Section 1

Before the 1937 elections Jinnah’s plan had been to claim for the League the undisputed spokesmanship of Muslims at the all-India level. This plan required the Muslim-majority provinces to come under the League’s banner and Muslims in provinces where they were in a minority to vote solidly for the League. If he had won this mandate from Muslim voters, Jinnah might have been able to offer Congress something worth having: at the centre, support from Muslim provinces for a combined assault upon the federal provisions of the 1935 Act and, in the minority provinces, solid League backing which might have tipped the balance against the old guard upon whom the British depended and have brought into office coalition Congress–League ministries.

But for Jinnah the results of the 1937 elections proved another setback in a career marked more by snakes than by ladders. In the Punjab, the Unionists swept the board; in Bengal, Jinnah and the League had to accept a coalition led by Huq who did not acknowledge their writ; in Sind they faced an independent ministry; and in the N.W.F.P., where almost the entire population was Muslim, the worst humiliation of all, a Congress ministry. In each of the majority provinces, Jinnah’s strategy had been repudiated by the voters’ choice. In the Muslim-minority provinces, where the League did best, the Congress did much better than anyone had expected, and did not need the League’s help to form stable ministries. Despite a measure of agreement with Jinnah about the future shape of the centre, the Congress High Command could now plausibly do without the League; understandings with the League were, in the aftermath of the 1937 elections, the expenditure of the expendable. Rejected by the Muslim provinces, the League had nothing to offer the Congress at the centre; so in the provinces where it had won comfortable majorities the Congress saw no reason to dilute its control by giving the League a share of office. The way in which the Muslim vote had split in the elections of 1937 lent some credence to the old Congress line that it was a secular party, ready and able to speak for Muslims, many of whom had entered its camp. Indeed, the Congress now saw the possibility of
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Map 3. All-India Muslim League: presidents and sessions, 1906-1943. Presidents are grouped by regions. Dates for both permanent presidents and sessional presidents are given. From 1906 to 1930 the League designated a permanent president (see the Aga Khan, the Raja of Mahmudabad and M. A. Jinnah) as well as a sessional president. (N.B. All boundaries are as at July 1947, all population data as at 1941.)

(s.s.) = Special session
* = Simultaneous session with Congress
(H) = Hidayat group
(J) = Jinnah group
(S) = Shafi group

(temporary factions within League)
breaking the grip of rival political groups in the provincial assemblies. Muslim members outside its whip in provincial assemblies might be persuaded to cross the floor; a mass contact programme directed specifically at Muslims might give substance to the claim that Congress spoke for many of them. Above all, the High Command calculated that Congress's eventual dominance at a federal centre was unlikely to be threatened by an united Muslim bloc. On the basis of the 1937 elections, the League could at best expect to control less than half of the Muslim seats in the federal legislature, or just over fifteen per cent of the seats for British Indian representatives. The triennial election system meant that it would be long before the League, even on the assumption that it could win the Muslim-majority province vote, could get its one-third say among the British Indian representatives. Moreover, if the federal provisions of the 1935 Act could be changed so that representatives from the Princely States were elected, not nominated, then the Congress would have little to fear at the centre from even a powerful Muslim combination, let alone the rump led by Jinnah. Once Congress succeeded in getting a constituent assembly along the lines it wanted, that assembly, even if it were to be elected on the existing franchise and even if Muslims continued to have separate representation, would contain a mere handful of League members. So there seemed little point in paying much heed to the League—an assessment which seemed reasonable enough in the first flush of victory in 1937, but one which was to prove to be one of the gravest miscalculations by the Congress leadership in its long history.

Faced with the threat of being snuffed out politically, the League urgently needed a new strategy for survival. Some appearance of support, however nominal, from the Muslim-majority provinces was the first requirement if the League was to secure any role for itself at the centre. Admittedly the Muslim-majority provinces needed a spokesman in Delhi since it was there that the Congress's ambitions were coming increasingly to be directed. At the centre, one voice was more likely to be heard than a babel of conflicting tongues. But Jinnah, an obvious candidate for the role of spokesman, was not well placed to exact terms

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1 The Indian States were of course divided. But the Muslim States were grossly outnumbered by the Hindu States. Kashmir with its Hindu Maharaja had only three seats and Hyderabad, which had a predominantly Hindu population and a Muslim ruler, had only five seats. So the Hindus would have a certain majority of the representatives from the Indian States. If they were to be elected, then they might join the Congress, since Congress had a powerful States' movement while the League had nothing of the sort even in the Muslim States.
Jinnah and the League's search for survival

from the majority provinces for acting as their vakil; a briefless advocate, he had to accept any terms they cared to offer. Predictably their terms were not generous. In October 1937, Sikander and Huq rescued Jinnah from political oblivion by allowing him to speak for Punjab and Bengal at the centre; but they both made the League pay a heavy price for the privilege. By agreeing to bring their followers nominally into the Punjab League, the Unionists were in fact ensuring the obliteration of an independent League in their province. Moreover, Sikander insisted that in return for this limited mandate to represent their interests at the centre, the A.I.M.L. was to have no say in Punjabi affairs. There was more to it than that: Jinnah was forced in the Punjab to call to heel the few loyal Leaguers, urban out-groups who actually acknowledged his authority. That the Jinnah–Sikander agreement at Lucknow was a victory for the Unionists is proved by the reaction of Iqbal and the League's urban supporters in Punjab. Iqbal saw the move as 'handing over the League to Sir Sikander and his friends', which had 'already damaged the prestige of the League in this province' and 'may damage it still further', and warned that Muslim Unionists had no intention of signing the League's creed. In December 1938 some 'honest and genuine [L]eaguers', predicted that the Punjab League, now simply an Unionist creature, a bogus organisation, existing only on paper, would soon be 'absolutely dead'; but Jinnah had no alternative but to sacrifice what little organisation the League possessed in the Punjab in exchange for the limited right to speak for it at the centre. With characteristic political realism, he told his Punjabi supporters what his line towards the provinces was now going to have to be. Any Muslim ready to accept the League's 'creed, Policy and Programme' (or simply that the League spoke for him at the centre), whatever his political persuasion, 'is no longer any thing else but a leaguer and those who have been already in the League are no better than the [new] leaguers'. With so few in his camp, Jinnah had no option except to fling the gates wide open to all comers. Any Muslim who now gave the League his nominal allegiance became a Leaguer on an equal footing with those who had actually worked for the party in the past. As Jinnah explained with unusual candour, 'there is no such thing as this group or that group, or that party or this party, because then it really means various cliques'.

