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## **Wavell's Relations with His Majesty's Government (October 1943-March 1947)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to investigate the relationship between the British Government in India and His Majesty's Government in London during Wavell's viceroyalty of India (1943-1947). It discusses the differences in ideas, approaches and plans of Wavell with the British political leaders such as Churchill, Cripps, Amery, Pethic Lawrence and Attlee and examines their actions because they shaped the policies of the British Government towards British India.

### **Introduction**

Wavell's appointment was not only a clear attempt to maintain a political status-quo in India for the duration of the World War II but he also displayed a keen interest in resolving the constitutional and political deadlock, the then prevailing in India. His views and opinions collided with those of the politicians and bureaucrats in London. For example where he was an advocate of an early transfer of power to the Indians his bosses back in London were totally opposed to such a course of action. Such views made him unpopular, both with the Conservative and the Labour governments. Wavell was against the demand for Pakistan because he believed in the geographical unity of India. In order to achieve his aims he floated a number of ideas and plans such as the Wavell Plan, Cabinet Mission Plan and the Breakdown Plan but he was prevented to implement them by His Majesty's Government and consequently was dismissed because he kept insisting for its implementation.

### **Wavell and the Conservative Party**

Wavell's relationship with Churchill had never been cordial. It worsened soon after Wavell became the Viceroy of India because the British War Cabinet under Churchill (1940-1945) realized, owing to their divergent ideas with Wavell that

they had chosen a wrong person at the wrong time and the wrong place. Firstly, the War Cabinet had appointed Wavell as no suitable replacement to Linlithgow was available. Secondly, Whitehall wanted to preserve law and order in the country and did not want to touch upon the political and constitutional problems of the country. Amery wrote in his diary, "Winston would not have been as keen about Wavell as Viceroy if he had realized how thoroughly Wavell backs up Allenby's policy of sympathy with Egyptian nationalism" (1988, 896).

Amery opined that he would not be at all surprised if Wavell went a long way in trying to find a solution to the Indian problem.

Wavell, whom Churchill thought of 'in cricketing terms a 'night watchman' inserted to stonewall until the end of the war offered fresh options,' on the contrary was a politically savvy and military officer who started making plans for political changes in India, even before he had assumed the top office in India. His first plan is known as the 'Wavell Plan'. He was concerned about the tense political relationship, existing between the British government and the Indians at that time and wanted to change with a pro-active approach.

The War Cabinet<sup>1</sup> issued a draft directive to the Viceroy, originally suggested by Cripps on September 29, 1943 and then approved (the new Viceroy should be able to approach the political leaders in India as and when he considers it desirable) but was amended on October 4 in a more restrictive sense with the addition of the words "but should consult the War Cabinet about the time and form of any invitation to be issued" (Barnes, 1988:904-5).

The British Cabinet's instructions exhorted Wavell to give top priority first to the defence of India and he was warned to 'beware above all things' that may raise political issues and prejudice India's war effort. All this meant in other words that he should simply forget about the political situation in India.

Thus not only the Wavell Plan went into cold storage, the course of action proposed and endorsed by a majority of the India Committee was also ruled out. Wavell also gathered from his private discussions with Churchill that the latter feared a split in the Conservative Party and some kind of a parliamentary trouble in case of any fresh step regarding political reforms in India. Churchill was not ready to take this risk and was determined to block it as long as he was in power.

Churchill never wished to see his new Viceroy taking initiatives on the political front in India.<sup>2</sup> He was annoyed with Wavell's political views and his insistence on pursuing them to the extent that he even refused to attend Wavell's farewell party when he was leaving for India as the Viceroy-designate.<sup>3</sup> On October 7, 1943, Amery recorded in his diary,

Winston who seems to have been rather on the rampage at first and more or less accused Wavell of playing for his hand and trying to do a public stunt to which Wavell seems to have said that he had no desire to go to India and was quite willing to resign if the PM did not trust him<sup>4</sup> (Barnes, 1988:946-7).

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Wavell, in spite of all these impediments introduced some confidence building measures in India like his determined efforts to help the victims of the Bengal famine.

Wavell began his viceroyalty having a high opinion of Gandhi thinking that he would help in resolution of the political deadlock in India. In spite of Whitehall's reluctance, Wavell released him from prison in 1944 as he had been seriously ill for some time. Wavell also wrote many letters to Whitehall concerning Gandhi's demand that he wanted to talk to the viceroy concerning the formation of a national government. Amery wired back to Wavell on 4<sup>th</sup> October in which he stated that the entire Cabinet was disturbed because of his contacts with Gandhi. They considered Gandhi a 'political dead-horse' and believed that Wavell's reopening of negotiations with him would revive his political career.

Wavell's actions on behalf of Gandhi led to severe disagreements<sup>4</sup> (Wavell, 1974) with the people in London including an exchange of messages between the Viceroy and the British Cabinet which created a row with the Prime Minister, Churchill, who wanted no part of negotiations with Gandhi<sup>5</sup>. The debate gathered momentum over the next few days<sup>6</sup> (Wavell, 1974). Amery maintained that the Viceroy should have "avoided a direct collision with the PM and the Cabinet on an issue, not of substance, but of tone and wording"<sup>7</sup> (Wavell, 1974: 123). Amery lent his dissent to the War Cabinet's decision at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> August, recorded in the minutes that "on the ground that in a matter not of broad policy, but of wording and tone, the earnest and repeatedly expressed opinion of the Viceroy should not be overridden" (Barnes, 1988:907-8).

Wavell nearly resigned over his stand concerning Gandhi's release from prison but he withdrew from his earlier determination to do so. There was a strong Indian reaction to His Majesty's Government's decision of not having parleys with Gandhi. Wavell complained to Amery of an "obviously hostile Cabinet who seems to have no confidence in my judgement on any matter," and justified his complaint by referring to the previous incidents. Indian reactions to Wavell's reply had been strong and Wavell rightly suggested that "the Cabinet has destroyed at one blow my reputation for fairness and good temper in my correspondence with Gandhi" (Transfer of Power (TP), Vol. IV: 1182-99). In his protesting letter to Amery, Wavell wrote, "They have now turned down my recommendations for (a) Indian Finance Minister;(b) Section 93 in Bengal at the beginning of the year;(c) Bajpai's status;(d) the form of my reply to Mr. Gandhi; and (e) my requests for food imports, of which my great persistence has produced an inadequate amount" (Wavell Collections, August 15, 1944: L/PO/ 10/21). He warned Amery that "His Majesty's Government must really give up trying to treat the Government of India as a naughty and tiresome child whose bottom they can smack whenever they feel like it" (Wavell, 1974: 87).

Future interaction between Wavell and Whitehall suffered severely due to this episode. It substantially weakened Wavell's position in the eyes of the Indians and

he feared that there might be a Congress-League coalition against the British Government.

In the meantime, a further clash between Churchill and Wavell occurred when Whitehall suddenly announced that the pay and allowances of the British forces serving in the Far East were to be increased. Despite the fact that under the rules of the defence expenditure, the costs would have mainly fallen on India. It would have almost inevitably involve a corresponding increase in the pay of Indian forces and resulted in an increased inflation in India. Delhi Government was not consulted. Wavell did not like such decisions being made in London without even consulting Delhi<sup>8</sup>.

In one of his private telegrams of protest to Amery which was imprudently permitted to come to the notice of Churchill, Wavell feared that the "Council will take the line that if His Majesty's Government has to bribe the British forces to fight in Far East, they should pay the bill"<sup>9</sup>. Wavell's use of such flagrant language against him and Whitehall was more than insubordination and highly treasonable in the eyes of Churchill who condemned Wavell's seditious language and "accused him of insulting the British soldier" (T P: 61-2; Wavell, 1974: 91-2). Wavell noted in his diary that this exchange of letters and controversy would neither improve Churchill's mindset about India nor would improve personal relations between the two.

Right at the outset, he visualized that if the British Government did not take the initiative to break political and constitutional deadlock in India, it would result in chaos, civil war and partition of India. By the middle of 1944, Wavell once again stressed upon the home government to reconsider his earlier 'Wavell Plan' which had been turned down in 1943. He was also conscious of the fact that India's services in the war must be recognised along with other contributions which India had made towards turning the tide of war.

