the] outcome’ of the communal violence that was forecast; it would be a major redemption of the situation for them. Mountbatten’s designation would be changed from Viceroy to governor-general and he would play his role in cementing the good relationship between Britain and India. Transferring power before June 1948, as Mountbatten observed, ‘will be an invaluable factor in the long-term view of the Indo-British relationship [and].... both parts of India [e.g. India and Pakistan] may see the benefit of retaining that link with Great Britain.’¹³⁴

By retaining India in the Commonwealth, Attlee and Mountbatten gained support from the Conservative opposition for the smooth passage through the House of Commons. When the date of British departure was first announced, Churchill as the leader of opposition had told the House of Commons: ‘A time limit is imposed — a kind of guillotine — which will certainly prevent the full, fair, and reasonable discussion of the great complicated issues that are involved.’¹³⁵ He described the time limit as a ‘shameful flight’ and ‘hurried scuttle’, accusing the present government of having departed in several basic respects from the 1942 Cripps offer.¹³⁶ Conservatives protested Labour’s plan failed to allow for the postponement of the transfer of power if no responsible government emerged. Simon told Churchill: ‘Really,

133 Speech of the Prime Minister Attlee in the House of Commons, 10 July 1947, Nicholas Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1952* (1953), Vol. II, pp.688-689.

134 Minutes by Lord Ismay and Rear-Admiral Viscount Mountbatten of Burma, Mountbatten Papers. Official Correspondence File, Plans, Alternative (For the *Transfer of Power*), Part (1), Appendix to No.222, Note by V.P. Menon, (Top Secret), *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.222, p.440.

135 Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.310.

136 Alan Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten* (1951), p.28; Ch. Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (1967) p.118; L. Mosley, *The Last days of British Raj* (1962), p.53.

HMG decision is to withdraw from India in 15 months, whatever happens, though India may then be in a state of turmoil with the prospect of unlimited butchery and rapine.¹³⁷ For Conservatives, British India was still the embodiment of British power and self-esteem and the rapid collapse of India as an imperial asset made it no less desirable that Britain remained in control. Britain's duty was to remain in India until a settlement was reached. They stressed Britain's responsibilities to guide her colonies to eventual self-government in such a way as to prevent imperial fragmentation. For Harold Macmillan, this meant that at the very least India should give a 'fair and reasonable' trial to membership of the Commonwealth. Visiting India in January 1947, Macmillan noted that the future of British trade with India depended on two conditions. First, India must be held as a Dominion within the Commonwealth, for then, 'the trade safeguards can be incorporated in an Act and enforced.' Secondly, for Indo-Britain trade to prosper, the transfer of power must be orderly. Moreover, there were reasonably good chances that an anti-surrender campaign would gain public support. Salisbury had threatened an 'appeal to public opinion.' For many, the hasty retreat was a sign of national weakness, at the very moment of Britain's triumph in war. Opinion polls confirmed that the public expected the British to remain in India until a new constitution was established and that India should be granted only Dominion Status.¹³⁸ Attlee himself admitted that the policy proposals 'were not well received by the Opposition in the Commons or the Lords... I refused to give way in face of persistent questioning by Mr. Churchill.'¹³⁹ The former foreign secretary Anthony Eden rebutted that the new nations would remain in the Commonwealth under Dominion Status. Churchill had given assurances that he would facilitate the smooth passage of legislation if Dominion Status was granted to India and Pakistan. Churchill's attitude altered perceptibly, when Mountbatten told him that he had received a letter from Nehru accepting Dominion Status if power was transferred this year. Churchill gave his

137 Nicholas Owen, 'The Conservative Party and Indian Independence, 1945-1947', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.46, Issue 2 (June 2003), p.419.

138 *Ibid.*, pp.422-423.