2 Iqbal was proved to be right. Until the summer of 1944, the League possessed not even the pretence of an organisation in the Punjab. (See Iqbal to Jinnah, 10 November 1937, Ahmad (ed.), Historic Documents, p. 213.)


Bengal’s backing at the centre was purchased by Jinnah at an even higher price. Here M.L.A.s in the League camp had a fighting chance of pulling down Huq and having a ministry of their own. In September 1937, another section of the Krishak Praja party had broken with Huq, leaving him as the leader of a minority group in the coalition ministry. This strengthened the claims of Nazimuddin, the leader of the League’s assembly party, to become prime minister, particularly since he had Government House’s favour, backing from the European bloc in the assembly and support from the non-Bengali Muslim businessmen of Calcutta. This is why Huq now identified himself with the League and led Bengal’s delegates to the League’s Lucknow session. To get the immediate support from the ministry in Bengal, Jinnah had to permit Huq and his Krishak Praja followers, who straddled the communities, to appropriate the League’s colours. In return, all Huq promised to do was to advise his few remaining Muslim followers in the Krishak Praja party to ‘follow’ the League’s policy at the centre, while in every other respect he and his men remained free to go their own way. In the short-term, this prevented the Nazimuddin faction, which after all was much closer to Jinnah and the A.I.M.L., from throwing Huq out of office, and perhaps bringing in a League ministry in its stead.

Of course Jinnah would have liked to impose structure and control from the centre over the provincial Leagues, as the A.I.M.L.’s new constitution, drafted along Congress lines, proves. But the gap between Jinnah’s centralist pretensions and the realities in the provinces was shown by the concessions he had to make even in the paper constitution. The A.I.M.L.’s new constitution which came into effect in February 1938 gave the Muslim-majority provinces a much larger say than before on the All-India Council. But it still did not reflect the real balance of power in Muslim politics. The total membership of the Council was raised from 310 to 465, the Punjab and Bengal each receiving an additional forty representatives, Sind fifteen and the N.W.F.P. ten. But the U.P. was also given an additional twenty seats. The two largest

5 Seats on the A.I.M.L. Council were distributed as follows (the old numbers are in parenthesis):  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Old Numbers</th>
<th>New Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>15 (10)</td>
<td>100 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.P.</td>
<td>70 (50)</td>
<td>30 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>90 (50)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>30 (20)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind</td>
<td>25 (10)</td>
<td>25 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>20 (18)</td>
<td>5 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.W.F.P.</td>
<td>20 (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>445</strong></td>
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(See ‘The Constitution and Rules of the All-India Muslim League’, AIML/File No. 111.)
Muslim provinces had just over forty per cent of the votes on the League’s Council, and even with Sind, the N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan thrown in, the Muslim-majority provinces had only just over half the votes. The method of election to the League Council was closely in line with the principles adopted by the Congress. The representatives of the League Council were to be elected by the provincial branches. Provinces were to be split into divisions which were further sub-divided into wards, and branches in a ward or a district were named primary Leagues. The membership fee was reduced to only two annas (two annas less than that of the Congress). For every one hundred primary League members there was to be one representative on the district League. The district Leagues would annually elect members to the provincial Leagues – the precise number from each district was to be fixed in the newly revised provincial League constitutions. The provincial Leagues in turn would elect representatives to the A.I.M.L.’s Council. In the event that the process of election was not completed by a province, the All-India Council had the authority to select members from each province. The League Council also had the power to disaffiliate Leagues in a majority of the districts. Rules for the enrolment of members, conduct of meetings, election of office bearers, maintenance of accounts, etc., were also framed. The most significant change was the increased powers of the Working Committee – the executive of the All-India League’s High Command. It was to consist of twenty-one members, to be nominated from the Council by the president; it would consider and pass all resolutions before they were put before the Council and was empowered to prepare the annual budget of the League and to sanction all payments exceeding fifty rupees not included in the budget. The Working Committee also had the authority to appoint all sub-committees. This was almost a carbon copy of the Congress constitution; and it followed its model by concentrating power at the top, in the hands of the Working Committee. With the right to select all the members of the Working Committee, Jinnah at least in theory had equipped himself with all the necessary powers to impose centralised authority over the League’s provincial arms. But the continued dominance of minority-province Muslims in the Working Committee, the U.P. in particular, suggests that the League was still far from becoming the voice of the Muslim provinces.

After the elections, Iqbal had advised Jinnah to ‘ignore Muslim minority provinces’ and to look to the Muslims of north-west India and Bengal, an irony not lost on the leader of a party whose only electoral success had been in the minority provinces which he was now being

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6 Ibid.
invited to spurn. Seven years after his famous speech in Allahabad on 29 December 1930, Iqbal crystallised his thoughts:

Why should not the Muslims of North West India and Bengal be considered as nations entitled to self-determination just as other nations in India are? Personally I think that the Muslims of North West India and Bengal ought at present [to] ignore Muslim minority provinces. This is the best course to adopt in the interests of both Muslim majority and minority provinces.\(^7\)