Amery had been keenly observing these developments and formulated a new approach to the Indian problem. In his letter of October 3, 1944 to Wavell, he explained his plan in detail stating that India's main grievance and source of bitterness was not the existing government of India but Downing Street and the House of Commons. He further added that Indians had constantly been feeling discriminated in all spheres of life by decisions taken by outsiders.

Based on his own soul-searching Amery suggested to Wavell that he should announce that India would enjoy Dominion Status. He also visualized that the Viceroy would be more powerful and would exercise the power to override his Council or dismiss it with his own judgement and without any prior approval from the Secretary of State for India or Whitehall.

Amery was not only interested in seeing the Delhi Government getting rid of 'remote' control from Whitehall but also wanted to sideline the demand for Pakistan. He wanted to ensure:

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This continuance of the unity of India under the present Government does not preclude an eventual Pakistan, though I believe that in fact it would create an atmosphere in which at any rate the extreme Pakistan demand would no longer make the same appeal, and more practical considerations get the upper hand<sup>10</sup> (Wavell Papers, Political Series, April 1944-July 1945, Pt. I: 47-9).

He chalked out a programme in which the Congress would be empowered to impede the demand of Pakistan. Therefore, he thought the essence of the idea in fact would be to release the Congress internees and to send an invitation to them to take part in coalition governments in the provinces and to participate in planning the future constitution at leisure.

Amery feared that the division in Indian society was so obvious that the proposed Wavell Plan would result in further division among them. Similarly, after the failure of Gandhi-Jinnah talks, Amery suggested, since the two main organized parties were incapable of finding a solution, both should be excluded from, or sparsely represented on, the contemplated constitution-making body. To him, the best remedy was to avoid establishing a council proposed in the Wavell Plan and set up a council consisting of non-political elements instead. It would form a very suitable nucleus, partly because it would already include representatives of the Princes.

On December 6, 1944, India Committee met to discuss Wavell and Amery Plans. Wavell Plan was bitterly criticized by its members including Amery who had put forward his own alternate scheme, explaining that he had an idea of having a body of some 40 to 50 persons, thoroughly representatives of all sections, parties and interest groups and in particular the martial races of the Punjab. However, his idea was dropped and Wavell's proposals were postponed for another six months. However, neither the British Parliament could be bypassed nor could the two major political parties of India be ignored as proposed by Amery. Wavell was of the view that Amery "has a curious capacity for getting hold of the right stick but practically always the wrong end of it"<sup>11</sup> (Wavell, 1974: 111).

As Wavell did not appreciate the response from the India Committee<sup>12</sup> (Wavell, 1974) he decided to write directly to the Prime Minister. After complaining of the various grievances of the Delhi Government against London, he informed Churchill that the present Government of India cannot continue indefinitely, or even for long--the British Civil Service, on which the good government of the country has been depending till now. It might almost be described as moribund, the senior members being tired and disheartened. He said that with the approaching end of the Japanese war, political prisoners would have to be released and they would find a fertile field for agitation in food shortages and unemployment, following the closure of war factories, unless their energies had previously been diverted in trying to solve the constitutional problem.

Wavell, recommending an approach to Gandhi and Jinnah and their followers, said, "But the Congress and the League are the dominant parties in Hindu and Muslim India and will remain so. They control the Press, the electoral machine, the moneybags, and have the prestige of established parties" (Wavell, 1974, pp: 94-99). He held that even if Gandhi and Jinnah disappeared tomorrow, he could see no prospect of having more reasonable people to deal with. He insisted on consideration of his plan because the Commander-in- Chief, governors of all eleven provinces, and the senior members of the services supported his plan.

Churchill's response on November 26, 1944 clearly showed that he disagreed over the urgency of the matter. He held that "these large problems require to be considered at leisure and best of all in victorious peace" (Churchill Papers, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge). Wavell was anxious to write another letter to convince the Prime Minister of the urgency of the moment and to inform him of the psychological advantage but was restrained by Amery's advice. Amery suggested to him to refrain from a direct communiqué to the Prime Minister and promised to influence the Members of the War Cabinet "to get the matter referred to the Cabinet India Committee" (Wavell Papers, L/PO/6/108b: f 351).

The India Committee in its meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> December not only disagreed with the vitals of the Wavell Plan but also invited him to London for a face to face meeting where he could justify the details of his plan. Wavell thought that "it would be grave mistake" to postpone because of Sapru's non-party conference as that would produce no proposals of value. Thus he proposed that he should reach London about 15<sup>th</sup> January. Now, Churchill directed Amery to place before the Cabinet the question whether Wavell should come home at all at this juncture. He feared, "I expect he is going to make trouble and stage a scene for resignation"<sup>13</sup> (TP, V: 173).

Wavell was quite conscious of the urgency for getting both the parties to work together in the coalition government and this would, he expected, generate team spirit. Their cooperation would also help to sideline Pakistan issue. He met with Jinnah on December 6, 1944 and got his opinion. Writing to Amery on December 12, 1944, Wavell told him:

Jinnah was prepared to accept the unity of India as an ideal, but an ideal quite unattainable in present conditions. He said that the Muslims had been led by their experience of Congress domination to regard Pakistan as the only possible solution. I put it to him that if in the critical post-war years, on which the whole future of India may depend, we were busy cutting up the country, all parties would suffer, and that it would be very much better to hold India together for the time being at least and to undertake partition only if the Hindus and Muslims found in practice that they could not carry on (Wavell to Amery December 12, 1944, L/PO/10/20).

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Wavell thought that Jinnah would cooperate if an Executive Council was constituted under the present constitution.

Wavell arrived in England on 23<sup>rd</sup> March and his first meeting with the India Committee took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March. Attlee refused to allow Wavell to see a record of discussion on the Indian constitutional problem in the India Committee, as “the making of this request is, I fear, only another example of having a Viceroy with no political experience.” Hugh Tinker remarked that “Attlee’s complaint seems particularly peevisish when we recall that man he chose to succeed, Wavell-Mountbatten-had even less knowledge of British politics” (Brook: 193). Attlee, who chaired the meeting, was horrified at the thought of a rule by the ‘brown oligarchy’<sup>14</sup>. Attlee declared, “He was dismayed that we should hand over the people of India to a few very rich individuals who would control the caucuses without responsibility to any one”<sup>15</sup> (War Cabinet, India Committee I (45) 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting 26 March 1945, L/PO/6/108c: 268-75). Wavell noted in his diary on 18 April that “Attlee started attacking me at once... John Anderson complained that I would not admit that I was making a radical change in the constitution. Cripps was absent; Grigg and Simon were definitely hostile” (Wavell, 1974: 126).

India Committee showed a lack of concern about the Indian problem and tried to avoid the Wavell Plan. They did not want to go beyond the Cripps offer of 1942. Churchill, like Attlee, also disapproved the Wavell plan<sup>16</sup>. At that moment, Wavell realized, “Now I think we have missed the bus in any case. The sudden collapse of the Germans and the approaching reoccupation of the whole of Burma will make Indian politicians less accommodating than a few months ago. If I got my own way now, I feel it would be too late” (Wavell, 1974: 127). Wavell’s repeated requests (Wavell to Churchill May 24, 1945, TP, V, pp. 1057-58.) annoyed Churchill who gave an ungracious reply to him and said, “I do not consider that your visit to this country was necessary at the present time” (Churchill to Wavell, May 28, 1945, TP, V: 1063).

In the meantime, War Cabinet had been replaced by a ‘caretaker’ Conservative Cabinet in June 1945. However, this time both the India Committee and the Cabinet accepted the Wavell Plan but not in its entirety. Thus Wavell called the Simla Conference in June 1945 which, however, failed to produce any results.