139 Attlee to Lascelles, 22 February 1947, *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.449, p.787.

blessing to this proposal and promised to facilitate the passage of the necessary legislation.¹⁴⁰

Attlee's great contribution was the transfer of power in India and the latter's acceptance of independence via Dominion Status. Bevin placed Attlee in the list of 'the great men who had helped build this commonwealth...Durham who had saved us Canada...and Campbell Bannerman who created the Union of South Africa.'¹⁴¹ As the Independence Bill passed into law in the first week of July, Attlee hailed Mountbatten's 'wise counsel and his great devotion' to retain the parties in the Commonwealth and said that 'his personal position will, undoubtedly, prove a most beneficial factor in the future development of the whole continent of India.'¹⁴²

The rapidly implemented partition plan had merely conceded the principle of Pakistan; it had not assured its creation or its survival. Jinnah had yet to battle for the actual preservation and survival of Pakistan. He knew that he had to take control of Pakistani territory as fast as possible. He felt that Pakistan would be viable only with a strong army and within the Commonwealth. He told the Viceroy that, 'the leaders of Congress are so dishonest, so crooked, and so obsessed with the idea of smashing the Muslim League, that there are no lengths to which they will not go to do so; and the only way of giving Pakistan a chance is to make it an independent nation of the British Commonwealth, with its own army, and the right to argue cases at any Central Council on this basis.'¹⁴³ In similar view, Liaquat Ali Khan described the Congress

140 Record of meeting between Churchill and Mountbatten, 22 May 1947, and Churchill to Attlee, 21 May 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.513, pp.945-946. Also see Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London: Duckworth, 1989), p.1178; Lionel Carter, *Mountbatten's Report on the Last Viceroyalty 22 March-15 August 1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003), p.151; John R. Wood, 'Dividing the Jewel, Mountbatten and the Transfer of Power to India and Pakistan', *Pacific Affairs*, Volume, 58, Issue 4 (Winter, 1985-1986), p.660.

141 R.J. Moore, *Making of the New Commonwealth* (1987), pp.5-6.

142 Speech of the Prime Minister Attlee in the House of Commons, 10 July 1947, Nicholas Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1952* (1953), Vol.II, p.692.

143 Mountbatten's interview with Jinnah, 26 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.229, p.453.

leaders as ‘utterly impossible people to deal with’ and insisted that the Muslim League would prefer to have the ‘Sind Desert’ rather than continuing the ‘bondage to Congress.’¹⁴⁴ Contrary to the Congress strategy, Jinnah had promised British policy-makers since December 1946 Dominion Status for Pakistan. This was after he had abandoned his mid-year hope of realizing Pakistan through the Cabinet Mission scheme. Despite his resolution on a sovereign state for Muslims, he insisted on Pakistan’s entry in the Commonwealth. During his visit in London in December 1946, he mentioned to the British policy-makers in Whitehall that ‘his own aim was simply that of Pakistan, within the British Commonwealth.’¹⁴⁵ He also met the Conservative leadership. Churchill assured him that ‘you have only to stand firm and demand your right not to be expelled from the British Commonwealth’ and your country ‘would never stand for the expulsion of loyal members of the Empire.’¹⁴⁶ Jinnah and the Muslim League astutely promoted the chances of Pakistan by offering to accept Dominion Status and they provided the conditions necessary to the transfer of power to Dominions.

The Congress high command tried to persuade the British policy-makers to expel Pakistan from the Commonwealth. Clearly one of the main objectives to partition from the Congress point of view had been the danger that Pakistan would fortify itself with outside assistance from Britain, America or others. The fear of Pakistan’s remaining in the Commonwealth in the end brought Congress to agree to temporary Dominion Status and several utterances had been made to the effect that anyone who indulged in giving support to Pakistan would incur ‘the hostility of Congress.’¹⁴⁷ ‘Any attempt to conclude with Pakistan any treaty or

144 Mountbatten’s interview with Liaquat Ali Khan, 24 March 1947, Lionel Carter (ed.), *Mountbatten’s Report on the Last Viceroyalty 22 March-15 August 1947* (2003), p.69.

145 Indian Conference in London: 4 December 1946, *TOP*, Vol.IX, Document No.153, p.261.

146 Mountbatten’s interview with Jinnah, 26 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.229, p.453. Also see Minutes of Viceroy’s Fourth Staff Meeting, 28 March 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.29, pp.36-37.