But as even Iqbal could see the lip-service paid by the two main Muslim-majority provinces in October 1937 could be turned into political advantage only if the League could now find a line which would appeal to all Muslims, whether in the majority or in the minority provinces. Once the Congress had launched its Muslim mass contact movement in March 1937, Iqbal was convinced that the League would now have to decide ‘whether it will remain a body representing the upper classes of Indian Muslims or [the] Muslim masses who have so far, with good reason, taken no interest in it’. The real issue as Iqbal saw it, was: ‘how . . . to solve the problem of Muslim poverty? And the whole future of the League depends on the League’s activity to solve the question.’ The ‘only way to solve the problem of bread for Muslims’ was to enforce the ‘Law of Islam’.\(^8\) A bold social and economic programme based on the ‘Law of Islam’ for the Muslim masses would, according to Iqbal, do the trick; but what such a ‘Law’ involved or how it could be implemented was not very clear, and in any case Jinnah was too shrewd and too secular to chase this particular hare. If the ‘Law of Islam’ was to be interpreted by the ulema, the traditional guardians of the law, then Jinnah would certainly have nothing to do with it. Any recourse to the ‘Law of Islam’ would have sparked off an ideological debate between the ulema and the more progressive Muslims. This was clearly the last thing Jinnah needed at this stage. As his old friend the Raja of Mahmudabad has reminisced, Jinnah ‘thoroughly disapproved’ of such traditional remedies; he asked Mahmudabad not to express them from the League’s platform since this might mislead people into thinking that Jinnah had given them his endorsement.\(^9\) Moreover, Jinnah could see that any appeal to religion, or to a radical economic programme, might only too easily boomerang upon its proponents. The League could not even begin to set out a plausible facsimile of a social programme to eradicate Muslim poverty since such support as it possessed came from vested landed and business interests at


\(^8\) Iqbal to Jinnah, 28 May 1937, ibid.

the apex of society. In any event, such appeals were irrelevant to Jinnah’s predicament.

But the Congress’s siren calls to the Muslims, both to the elected representatives in the assemblies and to the people below, its efforts to seek accommodations with provincial Muslim factions and to launch a mass contact movement, had somehow urgently to be countered. All Jinnah could do was to make much of the Congress threat to Muslim interests, portraying it as a perfidious party no Muslim after the U.P. experience could ever trust again; its mass contact movement a knife at the throat of every Muslim politician; its ministries blatantly favouring their own; a High Command whose iron control over its own provinces clearly hinted at what lay ahead for the Muslim-majority provinces once it came to dominate the centre. Much of the League’s propaganda at this stage was directed against the Congress ministries and their alleged attacks on Muslim culture; the heightened activity of the Hindu Mahasabha, the hoisting of the Congress tricolour, the singing of bandemataram, the Vidya Mandir scheme in the Central Provinces and the Wardha scheme of education – all were interpreted as proof of ‘Congress atrocities’. So Congress was clearly incapable of representing Muslim interests, yet it was trying to ‘annihilate every other party’. Jinnah wanted the League’s claim to ‘complete equality with the Congress’ to be recognised. While he was prepared to come to an understanding on this basis: ‘we cannot surrender, submerge or submit to the dictates or the ukase of the High Command of the Congress, which is developing into a totalitarian and authoritative causes [sic – ?caucus], functioning under the name of the Working Committee, and aspiring to the position of a shadow cabinet in a future republic’. He warned that Congress was taking the offensive deep into the Muslim provinces, and hoping by dividing to rule. In Sind, his line was that Congress had contrived a split among the Muslims; certainly it had helped to keep a League ministry out of office. In the C.P., the very provinces where,
according to League propaganda, Congress had ridden roughshod over Muslims, it was accused of dangling carrots before Muslim League M.L.A.s. These were some of the arguments, according to Jinnah, why Muslims needed to unite under his leadership.

Much of this propaganda was simply a response to Congress's attempts to further consolidate its electoral success by winning Muslim support both inside and outside the legislatures. But by now some elements in the Congress High Command were coming to realise that they had perhaps underestimated the League's capacity for survival, or the fears among Muslims upon which it would play. So they called off the Muslim contact movement and made tentative approaches to Jinnah through Subhas Chandra Bose, an appropriate choice since Bose, as a Bengali, could see the advantages for his own province in some understanding between the Congress and the Muslims. But at this point Jinnah was not ready to parley with the Congress unless it accepted the League as the 'authoritative and representative organisation of the Indian Muslims', just as he was ready somewhat provocatively to admit that the Congress was the 'authoritative and representative organisation of the solid body of Hindu opinion'.

Congress saw no reason to make a concession which cut against the

In October 1938, Jinnah came to Karachi hoping to stamp some unity upon the divided Muslim ranks of Sind, and then to impose the League's imprimatur on whatever alliance they were prepared to form. Just when it seemed that Baksh might come to terms with Jinnah, the Congress High Command ordered its party in the provincial assembly to support Baksh against the no-confidence motion. So Baksh saw no reason to forge an alliance with the League. Jinnah left Sind plaintively complaining that the Congress High Command was 'obsessed with one and only one idea of destroying any effort which will bring solidarity among the Musalmans'. (See Jinnah's statement to the Associated Press of India in Karachi, 13 October 1938, QAP/4/File No. 160.)

Of course the C.P. and Berar Muslim League was riven with factionalism and many League M.L.A.s were prepared to cross the floor and join the Congress. In mid-January 1939, a group of C.P. Leaguers agreed to call a meeting of the Muslim members of the legislature to present their common demands to the Congress ministry. Of the fourteen Muslim M.L.A.s, ten were Leaguers and four were Congressmen, and it proved impossible for them to agree. The Congress Muslim M.L.A.s had no reason to join in attacking the Vidya Mandir scheme and were not impressed by the alleged anti-Muslim activities of the ministry. As the vice-president of the Jubbulpur League lamented: 'to go to the enemy with different aims and aspirations is to court disaster from the beginning' and 'to exhibit community's demoralised position before the bar of ... world opinion in a manner not befitting to its aims and objectives'. (See Taj-ud-din to Jinnah, no date, SHC/File No. 4.) Jinnah was warned that if he did not intervene personally and put an end to the 'scandalous' activities of some of the C.P. Leaguers, he would find 'Provincial PACTS [sic] being arranged ignoring the All-India organisation which is the new game of the Congress'. (Taj-ud-din to Jinnah, 1938 (undated), ibid.)