One of the main reasons for Churchill’s continued tense relations with Wavell was that the former was vehemently opposed to grant freedom to India. Wavell rightly wrote to Churchill, “I know you have often found me a difficult and troublesome subordinate; I have not always found you an easy master to serve”. (Wavell to Churchill, May 24, 1945, TP: 1057-58). Wavell got nothing from Churchill which could have made him popular in India. Amery much later conceded that the failure of the Simla Conference in 1945 was due to Churchill’s obstinacy. Churchill never wanted Wavell to succeed in his political plans for India and it can be rightly said that it was he, not Wavell, who was responsible for the failure of the Simla Conference. Wavell went to see Churchill on August 31,

1945 when he had been ousted from the power. He had meeting with him for an hour. Churchill was in a good mood and “revealed that the only reason he had agreed to my political move was that India Committee had all told him it was bound to fail” (Wavell, 1974: 168).

## **Wavell and the Labour Government**

With Labour's victory at the polls<sup>17</sup> (The Labour victory of 1945, in the eyes of Geoffrey Alderman, “was famous one: with the support of nearly 12 million voters as against the Conservative total of just under 10 millions, Labour could rightly claim to have become a, and perhaps the, national party” (Alderman, Geoffrey, 1986: 232). In July 1945 Attlee, as the new Prime Minister, continued his opposition to Wavell's proposed policies for India. According to Irial Glyn the Labour Party also preferred like its predecessor that men in Whitehall be the final judges of the policies to be adopted in India. Wavell was thus kept in the dark by his own superiors, resulting eventually in his failure to deal with the Indians in an atmosphere of mutual trust and to prevent Pakistan plan from emerging in the near future (Glyn, Irial, 2007).

Labour Party had been a strong supporter of the Congress and a big proponent of self government in India for years. Above all, during the recent election campaign, it had promised that “if Labour is returned we would close the India Office and transfer Indian business to the Dominions Office.... This act would give them confidence that they are no longer governed from Whitehall”<sup>18</sup> (Tinker, 2004:19). At the start of the new parliament on August 21, 1945, Attlee replied to a question by Woodrow Wyatt about transferring Indian affairs to the Dominions Office by declaring that he had “no statement to make” (Wavell Collections).

The Labour Government on August 13, 1945 undertook three important steps: release of the Congress prisoners, removal of ban on Congress and immediate ordering of the general elections in India<sup>19</sup>. The very first telegram which Wavell received from the Secretary of State for India on 18 August 1945 indicated that His Majesty's Government intends to take Indian problem in hand at once and seriously. The first instructions, Lawrence issued to Wavell were to hold elections, release political prisoners and to lift ban on the Congress Party. Wavell was called to London immediately in this regard and he gave his briefing about the problems of the Indian political scene<sup>20</sup>. But ground realities were different as the Hindu-Muslim conflict had reached to such a point that in the opinion of David McIntre, “Only one week before the Victory Parade, Wavell was predicting possibility of violent uprising, requested orders as to whether he should plan to scuttle or to stay” (W. David, McIntre, 1998: 3-4).

It had become clear after the Governors' Conference on August 2, 1945 that elections to verify the claims of the Congress and the League should be held before the formation of the central and provincial ministries. Secondly, Pakistan

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issue must be dealt with and its drawbacks should be brought to the notice of all parties, especially the Muslims. Wavell went to England with this frame of mind but was taken aback, for Whitehall had a diametrically opposite understanding of, and consequently, a different stance concerning the Indian problem.

Although the Cripps Proposals had been rejected by both the Muslim League and the Congress, however, they had remained the only outstanding offer of the British Government during the World War II. R. J. Moore is right in suggesting that “the irony is that by the time Labour achieved office, its scheme for the transfer of power (Cripps Proposals) was no longer feasible” (Moore, 1979: 147).

The Secretary of State for India, Lawrence, in his briefing to the India Committee suggested that the best guarantor of political progress in India were still the Cripps Proposals. He said that while the constitutional issue was being settled, there would presumably be a time-lag during which the business of India had to be carried on. He also suggested the means for forming a provisional Executive Council from a Provincial panel.

Wavell demanded two things during his talks in London: Pakistan issue must be tackled and elections may take place for the Constituent and Provincial assemblies. The implementation of the Cripps offer was deferred and Wavell was directed to hold the elections and set up provincial governments and a Constituent Assembly after the elections.

The general elections which were held in 1945-46 witnessed that the Muslim voters gave an overwhelming mandate in favour of Pakistan while the Hindus on the whole voted for the Congress which stood for a united India<sup>21</sup>. In the central assembly election, the Congress won 55 seats and 30 Muslims seats were captured by the Muslim League. The Sikh seats went to the Akalis who were uncompromisingly opposed to Pakistan. The Congress lost 4 Landlord seats, according to Shiva Rao because of “Jawarharlal’s strong attacks on the land holds and advocacy of the abolition of permanent revenue settlement” (TP: 704-7). This most visible victory of the League, however, was not accepted by the Congress and the British as a complete and whole hearted mandate of Muslims for Pakistan. Durga Das has recorded his meeting with Attlee in 1945 and writes,

Attlee did not conceal his deep agitation over the Muslim demand for Pakistan and agreed with my plea that a minority should not be allowed to hold up progress of the majority to self-rule. He added that his intention was to promote in India a structure that would give her federal unity...He considered the Congress as a party which was the true advocate for freedom and the League a disruptionist one and expressed the hope that in the impending elections, the League candidates in Punjab, Sind and North West Frontier would be defeated. That would help preserve the unity of India (Das, 1970: 222-3).

However, contrary to the desires of Attlee and many other well-known political pundits, the results of elections to the Central assembly and the provincial seats forcefully strengthened the case for Pakistan. Even then, Wavell was not ready to accept ground realities and thought that it was time for the British Government to make a clear statement, regarding its intentions for acceptance or rejection of the Pakistan demand<sup>22</sup>. (Apprising to Whitehall on December 27, 1945; Wavell wrote that Pakistan demand was the inflexible policy of the League, so long Jinnah controlled it. He, however, argued that many of his supporters realized the difficulties and disadvantages of Pakistan. Wavell held that the Congress and the League would be unable to settle and arrive at any agreement about the issue of Pakistan and this would result in a political deadlock. He thought that His Majesty's Government should not allow another deadlock in the event of parties failing to come to terms and, therefore, must be ready to offer its own plan<sup>23</sup>. Wavell requested Lawrence to keep it a secret so that his negotiations with the Indian leaders for the formation of the Executive Council should not be prejudiced.

The Labour Government, though it agreed with the seriousness of the demand for Pakistan, wanted to find out for itself whether it could be dealt with effectively by some other means. They decided to send a fact finding mission consisting of members of the Parliament to India. Wavell welcomed this proposal and rejected the other one according to which the two main leaders from the Congress and the League should go to London for talks. The Parliamentary delegation was able to confirm that Jinnah was firm on his stand. It also concluded that the demand for Pakistan was not a bargaining counter on the part of Jinnah; therefore, it had to be faced and tackled by appropriate political means<sup>24</sup>. Moon writes that "Through no fault of its members, the Parliamentary Delegation did not arouse much interest in India and had little effect on the course of events; but probably some of its members did succeed to some extent in bringing home to the Labour Government that Jinnah and the League would not easily be persuaded to drop the demand for Pakistan" (Wavell, 1974: 208).

## **Wavell and the Cabinet Mission**

The British Government decided, "The foundation of a provisional constitution for India must be based on the 1935 Act and such a constitution must continue to provide a unitary framework but within it, means of satisfying, to the greatest degree compatible with preservation of India as a single state, the aspirations of Indian Moslems for self-rule"<sup>25</sup>. This was the game plan of the India Office as conveyed to the Cabinet Mission on its departure for India.

According to Philip Ziegler, "Lord Pethic Lawrence was technically to be in charge of whatever negotiations were necessary; but in fact Cripps and the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, took over responsibility" (2001: 352). The Cabinet

Mission, which came to negotiate with Indians about the formula and modus operandi of the transfer of power, did not wish to include Wavell, governor-general, during its workings in India. Probably they thought that they knew more than him, therefore, they thought of him as less than useful. The Labour Government, however, included him after his note of protest. Though they decided to include Wavell as one of the negotiators, he was not taken into confidence about their game plan. Wavell rightly observed, "I may be left with all the loose and awkward ends to tie up, and perhaps to implement a policy with which I do not agree" (Wavell: 206). He, therefore, made it clear that he should not be treated as a communicator but negotiator and mediator and "if it is the wish of HMG that I should be responsible for implementing in India any settlement to be negotiated, I must really and genuinely be consulted"<sup>26</sup>.