147 Listowel to Mountbatten, 27 June 1947, *TOP*, Document No.376, p.705. Also see, India and Burma Committee. I.B (47) 25 Meeting, 19 May 1947, L/P&J/10/79,

alliance with military or political provisions' would be regarded as a 'hostile act' against the Indian Union.¹⁴⁸ On 28 May 1947, Nehru opposed a Memorandum of the Secretary of State which stated the right of the constituent assemblies to remain within the Commonwealth. He criticized the peculiar sentence that would allow Pakistan to remain within the Club. He argued that H. M. G. should not be party to allowing Pakistan to remain in the Commonwealth if the new India wished eventually to withdraw.¹⁴⁹ On 3 June 1947, an hour before the formal acceptance of the partition plan, Nehru unsuccessfully tried to persuade Mountbatten to make it a part of the agreement that Pakistan would be excluded from the Commonwealth if India eventually decided to withdraw. Nehru wanted to raise the issue during the discussions of the 3 June plan.¹⁵⁰

Mountbatten thought that if India did enter the Commonwealth Pakistan would not remain in the Commonwealth.¹⁵¹ Jinnah, however, required the shield of the Commonwealth. He begged the British policy-makers to admit Pakistan to the Commonwealth. 'It was not a question of asking to be admitted, it was a question of not being kicked out.' He threatened to approach the people of the Commonwealth and argued that no part of Commonwealth could be forcefully excluded against its will. 'You can not kick us out', Jinnah said to Mountbatten, 'there is no precedent for forcing parts of the Empire to leave against their will.'¹⁵² Jinnah argued that 'what about the other dominions — Australia and the New Zealand — will they

ff.142-48, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.485, p.896. In this regard, Kripalani, the president of the Congress, wrote to Mountbatten that if the rest of India decided to stay out of the Commonwealth, Pakistan would be expelled from it. See, Kripalani to Mountbatten, 3 June 1947, cited by Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman* (1985), p.286.

148 9 April 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, V.P.R. 5, L/PO/6/123, O.I.O.C.

149 Lionel Carter, *Mountbatten's Report on the Last Viceroyalty 22 March – 15 August 1947* (2003), p.159.

150 5 June 1947, *Mountbatten Papers*, V.P.R..8, L/PO/6/123, O.I.O.C.

151 Mountbatten's interview with Krishna Menon, 22 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.200, p.372.

152 Mountbatten's interview with Jinnah, 26 April 1947, *TOP*, Vol.X, Document No.229, pp.453 and 897-898.

accept our being expelled against our will? Is there any thing in the Statute of Westminster that allows you to kick out parts of the Commonwealth because a neighbouring State that used to be a member wishes to leave?'¹⁵³ Jinnah's threat and desperate need to remain in the Commonwealth had exerted a disturbing effect on the Congress leaders. They had begun to feel that an independent India might be at some disadvantage with Pakistan still part of the British Commonwealth.

Once Dominion Status had been achieved, discussion turned to how the Commonwealth could accommodate the republic of India. In 1948, when the Indian Constituent Assembly had been formulating a constitutional framework for India to secede from its connection with the Commonwealth, the British policy-makers were concerned that India's becoming a republic could dent the Commonwealth's status internationally. India's secession from the Commonwealth would have 'world-wide repercussions.' The Soviet Union had voted for the admission to the UN of Burma, which had left the Commonwealth,¹⁵⁴ while vetoing the application of Ceylon, which opted to remain a member.¹⁵⁵ It was believed that

153 Viceroy's Personal Report No.5 *TOP*, 1 May 1947, Vol.X, Document No.276, p.541.

154 Burma stayed out of the Commonwealth club. It was a province of the British India until 1937. In May 1947, Aung San, president of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), sanctioned a resolution in the Constituent Assembly for Burma to become a sovereign republic. Burma's departure from the Commonwealth was a concern to the policy-makers in Whitehall. Mountbatten bluntly admitted that greatest mistake he ever made was failing to keep Burma in the Commonwealth. He confessed that 'I made a tremendous error in allowing the Civil Government to take over in Burma after the war months before I should have. If I had held on to the government myself, Burma would still be in the Commonwealth; but I turned it over to people who mucked it up.' See Philip Howard, 'Mountbatten, Presiding over the end of the British Raj', *The Times*, (London), January 02, 1969, p.5.

For details of Burma's decision to stay out of the Commonwealth and Britain's concerns for it, see Hugh Tinker, 'Burma's Struggle for Independence, The Transfer of Power Thesis Re-Examined', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.20, Issue 3 (1986), pp.476-79; R.J. Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth* (1987), pp.100-10; W. David McIntyre, *British Decolonization, 1946-1997* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

155 Ceylon achieved Dominion Status on 4 February 1948 due to 'a good deal' of the Prime Minister of Ceylon, Senanayake, and became republic in 1970. Commenting on the Ceylon Independence Act in the Lords, Privy Seal stated that Ceylon being a member of the British Commonwealth would achieve grants — financial and economic — and in return Ceylon would provide H.M.G. with assistance to

India's departure from the Commonwealth would probably be 'exploited to the full' and would lead to 'greater intransigence' in world affairs.¹⁵⁶ British influence in Asia would diminish and communism would step into the void. These seemed to be realistic possibilities and almost any sacrifice would seem to be worthwhile to prevent their realization. Therefore, every effort was sought to encourage India to remain in the Commonwealth.