Quoted in Subhas Chandra Bose's note to Jinnah, 14 May 1938, AIML/File No. 122 (my italics).
very basis of its creed, and so Jinnah turned to the British, a last resort for so dedicated a nationalist who had devoted his political life to battling against the alien rulers. In August 1938, he asked to meet Lord Brabourne, the acting Viceroy, and hinted at a deal by which the League might support the British at the centre if in return the British accepted the League as the sole spokesman of the Muslims. According to Lord Brabourne, Jinnah had ended up with the suggestion that ‘we [the British] should keep the centre as it is now’ and that ‘we should make friends with Muslims’ by protecting them in the Congress provinces, and if this was done, ‘Muslims would protect us at the centre’. Jinnah himself confessed that, if the League’s interests so demanded, he was ready to be ‘the ally of even the devil’. ‘It is not because we are in love with Imperialism’, Jinnah explained to the annual League session in December 1938, ‘but in Politics one has to play one’s game as on a chess-board.’ But still trying to implement the federal provisions of the 1935 Act, Viceregal Lodge saw little attraction in a deal with a man who besides being bitterly opposed to the federal scheme seemed as trivial an enemy as he was lightweight as a friend.

However, when war seemed imminent and certainly once it had broken out, Delhi’s relative assessment of Jinnah and the Congress changed sharply. To fight a war from an Indian base, the British now needed both to hold firm at the centre and to reassert control over the provinces. With the war on its way, Delhi judged that Congress would demand a high price for its collaboration and might threaten to pull out its provincial ministries. But far from being a frightening prospect, this threat was good news for Delhi, since even collaborating Congress provinces were likely to be more of a nuisance in running India during the war than provinces deprived of their Congress ministries. By April 1939 Delhi had persuaded Parliament to give it powers to take over and run the provinces if the need arose. So the Viceroy and his advisers were

18 But already the year before, London was taking a somewhat different line: Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, could ‘not resist a steadily growing conviction that the dominant factor in determining the future form of government would prove to be the All-India Muslim League’. (See Dundas (ed.), Essayez, p. 247.) But Linlithgow in Delhi did not expect any ‘serious trouble’ from the Muslims and thought they would ultimately come into the federation if it was imposed upon them. (See Gowher Rizvi, Linlithgow and India: A Study of British Policy and the Political Impasse in India, 1936–1943 (London, 1978), p. 84.)
19 Six months before the war broke out, a new section (Section 126A) in the 1935 Act was
ready, indeed eager, to ditch the eight Congress ministries. Here the British made a reasoned assessment of the Congress’s weaknesses. Even in the two brief years of provincial autonomy, they could see that the Congress High Command was increasingly facing the dangers of splits between Congress movements outside the legislatures and the ministerial groups in office. Congress in office was bound to disappoint many of the aspirations of its followers. There were splits between the Congress right wing and the radicals, between rival factions bidding for government patronage, and of course between ‘ins’ and ‘outs’. The war was bound to make the problems worse, since the provincial governments would have less of a free hand and, with little prospect of large concessions at the centre during the war, provincial bosses would have less reason to accept the dictates of the High Command. This added up to a strong argument for the High Command to pull the Congress out of the provinces. The High Command still had the power to tell its provincial ministries to resign, however reluctant they themselves might be to do so. But if Congress promised to be an uncertain ally during the war, a way had to be found which combined the requirement that no concessions of substance be made to it, and yet succeeded in putting the blame for the breakdown of negotiations upon Indian politicians and their inability to agree among themselves.

This is where Jinnah proved to have his uses. This ambassador of Hindu – Muslim unity now seemed the best guarantee the British could find in India against an united political demand. With his limited mandate from the Muslim-majority provinces, Jinnah now had a semblance of a right to speak for Muslims at the centre. This is where the British needed him and where they were ready to acknowledge his standing. But they wanted to keep him out of the affairs of the Muslim-majority provinces. The fact that Jinnah was hardly a free agent, a mere vakil of the Muslim provinces, made him a particularly convenient instrument from the British point of view. It still seemed unlikely that Jinnah could produce a demand which would seriously embarrass the British, and he had no power to create problems for the war effort in the Muslim-majority provinces, especially in the Punjab, the main recruiting ground for the Indian army, and in Bengal, the Raj’s eastern front against Japan.

Introduced by Westminster; this enabled the Government of India, during an emergency such as war or the threat of war, to instruct provincial governments on the exercise of executive authority; permitted the central legislature to make laws for the provinces and gave the centre full executive powers if it needed them. At a stroke, this negated most of the provincial autonomy which the 1935 Act had granted. (See Rizvi, *Lnhithgow and India*, pp. 131–2.)
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Just how confident Delhi was of its ability to exploit the weaknesses both of the Congress High Command and its much weaker counterpart, the League, was shown on 3 September 1939, when Linlithgow, without consulting any Indian politician, simply announced that by declaring war on Germany Britain had automatically turned India into a belligerent in the allied cause. This was correct by the letter of the law; but it was hardly the action of rulers concerned about the reactions of their subjects. The next day the Viceroy invited Jinnah, on an equal footing with Gandhi, for talks, and informed them that the efforts to implement the federal provisions of the 1935 Act would be suspended until after the war.