Wavell's relationship with Cripps had never been cordial and it worsened with time. Wavell thought that Cripps could not be an honest and impartial negotiator because "He is sold to the Congress point of view" (Wavell: 211). Wavell deplored that both Cripps and Lawrence failed to maintain high standards of impartiality, fair-play and justice while they were dealing with the Hindu-Muslim problem. He complained to the Prime Minister that "the late Cabinet Mission had too many unofficial advisers and indirect contacts", (TP, VII: 100), which had made his job and the job of the Mission more difficult in settling disputes. Further, he said, "I thought it was a mistake that the Mission should have had, outside the official discussions, such a continuous and close touch with one of the two main parties, the Congress" (Wavell Collection, MSS EUR /D977/1: 121). This naturally aroused the deep suspicions of the Muslim League about the intentions of the Cabinet Ministers.

Wavell was dissatisfied with the tactics of double crossing and underhanded dealings adopted by the Cabinet delegation during their negotiations with the Indian leaders<sup>27</sup> (Wavell, 1974). Cripps' methods created suspicion and confusion as Wavell thought that Azad and Jinnah were being presented with different propositions. According to Patrick French, "in the end the Delegation created more problems than they solved, and the last chance to retain a united India disappeared" (French, 1997: 244).

The Cabinet Mission Plan had pleased neither the League nor the Congress. The Cabinet delegation, especially Cripps and Lawrence, knew that without Congress' support of the plan, a government of a united India, though with a weak centre, could not be formed. Cripps, especially, wanting to avoid the formation of a government by Jinnah at all costs, persuaded the Congress to at least, accept the long-term part of the plan. Wavell wrote on June 25, 1946:

The worst day yet, I think. Congress has accepted the Statement of May 16, though with reservations on its interpretation. They did not intend to do so, having always said they would not accept the long-term policy unless they

accepted the short-term one, Interim Government. Now Cripps, having assured me categorically that Congress would never accept the Statement of 16<sup>th</sup> May, instigated Congress to do so by pointing out the tactical advantage, they would gain as regards the Interim Government. So did the Secretary of State. When I talked to him on this, he defended on the grounds that to get the Congress into the Constituent Assembly was such a gain that he considered it justified. It has left me in an impossible position vis-à-vis Jinnah (Wavell, 1974: 305).

Describing the Delegation members' underhand dealings with the Congress, Sudhir Ghosh has written:

This 'parity' between the majority and minority, between the Muslim League and the Congress, was of course wholly unacceptable to the majority party. In giving Mr. Jinnah such an indication the Viceroy had seriously slipped up and the Secretary of State was disturbed about it. He sent for me on 12th June and told me how upset he was about it all. Was there no way of persuading Gandhiji to find a way out of this tangle? I told the Secretary of State that only thing to do was to have a heart-to-heart talk with Gandhiji and to appeal to him for help. So he asked me if I could not fetch Gandhiji to his house for a talk that evening ... (Ghosh, Sudhir, 1967: 155).

As we have discussed earlier it was because of Gandhi's influence that the Congress Party accepted the long-term part of the Plan only on 25<sup>th</sup> June. Lawrence and Cripps were partly successful in trying to clear up the mess created by Wavell's assurances to Jinnah because he had refused to allow the Muslim League to form the Interim Government without the Congress contrary to his earlier assurances.

Wavell's justice, fair play and honesty were now put to test. He told Alexander, "I should normally ask to be relieved of my appointment after what had happened; that I thought I had been placed in an impossible position with the M.L (Muslim League) and that Cripps had not been quite straight" (Wavell, 1974: 305). He thought of resigning but soon dropped the idea, reasoning that his resignation would badly expose the conduct of the three Ministers and His Majesty's Government and he did not want to embarrass either of them<sup>28</sup>.

Though Wavell regretted for a short while the failure of not forming the Interim Government yet he still believed, "We must try to leave India united and we must secure the cooperation of the Congress which represents the great

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majority of Indian political opinion whatever our views on the past record of that party” (Wavell Collections, MSS, EUR, 997/1: 121-2). Besides, he also held that large dependence on the shifting views and actions of a set of inexperienced, short-sighted and sometimes malevolent politicians had caused the failure.

According to Kevin Jeffreys, “Certainly, in assessing the record of the post-war Labour Government, historians are agreed that Attlee’s party made only limited advances towards its stated aim in 1945, the creation of a socialist commonwealth. In some policy areas, continuity with war time practice was undeniable. Under Ernest Bevin, for example, the surprising choice as Foreign Secretary, hopes of a ‘socialist foreign policy’ soon disappeared as the Cold War got underway,” (Jeffreys, 1995: 209). But in case of India it seems over simplification of the facts. The Labour government had high regard and respect for Congress and wanted to transfer power quickly to their so called socialist brothers. This state of mind led the Delegation to appease the Congress at all costs during the negotiations and they used all means, moral or otherwise to enlist its leaders’ support for keeping India united.

Meanwhile, Cripps and Lawrence continued their daily secret meetings with the Congress leaders. Lawrence used to take daily walks with Agatha Harisson (Secretary, India Conciliation Group), a friend of C. F. Andrews, who was himself an associate of Gandhi which prompted concerns about their integrity in Wavell’s mind. He thought, “But far more unfortunate than these was the presence of Agatha Harrison and Horace Alexander<sup>29</sup>, who lived in the Congress camp, were completely sold to Gandhi, and saw the S. of S. almost daily” (Symonds, 1950).

According to Sudhir Ghosh:

Why Cripps and Pethic-Lawrence, at moments of crisis in the India-Britain negotiations, chose to meet Gandhiji secretly in the garden at the back of the Viceroy’s House in New Delhi without the knowledge either of the British Viceroy or of the Indian political leaders in a struggle to hand over power to an undivided India is, I see now many years later, a poignant as well as a dramatic story (1967: 1).

While saluting the services of these English leaders for the Congress, B. R. Nanda, a biographer of Gandhi, quite frankly admits:

Not merely the compulsion of events, but a measure of idealism went into the policy which Prime Minister Attlee initiated and carried through during the years 1946-47. And in so far as the British Government was impelled by this idealism, by a desire to open a fresh chapter in Indo-British relations, it was a victory for Gandhi, who had pleaded for thirty years for transformation of a relationship between the

two countries. Among the advocates of this transformation were several English men and women, Hume and Wedderburn, C. F. Andrews and Horace Alexander, Brailsford and Brockway, Laski and Carl Heath, Mauri Lester and Agatha Harrison, who never wavered their sympathy for the Indian cause in their own day they represented a tiny and not-too-influential minority, but in the fullness of time their opinions became the national policies of their country (1965: 244-45).

Even Cripps and Lawrence quite frankly admitted that they had contacts with the Congress leaders, the nature of which was unclear to Wavell. Lawrence admitted that he wrote a secret letter to Nehru while he was in Simla. However, even such favours failed to win the support of Congress as it kept raising the bar. Even, Lawrence later on conceded,

We think you will agree that it was our experience that it is the consistent practice of Indian parties to take up a bargaining position well in advance of what they expect to get and we feel that it would be fatal to deal with Nehru's letter on assumption that it is final challenge under threat of a direct breach with Congress. We regard it rather as another attempt, such as was constantly made during Mission's negotiations, to squeeze some further concessions out of H.M.G (Lawrence to Wavell, 26 July 1946, Wavell Collections: 55-6).

Labour Party did not mind letting Jinnah down while trying to appease the Congress<sup>30</sup>. Wavell was also disturbed as the ministers showed tremendous flexibility towards Congress. They did not take strong stand and hence changed with the varying demands of the Congress. Consequently, they altered their plan many times to appease the Congress which ultimately brought failure to the Cabinet Mission plan. Wavell deplored this approach and said that he would not be a party to any unilateral concession to Congress but he was snubbed. It cared least for upholding any moral standards while dealing with him and Cabinet Delegation also decided to blame him for its failure. Lawrence went to the extent of using provocative language and even passed irresponsible remarks about Jinnah<sup>31</sup>.