Again, at this critical juncture the 'Patel-Menon-Nehru-Mountbatten nexus' worked together to keep the republic of India within the Commonwealth. V.P. Menon, wrote to Mountbatten that he had 'had a long discussion with Sardar [Patel] regarding India's position in the Commonwealth. ...Sardar is quite sure, if we could find a compromise on your common citizenship formula, there is every chance of its general acceptance by the Congress...Nehru requires a lot of persuasion, but if you and Lady Mountbatten with your personal influence on him can get him to accept the citizenship formula, then I am satisfied that I can persuade the Sardar to get it accepted by the Congress Party.'¹⁵⁷ Mountbatten explained to Ismay his endeavours to retain India within the Commonwealth after promulgating the constitution for a republic. 'I am doing my best...the India leaders realise the advantages which will accrue to their country by continued association with the Commonwealth after the new Constitution comes in.'¹⁵⁸ Nehru spent the weekend with Mountbatten at Broadlands and 'personal relations and mutual economic interest' retained India in the new

exercise control and jurisdiction over His Majesty's Forces stationed in Ceylon. See, Ceylon Independence Act, 1947, speech by the Lord Privy Seal, the Viscount Addison, in the House of Lords, 4 December 1947, N. Mansergh, *Documents and Speeches on British Commonwealth Affairs, 1931-1952* (1953), Vol. II, p.757.

For details of how Ceylon achieved Dominion Status, see Hugh Tinker, *Experiment with Freedom? India and Pakistan 1947* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.4-5. Also see W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impacts, 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1977), pp.365-371.

156 Anita Inder Singh, 'Imperial Defence and the Transfer of Power in India, 1946-1947', *International History Review*, Vol.4 (Nov. 1982), p.476.

157 R.J. Moore, *Making of the New Commonwealth* (1987), p.122.

158 Mountbatten to Ismay, 20 April 1948, *Ibid.*, p.131.

Commonwealth, despite earlier indications that he might quit when a suitable occasion arose. The new Commonwealth was founded.

Apart from personal relations and reciprocal economic interests, the Indian leadership calculated that the country's withdrawal from the Commonwealth boat would be beneficial for Pakistan. Tej Bahadur Sapru expressed his concerns that 'I have no objection to India declaring herself a republic but I think it would be very unwise at least at this juncture to pass a resolution of this character. Pakistan is following a different policy. It is receiving much more support from England than Hindustan and is likely to get more support, if the Indian union completely severs its connection with England.'¹⁵⁹ Sapru emphasized in the same terms to Rajagopalachari, who was about to succeed Mountbatten as the governor general of India, and to the governor of Bombay, by writing: 'If you cut off connection altogether with England and Pakistan continues to be like a dominion and if trouble arises in future between Hindustan and Pakistan, why should you blame the British if they openly render military help to Pakistan?'¹⁶⁰ Apart from Pakistan's commitment to join the Commonwealth, other convincing factors, which perhaps prompted Indian leaders to remain in the Commonwealth, were the post-partition disputes on Princely States, division of assets, evacuee property and river waters. If India seceded it meant the likelihood of an anti-Indian Commonwealth.

From the British point of view Dominion Status was not just a device to ensure the smooth transfer of power, or a means for keeping India and Pakistan in the Commonwealth, but a way of ensuring the approval of all the parties in Britain. Dominion Status gave the impression at home that instead of liquidating an Empire, the Labour government was in fact creating a dynamic new Commonwealth. Another virtue of the Dominion Status was that it appeared to fulfil the two main conditions of the Cripps offer of 1942 to which all parties in Britain had pledged their support: agreement between the major Indian political groups and a period of Dominion Status.

159 Sapru to M.S. Aney, the Governor of Bihar, 16 April 1948, Nicholas Mansergh, *History of Civilization: The Commonwealth Experience* (1969), p.330

160 Sapru to Rajagopalachari and Governor of Bombay, 19 April 1948, Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience* (1969), p.330.