This blunt announcement placed the Congress in a more acute dilemma than it did Jinnah. Ever since Congress ministries had taken office in the provinces in 1937, tension had been growing between them and the High Command. Rivalries between Congressmen in office and Congressmen out of office were becoming increasingly tiresome for the all-India leadership. These struggles for power and position at a provincial level played back upon the centre where the High Command itself was not as solid as it liked to pretend. As usual Gandhi remained in the wings, the ultimate arbiter whose commitment to non-violence complicated the Congress response to the blood and iron of war. Subhas Bose and his Forward Bloc, outmanoeuvred by the old guard earlier in 1939, now argued that Britain’s difficulties were India’s opportunity, and the divisions inside the Congress over its response to the war gave the Tiger of Bengal another chance to spring back into the ring from which he had been ousted. Nehru, who was permitted the role of Congress expert on foreign affairs, had enthusiastic but idiosyncratic views in which his commitment against fascism was qualified by notions of a world movement against imperialism. More to the point, there were discontents at central and provincial levels, sufficient and ready to embarrass the leadership and to force it to react in a more uncompromising way than the High Command itself deemed politic. Some of its members, particularly those with business interests, could see advantage in a pragmatic response to secure an accommodation with the British which would permit the Congress to co-operate during the war to its advantage. But the High Command was already finding it difficult to keep its movement together. If it was to preserve its fragile unity, it had somehow to make its bid for power at the centre compatible with ostensibly mobilising the base, and appearing to steer ‘leftwards’. Not surprisingly it took the Congress a week of agonising before it could cobble together a compromise out of these conflicting elements and make its public response to Linlithgow’s curt announcement. That response was the Congress’s
impractical demand on 14 September 1939 for immediate independence and for a constituent assembly to make the arrangements. This was the price Congress had to pay in order to maintain a semblance of solidarity over its own divided camp.\textsuperscript{20}

Once Congress had stated its demands, Linlithgow urgently needed a means by which he could challenge its claim to be speaking for all-India. Four days later, the League’s more measured resolution calling for the abandonment of the ‘Federal objective’ and a guarantee that no scheme of constitutional reform would be enforced without its approval gave the Viceroy the opening he needed.\textsuperscript{21} On 18 October 1939, Linlithgow assured Muslims that ‘full weight would be given to their views and interests’. ‘It is unthinkable’, Linlithgow added, ‘that we should now proceed to plan afresh, or to modify in any respect any important part of India’s future constitution without again taking counsel with those who have in the recent past been so closely associated on a like task with His Majesty’s Government and with Parliament’.\textsuperscript{22} The League’s Working Committee interpreted this statement as an emphatic repudiation of the Congress claim to represent the whole of India, and an indication that H.M.G. ‘recognise the fact that the All-India Muslim League alone truly represent the Mussalmans of India and can speak on their behalf’,\textsuperscript{23} even though this was not quite how Linlithgow had intended his response to be understood.\textsuperscript{24} By making prior agreement between the Congress and the Muslims the condition for any advance at the centre, Linlithgow in effect handed a veto to whoever could claim to speak for Muslims. At the same time he shifted the blame for failure to achieve constitutional advance squarely upon Indian politicians. As Delhi had hoped, the Congress High Command now had no option but to ask its eight provincial ministries to resign; they did so on 10 November 1939 and the Governors took charge of their administration under Section 93.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{21} A.I.M.L. Working Committee’s resolution, 18 September 1939, in Ahmad (ed.), \textit{Historic Documents}, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 352.
\textsuperscript{23} A.I.M.L. Working Committee’s resolution, 22 October 1939, AIML/File No. 128, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{24} Linlithgow had spoken of Muslims, not of the Muslim League. But it was convenient for the League’s Working Committee to claim Linlithgow’s assurance as a further step in the direction of gaining recognition as the sole authoritative spokesman of the Indian Muslims.
\textsuperscript{25} The Government of India’s \textit{Quarterly Survey} noted that the Governors of the Section 93 provinces were much relieved at being rid of the Congress ministries and were pleased with the results. (Cited in Rizvi, \textit{Linlithgow and India}, p. 145.)
With the constitutional question now effectively in cold storage, Linlithgow turned increasingly towards Jinnah and the League. He frankly admitted that Jinnah had given him 'valuable help by standing against Congress claims and I was duly grateful'. Had Jinnah supported the Congress and 'confronted me with a joint demand, the strain upon me and His Majesty's Government would have been very great indeed . . . therefore, I could claim to have a vested interest in his position'. 26 On his side, Jinnah, mindful of the risks of making an open declaration of collaboration in the war effort, preferred to sit on the fence. In private, however, he thanked Linlithgow 'with much graciousness' for what the Viceroy had done to 'assist him in keeping his party together'. 27 Here and now, the Viceroy's favour was worth more than any agreement with the Congress. After all, an anti-Congress stance was the main, perhaps the only, common factor in the divided ranks that Jinnah was trying to lead. Linlithgow himself thought he had more to gain from a deal with the League than with the Congress. When London pressed him to try and reach an accord with Indian leaders, Linlithgow argued that so long as Congress failed to meet Muslim demands, it was a mistake to try 'swapping horses or doing anything which might lose us Muslim support'. 28

So for the time being neither Jinnah nor the British were ready to negotiate with the Congress. But they were ready to come to an accommodation with each other which offered prospects of setting Jinnah and the League on the road to recovery. But from the British point of view such an accommodation required the League to spell out its policy in public. During the course of his talks with Jinnah, the Viceroy had: 'again put forward the familiar argument for formulating and publishing a constructive policy and in the light of our discussion he [Jinnah] said that he was disposed to think it would be wise for his friends and himself to make public at any rate the outlines of their position in good time'. 29 Since Jinnah and the League were to be used to alleviate a problem of propaganda, Linlithgow pressed Jinnah to state the League's 'constructive policy' as a counterweight to the Congress's demand for independence and a constituent assembly. There was public opinion in

26 Linlithgow to Zetland, note of interview with Jinnah on 4 November 1939, L/P&J/8/506, I.O.L. and Rizvi, Linlithgow and India, pp. 113–14.
27 Note of interview between Linlithgow and Jinnah, 5 October 1939, L/P&J/8/505, cited in Rizvi, Linlithgow and India, p. 110, fn. 4.
Britain; there was the need to get America to join the allies and to counter
the threat in Asia of the Japanese, portraying themselves as the
champions of Asian nationalism; and above all there was the need to
maintain the existing systems of collaboration in the provinces. So it was
mainly a matter of finding reasonable grounds for carrying on under
British management while avoiding a serious backlash, whether in India,
Britain or abroad. The complexities of the Indian communal problem
seemed to offer the best pretext for doing nothing. Since Jinnah also
needed time in which to build the League’s case, he was ready to
recognise this conformity of interest between the League and Viceregal
Lodge, and to proceed on that basis for the time being.