Before offering the formation of the government to the Congress, Wavell wanted some clarifications. He wanted to make it clear to the Congress that first of all, it should accept the Statement of 16<sup>th</sup> May fully and sincerely on the lines, laid down by the Mission<sup>32</sup>. Besides, he did not want any reduction in the powers of the Governor General unless both parties agreed to it. He also requested Whitehall to stand firm against any black-mailing by the Congress. He wanted to correct the

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Congress' impression that they had got the British 'on the run'. He suggested that the only way to prevent Congress, was to be firm on the essential points. He informed them that "Congress are convinced that they have got us on the run and we ought to correct that impression at once" (Wavell Collections, 1946: 33-34).

But the Prime Minister told him to carry on with what he had been directed to do. But perhaps the greatest of all the impediments to a solution was the state of mutual mistrust amongst the various political actors. According to Leonard Mosley,

Jinnah and the Muslim League mistrusted the Congress and Congress mistrusted the Viceroy; Wavell mistrusted the Labour Government; Attlee did not necessarily mistrust Wavell but he had certainly lost faith in him (Mosley, L, 1961: 28).

Attlee asked Wavell to accept Maurice Gwyer<sup>33</sup> as political adviser. Wavell felt very bad about it and thought that the Prime Minister and his Labour Government did not trust his political wisdom because it was 'not sufficiently pro-Congress.' He wrote,

I had a letter from the P.M., pressing on me again Maurice Gwyer as Political Adviser. He has obviously been told that I receive nothing but official I.C.S. advice and that my political judgement is therefore unsound, i.e., not sufficiently pro-Congress. I think my judgement is better than H.M.G.'s and shall say so; and tell him that if H.M.G. don't like it their duty is to find another Viceroy, as I will not be a figure-head (Wavell, 1974:324).

Nonetheless, he acted upon the directions and started negotiations with Nehru. Nehru, smelling the weak and awkward position of the governor-general vis-à-vis his own government in London, as stated earlier, began to behave as if he had already become the 'Prime Minister' of India and expected Wavell to act accordingly<sup>34</sup>. Wavell, under the circumstances, was forced to accept his suggestions.

Wavell was convinced that a coalition government would not help to bypass the demand for Pakistan only but would also help to avoid a civil war as well. However, Nehru and Gandhi did not share his feelings and insisted that the Congress party should solely be allowed to form the Interim Government regardless of the consequences. When Wavell warned that one party rule would lead to a certain civil war, as was obvious from the carnage on the 'Direct Action Day', (Wavell Collections, 1946: 134-5). Gandhi pounded the table and said, "If a bloodbath was necessary, it would come about in spite of non-violence." Gandhi and Nehru met Wavell on July 27, 1946 and discussed the formation of the Interim

Government and the matter of grouping. Wavell asked them to state clearly their intention about grouping so that the cooperation of the League could be sought. Nehru fully hated the League and Gandhi was quite aggressive about his point of view. Gandhi in his letter on 28<sup>th</sup> August, told Wavell that Congress would not bend itself and adopt what it considered a wrong course because of "brutal exhibition recently witnessed in Bengal. Such submissions would itself lead to an encouragement and repetition of such tragedies" (Wavell, 1974: 342-43). Therefore, he advised Wavell to trust Congress concerning the formation of the Interim Government (Nehru to Wavell, August 28, 1946, R/3/1/117: ff 164-5).

Wavell, who was aware of the repercussion and the backlash that it would bring to induct one party rule in a multi-religious country with hostile feelings, three days before induction of the Nehru's government, again asked His Majesty's Government to declare that 'Grouping' was a mandatory part of the Cabinet Mission Plan. To him, it was not a matter of legal niceties but of practical considerations and also because it would put the full weight of His Majesty's Government behind that important part of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Wavell wrote:

Though the consequences may be serious I think it is as well that things have come to a head. Calcutta with its 4,400 dead, 16,000 injured and over 100,000 homeless showed that a one-party government at the Centre was likely to cause fierce disorders everywhere. Far from having any sobering effects, it had increased communal hatred and intransigence. If Congress intentions are as Gandhi's letter suggests the result of their being in power can only be a state of virtual civil war in many parts of India while you and I are responsible to Parliament" (Wavell to Lawrence, August 28, 1946, R/3/1/117: f 145).

But Lawrence did not agree with Wavell's statement that "Congress always meant to use their position in the Interim Government to break up Muslim League and in the Constituent Assembly to destroy the grouping scheme" (Lawrence to Wavell, August 28, 1946, L/PEJ/10/75/: ff 394-5). In response to him he advised Wavell, "We should therefore like you to avoid pressing the grouping question to a final issue before the Interim Government takes over and has had a period of office"<sup>35</sup>. Thus Wavell was left with no choice except to invite Congress to form a new government in September 1946.

But Jinnah was not ready for such pressure tactics on his principled stand for Pakistan. Referring to it, Ayesha Jalal has written, "Here were already signs of London's willingness to resort to ruthless squeeze play if this could break Jinnah's intransigence. One clue to Jinnah's remarkable resilience in the face of grave political setbacks, overwhelming odds, and unremitting squeeze play, was his extraordinary capacity to fight when all would appear lost to lesser men" (Jalal, 1985: 220-1).

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Not to be outwitted and without wasting further time, Jinnah accepted Wavell's offer of joining the Interim Government on October 13, 1946. Despite opposition from Nehru and His Majesty's Government Wavell made this offer. His aim of bringing the two parties together was an attempt to make effort to solve the major constitutional and political issues, especially those related to 'Pakistan' but it seems that enough time had already been wasted and now only the adoption of the Cabinet Mission Plan in its could have ensured the unity of India; such delays had already created doubts in Wavell's mind that things were moving too fast to be contained simply by bringing the two parties together.

Wavell sincerely believed that the objection of congress to the grouping clause was contrary to the interpretation of cabinet mission. Therefore, he showed reluctance to call the meeting of the constituent assembly unless the Congress accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan in its entirety. He maintained that the 'Compulsory Grouping' part was the crux of the Cabinet Mission Plan whereas the Congress leaders believed that accepting that part would result in 'Balkanisation' of India. In fact, "at this stage a difference of opinion between the Viceroy and the London authorities was noticed. Attlee and Pethic Lawrence not only regretted Wavell's intimation to Congress that he would not call the constituent assembly until the point about grouping was cleared up, but also asked the Viceroy not to take any steps which were likely to result in a breach with the Congress"<sup>36</sup> (Sohail, 1991: 17).

Now Wavell pressured the Muslim League that it must either attend the constituent assembly meetings or otherwise resign from the Interim Government to which, Liaquat Ali Khan<sup>37</sup> (Wavell Collections, 1946: 340-1) responded that the League members would be ready to resign whenever required, but they would not accept the long term plan unless His Majesty's Government declared that the provinces must meet in Sections<sup>38</sup> (Wavell Collections, 1946: 313). Wavell did not try again as he himself was convinced that League's stand was right. He also knew of the growing risk of a civil war in case of League's resignation from the government which might put the life, property and interests of the British imperialists in jeopardy<sup>39</sup>. Wavell wrote that "I said that I was quite convinced that without the co-operation of the Muslim League there would be no chance of a united India or of a peaceful transfer of power. Nor would the States be likely to negotiate freely with a one-party Government" (Wavell Collections, 1946: 127-82). He was equally aware of the growing tendency towards militancy in the League circles which he himself that it was because of a lack of firmness and honesty on the part of the British Government. He said that the League had become "mulish and bloody minded"<sup>40</sup> (Wavell, 1974: 382).

Failing to convince Whitehall to make an unequivocal statement, regarding the Cabinet Mission Plan, Wavell on November 20, 1946 announced the decision of His Majesty's Government to call the Constituent Assembly on 9<sup>th</sup> December<sup>41</sup>. In fact, the Labour Government itself had been under extreme pressure from Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel who had twice threatened to resign from the

Interim Government if their demand for dismissal of the League ministers from the Interim Government, was not met. Thus, in order to break the deadlock and to bring about a settlement on the issue of the constituent assembly, Whitehall invited two representatives, each from Congress and Muslim League along with one Sikh to fly at once to London for discussions.