Section 2

Linlithgow’s call to Muslims to produce a ‘constructive policy’ was an
opportunity for Jinnah, the potential spokesman for Muslims at the
centre, but it was also something of an embarrassment. Such a policy
would have to walk a tight-rope between the conflicting requirements of
the divided constituents on whose behalf he was purporting to speak. In
particular Jinnah had to find a way of squaring the dominant interests in
Muslim-majority provinces over which he had no control. At this
juncture his most urgent priority was to persuade everyone – the British,
the Congress High Command and his own uncertain followers – to accept
his claim to be the sole spokesman for Muslims without being too precise
about the demand – precision and unanimity were incompatible. Yet
Linlithgow’s invitation, and the chance of official recognition which it
offered, required Jinnah to spell out a policy at a point in time when his
true hand, if revealed, was bound to be repudiated by the most
influential of his principals, the leaders of the majority provinces.
Congress’s demand for independence and a constituent assembly was
itself the product of its own disunities and dilemmas. Since the disunities
among the Muslims were far greater, and the League’s High Command
was neither high nor commanding, it is not surprising that Jinnah’s
problem in papering over the cracks in his movement was more difficult.
A demand which was the highest common factor of Muslim differences
would, almost by definition, have to be imprecise and vague.

There were a number of important constraints upon Jinnah in form-
ulating a policy. The new policy had to make a break with the past. It had
to reject the federal provisions of the 1935 Act since there was no security
there for Muslims, whether at the centre for the majority provinces, or in
the provinces where they were minorities. It had to turn back upon the
old principle of separate representation for much the same reasons. Even
if Muslims voted solidly for one party - an unlikely prospect at this time - they would be outnumbered, and outvoted in the making of the constitution. So a single constituent assembly offered no security for Muslim interests, however construed. What Muslims needed was a quite different basis to overcome the fatal defect of being a minority in British India, and a divided minority to boot. As far as the Muslim-majority provinces were concerned, they might have been content simply to see the British remain for ever in charge at the centre. But if some transfer of power was inevitable, then they preferred strong autonomous provinces and a weak federal centre. Yet the preferences of the Muslim-majority provinces had awkward implications for Jinnah: if these provinces openly called on the British to stay on, this would leave the Congress unchallenged as the spokesman of nationalist demands; if, however, the centre was to be weak and the provinces strong, any Muslim party at the centre would be the servant, not the master, of powerful provincial satraps. This, in turn, would give little security to Muslims in minority provinces. Their approach was bound to be very different. The only way minority Muslims could achieve security and a real share of power and patronage was by calling in the centre to redress the provincial balance. This required a strong centre, and at that centre a Congress High Command with an incentive, and the authority, to order its provincial arms to cut against the grain of their narrow interests, and cut in the Muslims. Such incentive could be found only in terms of all-India, not provincial, imperatives. The context in which the Congress High Command might have an incentive to instruct its provinces to treat Muslim minorities well would be if it needed Muslim co-operation at the centre. It would need such co-operation on two assumptions: first, that India had an unitary government (including Muslim-majority provinces) with a relatively strong centre, and second that at this centre there was a strong Muslim party, speaking for majority and minority provinces alike, whose co-operation was vital for effective government. If there was no strong Muslim party at the centre, or if the Congress could make terms separately with majority Muslims, province by province, then Muslims in minority provinces would not be able to get the centre to alleviate their provincial disadvantages. So Muslims in the minority provinces above all needed a strong party at the centre speaking for all Muslims. This was closer to Jinnah's own vision of the role he envisaged for the League. But the circumstances of the time had placed him at the mercy of the majority provinces: they were paying the piper; they could call the tune.

The new development of which Jinnah could take advantage was that the majority provinces, however reluctantly, now were coming to recognise that they too needed a piper at the centre playing a strong new
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tune. No juggling of the political arithmetic could prevent safe provincial Muslim majorities from being turned into an ineffectual minority at the centre. Asserting that Muslims were a nation avoided the logic of numbers. As a community, they were consigned to being a perpetual minority in an united India. As a nation they were entitled to equal status, irrespective of their numbers, since the family of nations contains the big and the small. This was a large step and a bold assertion. But it had a pedigree of sorts. There had been talk along similar lines for at least half a century. In the nineteen-twenties and early nineteen-thirties, when the British tactic had been to retreat to the centre, the idea of Indian Muslims constituting a nation had very little to commend it politically since it was relevant only if the distribution of power at the centre was at stake. The constitutional negotiations which led to the 1935 Act gave the notion a slight stimulus, but it remained an idea more cultural than political, for example in Iqbal’s famous presidential address to the A.I.M.L. in December 1930, or a fantasy more utopian than practical, as in the student scheme for a ‘Pakistan’ (see above, p. 12, fn. 14). The strongest Muslim influence on the making of the 1935 Act had been the Punjab’s provincial thesis which argued states’ rights against the centre, and envisaged an United States of Southern Asia in the long-term. Yet for the time being the Punjab statesmen had been happy to leave the centre firmly in British hands – which suited the rulers perfectly.

However, the Congress triumph at the polls in 1937 had implications for centre and province alike and it brought the Muslim dilemma into the open, and a flurry of schemes looking for some way out were doing the

30 Syed Ahmad Khan spoke of ‘two nations’ in the eighteen-eighties when he urged Muslims to disassociate themselves from the Indian National Congress, and asked the British to give them recognition in terms of their political importance, not their numbers. Of course this early hint of Muslim ‘separatism’ needs to be set into the context of north India in the late-nineteenth century: the particular interests of its Muslim elite, their response to the categories the Raj employed, and the opportunities of exploiting its patronage and favour. Later developments robbed this notion of its political utility. (See above, pp. 9–10.)

31 As early as 1935, the Aga Khan could see that Indian Muslims needed an entirely new basis on which to make their demands. The best course, he thought, was to take advantage of the ‘impregnable position’ of Muslims in the north-western regions and in Bengal; at the centre, Muslims should be ‘out and out Federalists’ and ‘make India what she is, i.e. a United States of Southern Asia’, where the Muslims would use the majority provinces against the centre. But ‘our Indian patriotism, of course, should never leave any doubt and our Hindu countrymen must realise that the welfare of India as a whole . . . is as dear to us as it is to them . . .’. (Aga Khan to Fazl-i-Husain, Fazl-i-Husain Papers (Aga Khan File); see also Jalal and Seal, Modern Asian Studies, 15, 3 (1981), 448–9.)
In March 1939, the A.I.M.L. appointed a special committee to look into schemes which had little in common with each other except the assertion, explicit or implicit, that Indian Muslims, whatever their differences and however defined, were a nation. These were not merely the tattered remnants of kites flown long ago; they included at least five new variants of varying degrees of practicality. The weightiest, because it had the stamp of Sikander Hayat Khan, who had taken on the mantle of Fazl-i-Husain, was a version of the time-honoured Punjab strategy, updated to prepare against the probability that the Congress would have a solid majority at the centre. The Punjab would afforce its autonomy by exerting its sway over other Muslim-majority provinces in its north-western neighbourhood, and by weakening the centre further still. The Punjab, the most viable base for Muslim consolidation, was not surprisingly the most fertile source for schemes of a federal nature. Another version, rather more extreme than Sikander’s, robbed the centre of any real substance. And of course there was the notorious ‘Pakistan’ scheme of the irrepresible Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali, an even more fantastical variant of his earlier dreams. None of this had much to offer Muslims in the minority provinces. As small scattered islands in a non-Muslim ocean, their dilemma was underlined by the impossible knots into which they tied themselves when they tried to deploy the idea of Muslims as a nation in their own interest. Some professors at Aligarh, a seminary noted for its political inventiveness, conceived the plan of slicing India into three separate states. Two of them were to be dominated by Muslims, and Hindustan, the one non-Muslim state, was to be subjected to a further surgery which would carve two autonomous

32 Sikander’s scheme published in the summer of 1939 advocated the loosest of federations with a weak centre and ‘blocs’ of provinces which would have regional or zonal legislatures dealing with common subjects. The Punjab in this way would dominate the north-western ‘bloc’ (which would include Sind, the N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan) and enjoy many of the attributes of sovereignty that belonged to the centre.

33 This was the ‘Industan scheme’ outlined in a Confederacy of India by ‘A Punjabi’; it proposed to split India into five different federations to be reassembled into a confederacy with common links, so vague and unspecific as to make the federal provisions of the 1935 Act appear in comparison an iron frame. (See ‘A Punjabi’, Confederacy of India (Lahore, 1939.)

34 Rahmat Ali now called for the establishment of no less than eight Muslim states and their consolidation into a ‘Pakistan Commonwealth of Nations’, which in turn would be re-integrated with that heterogeneous Muslim belt all the way from Central Asia to the Bosporus, the ‘original Pakistan’. (Chaudhuri Rahmat Ali, Pakistan: The Fatherland of the Pak Nation, rev. edn., (Lahore, 1978), pp. 228–9.)

35 Aligarh was rewarded in Jinnah’s will, made in 1939. It left substantial sums to Aligarh and to Bombay universities – a will which, significantly, Jinnah never changed, even though he had ample time to do so.
provinces out of its heart and its southern extremities: Delhi, the old centre of Muslim power in north India, and a somewhat improbable Muslim Malabar, built around the Moplahs. In their different way, all these schemes were trying to rescue Muslims from having a perpetual minority status at the centre, and they all, with the exception of Rahmat Ali’s, envisaged linkages of some sort between the Muslim blocs and their non-Muslim counterparts. No one accepted an unqualified balkanisation of India.

Out of these unpromising and contradictory opinions, the League had to find a way forward. Its sub-committee had been in existence since March 1939. When Linlithgow pressed Jinnah, the League’s Working Committee decided that it had to give its sub-committee a brief. That took it four days of constant meetings between 3 and 6 February 1940. In constructing a brief, the Working Committee had to bear in mind that the only point of general agreement was the decision to declare that Muslims were a nation, not a minority, and to reject constitution-making based on the counting of heads. Of course the real problem was to steer a path between majority and minority Muslims and somehow give Jinnah a hand to play at the centre. The new balance of power in Muslim

The Aligarh professors justified the creation of two autonomous provinces inside Hindustan on the grounds that Muslims in the minority provinces needed the ‘full and effective support by the Muslim majority provinces’. Muslims inside Hindustan were to be regarded as a ‘nation in minority and part of a larger nation inhabiting Pakistan and Bengal’. There would be defence alliances between the two Muslim states and Hindustan, and adequate safeguards would be incorporated in ‘the constitution’, which obviously would have to be agreed upon by all three states. Moreover, the A.I.M.L. would be the ‘sole official representative body of the Muslims in Hindustan’. (Mohammad Afzal Husain Qadri, ‘The problem of Indian Muslims and its solution’, 2 February 1939, QAP/File No. 135.)

Another variant of the Aligarh scheme came from Dr Latif from Hyderabad Deccan, which, interestingly enough, thought in terms of a minimal federation of homogeneous cultural zones, to be created after massive transfers of population. (See R. Coupland, Indian Politics: 1936–1942 (London, 1944), pp. 201–2.)