On December 2, 1946 in London, Wavell apprised His Majesty's Government:

The Muslim League leaders raised the cries of Pakistan and Islam in danger originally to enhance their prestige and power and thus their bargaining value as a political party. They have now so inflamed their ignorant and impressionable followers with the idea of Pakistan as a new Prophet's Paradise on earth and as their only means of protection against Hindu domination, that it will be very difficult to satisfy them with anything else. I think Jinnah is honest in saying that he had great difficulty in putting across the Mission Plan with his party, though he was probably wise enough to recognize it as a reasonable compromise worth trying at least for a period<sup>42</sup> (1946, L/P&J/10/111: ff 86-90).

He recommended the British Government to make fullest use of the present discussions in order to try and restore the Mission's plan to its originally intended form. He feared that it would be impossible to carry out the present negotiations with any hope of success, unless the Labour Government made up their mind "whether or not they are prepared to stand up to the Congress"<sup>43</sup>. On their part, the British Government thought that Wavell had outlived his usefulness in his present position. So, they so did not heed his advice and decided to remove him. The immediate reason for his removal, however, was his insistence upon implementing his 'Breakdown Plan', in case of a political deadlock which was imminent.

## **Wavell's Breakdown Plan**

The present author, disagreeing with some recent historians, has tried to prove clearly the acceptance and implementation of the Wavell's Breakdown Plan that in no way implied the acceptance of the demand for Pakistan<sup>44</sup> (Sarila, 2005: 167-198; Close, 1997: 80-91).

This plan had gradually evolved in Wavell's mind because he had realised, especially after the failure of the Simla Conference in 1945 that some kind of a well thought scheme was required, for implementation by the British Government in India. Moreover, such a scheme should aim to preserve its geographical unity and law and order as well because he had foreseen future is trouble, looming on the horizon.

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Ian Stephens has written that Wavell contemplated a date for the final British withdrawal from India and therefore, “in fact, at any rate during that crucial December of 1946, his thoughts were evidently more progressive on this point than the Cabinet’s”<sup>45</sup> (1963: 125). H. M. Close has written about Wavell that “consciously or sub-consciously, was not willing to promote a plan for partition on equality with a plan for unity, and therefore downgraded it with the unattractive name of “Breakdown”<sup>46</sup> (Close, 1997: 86). His Majesty’s Government neither accepted nor accepted the plan till the dismissal of Wavell.

All this delay in settling the communal problem and winding up the British rule had the most adverse effect in India. The loyalties of the police and the army towards British authority became doubtful. According to Noor-ul-Haq, “it seems that, by January 1947, the communal feelings in the Armed Forces had grown very strong. The communal composition in the Services was closely monitored by the two communities and the figures appeared in the press violating the secrecy rules of classified information. Because of the growing communalism in the Armed Forces, Prime Minister Attlee, who stood for the unity of India, got worried that Indian unity could not be achieved if the Indian Armed Forces were spilt on communal lines. He did, however, desire that if the Raj was to come to an end, the loyalty of the Indian soldiers might be transferred to an all India government. He feared that if the British failed to get that, the Indian Armed Forces would undoubtedly split owing to persistent communalism” (Haq 1995: 158-9). The country had been heading towards a civil war which could have been avoided by implementing the Breakdown Plan. Victoria Schofield has recorded:

Since partition formed part of the eventual solution, it may be conjectured that the Breakdown Plan, taking place over more than a year under Wavell’s schedule would have provided more time for tempers to subside; under Mountbatten, their were less than three months between the announcement of partition in June 1947 and independence celebrations in August. Mountbatten argued that once the plan had been announced time was of the essence, but within Wavell’s longer time frame it is possible the violence that accompanied partition could have been considerably lessened, if not averted (Schofield, 2006: 400).

Thus the civil war that broke out during last days of Raj in India and where numerous innocent people were slaughtered, might have lost a major part of its fury if Wavell’s Breakdown Plan had been implemented. The division of India and also the partition of the provinces of Punjab and Bengal most likely would have taken place peacefully.

According to the instructions of His Majesty’s Government, Mountbatten acted as a constitutional head of the government and therefore, could do nothing to stop bloodshed rather he left everything in the hands of the Interior Minister Sardar Patel who made scant efforts to control it. Wavell, on his part, had been impartial and conscious of the

rights of all communities and was determined as an executive head to suppress all such threats. After his dismissal, extremists became uncontrollable and shed the blood of innocent people in India in presence of the new Governor General and British forces, police and army.

During Wavell's Viceroyalty, devolutionary process of British authority in India was accelerated. He was trying to bring a settlement between the two major political parties to maintain the unity of India<sup>47</sup>. Whitehall rejected his Breakdown Plan because they believed that it was a weak plan of a defeated soldier and would result in a clash with the Congress. Attlee thought, "Partition would bring us into immediate conflict with the Congress and permanently embitter our relations with the larger part of India" (L/P&J/10/77: ff 325-8). This kind of approach emboldened the Congress which promoted violence and bloodshed against the Muslims. Wavell reported to Lawrence on January 8, 1947, "Nehru, in his usual irresponsible vein, addressed the All-India students Congress Delhi on the curious Congress position, in which they were both associated with the Government of India and even running provincial governments but at the same time in opposition and the provincial government committees have been advised by the Congress Head Office that they should prepare sub-committees in every village against the day of a future struggle" (L/PO/10/24).

It proved a great error on the part of Whitehall to ignore the Breakdown Plan as Ian Stephens has recorded, "he put forward a 'Wavell (Breakdown) Plan', politically and militarily clear cut, whereby British authority would have been withdrawn from the subcontinent much more gradually than this was turned down; and that had it not been, much of the appalling slaughter at Partition-time, and resulting ill-will between the two successor-States, might have been avoided" (Stephens, 1963: 122).

It is obvious that Wavell's personal relations with Attlee were strained and uneasy. Wavell's insistence on carrying out his Breakdown Plan put the Labour government in an awkward position. Wavell was allowed to return to Delhi. The fact was that Attlee had already decided to replace Wavell during his stay in London but did not dare tell him personally. News Chronicle indicates that from a present point of view, Lord Wavell's departure will be regretted but there is no need to gloss over the fact that certain errors of judgment have been attributed to his political inexperience in dealing with the astute Indian politicians (News Chronicle, 147). The Congress leadership was annoyed with him and had been continuously asking the Labour Government to replace him. In the last days of the transfer of power, he had become unacceptable both to the Congress and the ruling Labour Party in England. H. C. Close has already challenged the myth that Wavell had become a spent force. But he concluded wrong that Wavell was insisting on establishing the 'Lesser Pakistan'. As a matter of fact, Wavell in his Breakdown Plan had developed a strategy to force Congress and League to come to terms on the basis of the Cabinet Mission Plan but he was not allowed to carry it through in its entirety. One part of the Breakdown Plan proposed that a phased withdrawal of the British authority from four Hindu provinces of Bombay, Madras, Orissa and Central Provinces in the first phase be made and then they should withdraw from other provinces. This part of the Breakdown Plan was unacceptable to the Labour government as it could annoy the Congress and give the impression that the British wanted to divide India and to create Pakistan. The Labour

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Government accepted other recommendations which were embodied in the Breakdown Plan but dismissed him from the viceroyalty.

### Conclusion

Whitehall had given Wavell a mandate to maintain law and order in India for the duration of the war but, he, as a political thinker, disagreed with them. He advocated granting freedom to India in order to earn respect and love of the people of India, as had been earned by his hero, Allenby, in Egypt. However, His Majesty's Government did not permit him to carry out his plans. Wavell's failure to achieve his goals was not due to his own indecisions but was really due to the delay and wrong policies of both the Conservative and the Liberal Governments regarding India. He also had to face the opposition of the Congress High Command due to his insistence on granting Muslims a fair deal under the Cabinet Mission Plan which eventually led to his removal.

Indeed, Wavell worked as an honest broker during the negotiations of the Cabinet Mission but he failed to check the hostile, biased and negative approach of the Cabinet delegation towards the Muslim League leaders, especially Jinnah. He backed out the formation of the Interim Government and thus betrayed Jinnah but he did it only to avoid embarrassing His Majesty's Government.

He wanted the geographical unity of India at all costs and all his efforts like his initiation of the 'Wavell Plan', supporting the Cabinet Mission Plan and outlining of the Breakdown Plan were directed sincerely towards that end. His opposition to the Cripps Proposals was also based on that principle.

Wavell can also be credited with strong apprising to the British government of the widespread backing by Muslims of 'Pakistan' scheme so that it could be dealt effectively before it became unmanageable. He considered the Cabinet Mission Plan as the best antidote to the spreading popularity of the Pakistan scheme and therefore, wanted the British Government and Whitehall to press the Congress strongly in order to gain concessions which would have prevented the emergence of Pakistan. However in the end, he failed to do so.

Wavell chalked out the Breakdown Plan to reduce the attractiveness of the 'Pakistan Scheme' for the Muslims. In his Breakdown Plan, he suggested the division of Punjab, Bengal and Assam on communal basis something which was not clearly mentioned either in the Cripps Proposals or the Cabinet Mission Plan. His suggestion in the Breakdown Plan that Punjab and Bengal should be divided on a communal basis, if Jinnah insisted on the Pakistan demand, was only envisaged as a bargaining point with the Muslim League. It ever intended for actual implementation because he was dead sure that the League and the Congress would come to terms on a formula for a united India based on the Cabinet Mission Plan. However, since neither of the parties was willing to compromise enough that he was proved wrong. In the meantime, his Hindu advisers had drawn up an unjust demarcation of the Punjab and the Bengal boundaries on maps which when actually implemented during Mountbatten's brief tenure as the Viceroy, later on, caused tremendous territorial losses to the newly created state of Pakistan.

## Notes

1. On the farewell party, Wavell once again stressed the need to review the Indian policy and let him carry on his plan. He also used those words which, Amery had warned him not to use. It annoyed Winston and Clemmie Attlee.
2. Subsequently, the Cabinet agreed to a revised draft which Wavell described, "I got back exactly the same in principles, but intransigent and discourteous in tone. It seems to me one of our great mistakes in this country is not to have realized the importance to the Indian mind of good manners and appearance at least of consideration." Wavell, A. J. (1974), p. 84.
3. Barnes, (1988), pp. 907-8.
4. Wavell sent back a revised version of the Cabinet's draft, friendly in tone and clearly showing his desire to keep open the door to negotiations, whereas the Cabinet gave the impression of keeping it closed. Wavell knew his revised draft would infuriate Churchill and it actually did enrage not only him but also the whole of the Cabinet. Wavell, p. 84.
5. Gandhi-Jinnah talks were expected to be held soon and it might result in a compromise between the two main parties. Wavell believed that Gandhi got the talent and would manoeuvre successfully as Jinnah would not totally understand his inner feeling and intentions. Wavell to Amery 15 August 1944, Wavell Collections, L/PO/ 10/21.
6. Raisman, the Finance Member of the Executive Council, informed Wavell on 15 September 1944 that this would have very serious repercussions on India's finances. The War Department also protested at the failure to consult them in advance. The cost would fall, under the Defence Expenditure Agreement between His Majesty's Government and the Government of India, entirely on Indian revenues, and would result in aggravation of inflation in India. Wavell to Amery, 11 September 1944, T P, V, p. 25.
7. After the Governors' Conference in 1944, he urged the British Government to issue the statement that they genuinely meant to give India self-government as soon as difficulties could be overcome. Note By Wavell on 5 September 1944, Wavell Papers, Political Series, April 1944-July 1945, Pt. I, pp. 47-9.
8. The meeting took place under the chair of Attlee and those who present in the meeting were: Sir John Anderson, Amery, James Grigg, Cripps, Butler, Edward Bridges, Gilbert Laithwaite and Viscount Simon. Meeting of the India Committee, 6 December 1944, *Transfer of Power*, Vol. V, pp. 274-79.
9. Wavell wrote to Amery that "We missed opportunity between breakdown of Gandhi-Jinnah negotiations and Sapru's announcement of his Committee. We shall always be late if we only begin consultation when opportunity for action has occurred. I therefore propose that I should come home about January 25<sup>th</sup> and stay about a fortnight. I can not come earlier ... and can not break the engagement.... Will you please let me know as soon as possible whether my proposals for dates is approved as I have certain engagements to postpone or cancel." Wavell to Amery, November 1944, Wavell Papers, Political Series, 1944-45, pp.133-4.
10. The Prime Minister on 1 January 1945 said that that because of the meeting of the Big Three in Yalta in early February it was impossible for Wavell's visit to take place before the end of that month. Minute by Churchill 1 January 1945, *Transfer of Power*, Vol., V, p. 173.
11. Attlee also held that a Government responsible neither to parliament nor to a legislature would leave His Majesty's Government powerless to protect the Indian masses which would be defenceless. He also said that the new members would owe allegiance to an outside body and not to the Viceroy, who would be forced more and more into position of a Dominion Governor-General. Therefore

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- effective control would pass to an Executive Council “responsible only to party caucuses”
12. *War Cabinet, India Committee I (45) 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting 26 March 1945, L/PO/6/108c: ff 268-75.*
  13. India Committee Meeting 27 April 1945, L/PO/6/108d: ff 228-31
  14. The Labour victory of 1945, in the eyes of Geoffrey Alderman, “was famous one: with the support of nearly 12 million voters as against the Conservative total of just under 10 millions, Labour could rightly claim to have become a, and perhaps the, national party.” Alderman, Geoffrey. (1986) *Modern Britain, 1700-1983*. London: Croom Helm Ltd., p. 232.
  15. Speech of Bevin at Blackpool on 23 May 1945, quoted by Tinker. () p. 200.
  16. The very first telegram which Wavell received from the Secretary of State for India on 18 August 1945 indicated that His Majesty’s Government intends to take Indian problem in hand at once and seriously. The first instructions, Lawrence issued to Wavell were to hold elections, release political prisoners and to lift ban on the Congress Party. Wavell, A.J. (1974), p. 163.
  17. Wavell went to London on 24 August 1945 and came back on 16 September 1945. He discussed at length the Indian problems and forcefully tried to project his opinion.
  18. In the central assembly election, the Congress won 55 seats and 30 Muslims seats were captured by the Muslim League. The Sikh seats went to the Akalis who were uncompromisingly opposed to Pakistan. The Congress lost 4 Landlord seats, according to Shiva Rao, because of “Jawaharlal’s strong attacks on the land holds and advocacy of the abolition of permanent revenue settlement.” Shiva Rao to Cripps, 15 December 1945, *Transfer of Power*, Vol., VI, pp. 704-7.
  19. Apprising to Whitehall on 27 December 1945, Wavell wrote that Pakistan demand was inflexible policy of the League, so long Jinnah controlled it. He, however, argued that many of his supporters realized the difficulties and disadvantages of Pakistan. Wavell to Lawrence, 27 December 1945, L/P&J/ 8 / 525: ff 229-47.
  20. Wavell requested Lawrence to keep it secret so that his negotiations with the Indian leaders for the formation of the Executive Council should not be prejudiced. Wavell to Lawrence 27 December 1945, L/P&J/ 8 / 525: ff 248-51.
  21. Moon writes that “Through no fault of its members the Parliamentary Delegation did not arouse much interest in India and had little effect on the course of events; but probably some of its members did succeed to some extent in bringing home to the Labour Government that Jinnah and the League would not easily be persuaded to drop the demand for Pakistan.” (Wavell, 1974, p. 208).
  22. Besides Wavell, it was a general impression of the people in New Delhi and Whitehall that the only method which could make Jinnah to accept less than Pakistan was to offer him better alternate and to convince him that his Pakistan scheme was unacceptable, for it flooded with extreme dangers. A number of individuals, officials and secretaries worked hard to investigate the Pakistan scheme. Sir David Taylor Monteath, (permanent Under-Secretary for India and Burma 1942-1947) and his committee in India Office London prepared “Proposals For a Provisional Constitution”. It was prepared to give the frustrated protagonists a breathing space if there had been a breakdown. It suggested that a policy should be adopted to ensure there would be minimum loss of face to the image of His Majesty’s Government and no ultimate prejudice to conflicting aims of Indians.
  23. Wavell said that he would not like to be excluded from the discussion as was done at the time of the Cripps Offer.(TP, 1003); Lawrence in his reply on 21 February 1946 wrote that the Ministers would include him in his discussions and would let him know their policy towards India when they finalize it.

24. Wavell, A.J. (1974), p. 251
25. Wavell wrote to Lawrence on 29 July that "I do not think that your proposed method is quite fair to Jinnah, since it attempts to pin down the main point on which he will raise objections without disclosing to him the whole proposal. I am certain he will refuse. I feel that I must put the proposal to him as a whole. He is still very sore and I can not forefront him with a demand for what he will call one more concession unless I can let him know what he can hope to get if he makes it. I do not want any further misunderstandings or accusations of bad faith, and this is one of the principle reasons why I prefer a written approach. I can not see why we are any more committed by an approach in written than oral one, since it is surely not suggested that any proposals put forward orally can be subsequently disowned, any more than ones writing. Our offer of June 16<sup>th</sup> was in writing. I therefore still very much prefer to make the approach in the method I have suggested. I will be grateful for immediate reply as Jinnah's meeting is in a week's time, and Nehru is in Delhi for a few days." Wavell to Lawrence, 19 July 1946, pp. 33-34.
26. Richard Symonds writes that "My introduction to India was considerably influenced by Horace Alexander, a Quaker with extensive experience of India... Horace and the Society of Friends were sometimes were felt by British officials to be unduly sympathetic to Gandhi and to the Indian National Congress." Symonds, Richard. (2001), *In the Margins of Independence, A Relief Worker in India and Pakistan, 1942-1949*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4; Moon writes that Alexander was a lecturer at Birmingham. Like Agatha, he was member of the Quakers India Conciliation Group. Along with Sudhir Ghosh and a group of young British pacifists of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, he had been engaged on famine relief work in Bengal in 1942-43. He saw himself as intermediary between Gandhi and the world of British officialdom in succession to C. F. Andrews. Wavell, A.J. (1974), P. 311.
27. Wavell was also disturbed as the ministers showed tremendous flexibility towards the Congress. They did not take strong stand and hence changed with the varying demands of the Congress. Consequently, they altered their plan many times to appease the Congress which ultimately brought failure to the Cabinet Mission plan. Wavell deplored this approach and said that he would not be a party to any unilateral concession to Congress but he was snubbed.
28. Wavell, A.J. (1974), p. 287
29. Lawrence, however, apologized for his remarks and behaviour towards Jinnah. Lawrence to Jinnah
30. Gandhi and Nehru had started to interpret the substance and intent of the Cabinet Mission plan according to their own desires and interests. Neither had they thought grouping a compulsory clause nor the powers of the Union Assembly. These statements and resolutions were creating problems for Wavell and His Majesty's Government to implement the short-term and long-term plan. Wavell knew that if the Congress demand regard to the sections and grouping was accepted and if the case be referred to the Federal Court and accepted by it, the Congress would gain nothing. The Muslim League would inevitably refuse to take part, and the process of constitution-making would be held up. While communal stresses in the country would get worse and worse. Therefore, Wavell told Nehru that question involved was not a legal but a practical one and that if the Federal Court decided on a vital point regarding grouping that the Congress view was correct, no advantage would be gained to the Congress. The League would undoubtedly walk out of the Constituent Assembly and whole scheme would break down. Writing to Lawrence on 29 August 1946, Wavell held that the compulsory Grouping was the most essential scheme and we must insist on its being observed. He hoped that if His Majesty's Government would stand quite

- firm on the matter of Grouping and the intentions of the Mission must prevail. He hoped that it would help bringing League into the Interim Government. Therefore he suggested to Whitehall that it would be unwise to call Constituent Assembly till there was a firm agreed view on the grouping question. Wavell to Lawrence, 29 August 1946, Wavell Collections, pp. 134-5
31. Gwyer was Chief Justice of India 1937-1943; Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University 1938-1950.
  32. Attlee said that further delay would only exacerbate the temper of the Congress party leaders and perhaps lead to a definite break between them and the British authorities, as a result of which civil disobedience and anti-British agitation might once more sweep the country. The defeat for the Viceroy was considerable. The British Government, by overruling him, had demonstrated to the Congress that they no longer had any confidence in him. From this moment, neither side in India-Hindus nor Muslims-needed to consider him as vital figure in their negotiations. By his action of August 1946, Attlee deprived Wavell of most of his strength and left him practically helpless in the face of increasingly intransigent communal leaders with whom he had to deal. Wavell, in this hour of personal humiliation showed remarkable lack of resentment. His instinct was to resign at once, but he was aware of the difficult problem which would confront the British Government if he took this action, and of the crisis it might well provoke in India. Mosley. (1961), p.49.
  33. Ibid.
  34. Sohail, Mussarat. *Partition and Anglo-Pakistan Relations*, p. 17.
  35. Wavell to Lawrence, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1946, Wavell Collections, Political Series 28 June to 6 December 1946, volume IV, part V, IOR, MSS/EUR/ D977/8, pp. 340-1.
  36. Wavell to Lawrence, 13 November 1946, Wavell Collections, Political Series 28 June to 6 December 1946, volume IV, part V, IOR, MSS/EUR/ D977/8, p. 313.
  37. Wavell wrote that "I said that I was quite convinced that without the co-operation of the Muslim League there would be no chance of a united India or of a peaceful transfer of power. Nor would the States be likely to negotiate freely with a one-party Government." Wavell's interview with Nehru, 23 August 1946, Wavell Collections, Political Series 28 June to 6 December 1946, volume IV, part V, IOR, MSS/EUR/ D977/8, pp. 127-82.
  38. He said that the League had become "mulish and bloody-minded". Wavell, A.J. (1974), 382
  39. Wavell stressed that "His Majesty's Government must now make up its mind whether it will stand by the statement of the Mission or not". He believed that it would save the Mission's plan by a definite statement on the lines proposed by the League in paragraph 3 of his No.2459-s, which were in effect the assurances given to the League leaders by the Mission in their interview of May 16<sup>th</sup>. He assured that "If His Majesty's Government decides to make such a statement, I should of course put it first to Jinnah and obtain a definite pledge that the League would come in on this assurance. Otherwise His Majesty's Government must recognize that it has in effect abandoned the plan drawn up by the Mission and has surrendered to Congress." He however said that he could not guarantee the reaction of Congress to such a statement, but he expected that they would accept it after a great deal of preliminary bluster, and that majority of Indians, including all sensible and moderate men, would be glad that His Majesty's Government had at last shown some firmness of purpose. He however admitted that the Congress may react by resignation for their Members at the Centre and of all Congress Government followed possibly by widespread violence. He suggested that they could face this only if they had a breakdown plan on the lines which he had proposed. It would help them to get rid of India without serious loss and with

- some dignity. He warned that If His Majesty's Government decides to, Wavell Collections, Political Series 28 June to 6 December 1946, volume IV, part V, IOR, MSS/EUR/ D977/8, pp. 127-82, 342-4
40. Note by Wavell, 2 December 1946, L/P&J/10/111: ff 86-90
  41. Ibid.
  42. Sarila, Narendra Singh. (2005), *The Shadow of the Great Game The Story of India's Partition*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers in India, pp.167-198; Close, (1997), H. M. Attlee, Wavell, Mountbatten and the Transfer of Power (Islamabad: National Book Foundation , pp. 80-91.
  43. Stephens, Ian. (1963), *Pakistan*. London: Earnest Benn Ltd., p. 125.
  44. Close. (1997) Attlee, Wavell, Mountbatten, p. 86.
  45. The newspaper wrote that "widespread sympathy with Viscount Wavell, who is regarded as having been given an impossible individual task, and is now made to appear a scapegoat for the failure of the Government to bring the Indian parties together." *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 March 1947.
  46. *News Chronicle* indicates that from a present point of view Lord Wavell's departure will be regretted, but there is no need to gloss over the fact that certain errors of judgment have been attributed to his political inexperience in dealing with the astute Indian politicians. *News Chronicle*, 22 March 1947.

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## Biographical Note

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