It is significant that the premiers of the two most important Muslim-majority provinces, namely the Punjab and Bengal, were mainly concerned with protecting, and if possible, furthering provincial autonomy. Sikander’s scheme has already been discussed in footnote 32, p. 53 above. Less than a month before the League’s Working Committee was scheduled to meet, Fazlul Huq sent a resolution to it, passed by the Bengal Provincial League’s Working Committee. This called for a Royal Commission to look into the working of provincial autonomy ‘with a view to decide how far and in what direction any further advance in constitutional progress may be made’. (Fazlul Huq to Liaquat Ali Khan, 18 January 1940, QAP/File No. 129.)

See minutes of the A.I.M.L. Working Committee meetings between 3 and 6 February 1940, New Delhi, QAP/File No. 137.

It was not an easy task. Jinnah saw Dr Latif’s scheme as well as the Aligarh scheme. (See secretary of the Sind Muslim League to Jinnah, March 1939, QAP/File No. 136 and
politics was reflected in the Working Committee’s brief to its sub-committee: it contained an uncompromising version of the Punjab thesis – both in the west and east the Muslim-majority provinces were to constitute two ‘Independent dominions in direct relationship with Great Britain’. Moreover, the ‘various units in each zone shall form component parts of the Federation in that zone as autonomous units’. This was the assurance which had to be made to the Muslim politicians of Sind and the N.W.F.P. Minority Muslims had to be content with unspecified assurances of ‘adequate’ safeguards.

This, then, was the brief that the Working Committee gave its constitutional sub-committee. There are no records of the sub-committee’s deliberations. So the particular mix which produced the Lahore resolution cannot be analysed and documented precisely. But there are clear hints of what parts made up the whole. Sikander was later to deny that the resolution was based on his draft; the resolution, he claimed, was the League’s view, not that of the Punjab. But the Punjab thesis was a powerful – perhaps the most powerful – influence on the making of the resolution. Zafrullah Khan’s paper (which he gave to Linlithgow) shows the lines of Punjab’s thinking. Zafrullah, a distinguished lawyer from the Punjab, and a member of the Viceroy’s Executive Council wrote it in the later half of February 1940, that is, after the Working Committee’s brief, but some time before the Lahore resolution was passed on 23 March 1940. In it, Zafrullah was looking for a constitutional scheme acceptable to Muslim opinion generally. He considered three schemes. The first was the ‘Pakistan scheme’ along Rahmat Ali’s lines which he swiftly dismissed as ‘utterly impracticable’. The second, closest to the League Working Committee’s brief, envisaged two Muslim federations, in the north-west and the north-east, in ‘direct relation with the Crown’, but with treaty agreements with the non-Muslim federation (or federations) to cover matters of common interest. The short shrift he gave this

Mohammad Afzal Husain Qadri to Jinnah, QAP/File No. 135.) But the supporters of Rahmat Ali’s scheme, who had formed a ‘Pakistan Majlis’ in Lahore, condemned these schemes; they wanted to ensure the political integrity of Pakistan (which the cultural zones scheme did not do) and demanded that the League should ‘allow the Pakistan Movement [to go] its own way’. (See Ahmad Bashir to Jinnah, 22 March 1939, QAP/File No. 136.) Fortunately for Jinnah, the ‘Pakistan Majlis’ had little weight and could be ignored, but its separatist inclinations reveal the problems facing whoever purported to speak for Muslims in the all-India arena.

See minutes of the A.I.M.L. Working Committee meetings between 3 and 6 February 1940, New Delhi, QAP/File No. 137.

See Sikander’s speech to the Punjab legislative assembly on 11 March 1941 below, p. 67.


Ibid.
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'separation scheme', his hardly disguised scepticism about its practicability, shows that while everyone had to take account of the new direction which seemed to have emerged from the Working Committee's deliberations, Zafrullah himself was not sure that it could be sustained. Significantly the 'separation scheme', as Zafrullah understood it, demarcated the 'Muslim Federations' not on communal lines, but along the boundaries of existing provinces – this was the only way of safeguarding Muslim minorities in the non-Muslim federation (or federations).44

When he argued, with tongue in cheek, that 'devotion to the principle of all-India unity may in the end prove too strong to permit wisdom and foresight to govern the situation', and the 'separation scheme' might have to be abandoned, he hinted at the more pragmatic approach of an all-India federation which he preferred.45 Zafrullah knew the British; he knew the Congress; he knew the real interests of the Punjab; but, above all, he had the measure of Jinnah. Of course, the all-India federation scheme, which Zafrullah went on to outline, was familiar to the Punjab school and its British masters; but now the scheme envisaged a 'radically modified' version of the 1935 provisions. Instead of an apportionment of power between centre and provinces, the provinces had first to be replaced as sovereign units under the Crown, and then would 'delegate such minimum authority to the centre as may be necessary for the setting up and working of the All-India Federation'. In other words, the centre 'must not be invested with any greater authority than the minimum necessary to secure the working of the Federation, nor must the scope of the Federation be any wider than is absolutely essential'.46

Zafrullah's note was seen by Jinnah. Indeed, Linlithgow thought it had been written specifically 'for adoption by the Muslim League with a view to its being given the fullest publicity'.47 It is reasonable to assume that the League's constitutional sub-committee also considered it, and the Lahore resolution bears some marks of this note. But the resolution as cast shows Jinnah's dilemma, the delicate balance between what he wanted, and what the majority provinces, especially the Punjab, were after, but which he could not afford to accept. If the League accepted Zafrullah's all-India federal scheme, it would have had to accept forever its role as a cipher at an impotent centre, the mere agent of provincial forces which it did not control. The federal scheme denied the need for a strong party at the centre capable of negotiating for all Muslims, in particular those in minority provinces. Worst of all it specified a construct of the centre which the majority provinces liked and which

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Linlithgow to Zetland, 12 March 1940, Mss. Eur. F. 125/9, Sl. no. 13, vol. v, pp. 169–76, I.O.L.
Jinnah and the League's search for survival

Jinnah was unprepared to accept. This may have reflected the balance of power in Muslim politics in March 1940; but Jinnah's entire strategy depended on somehow changing that balance by the end of the day. In some respects the 'separation scheme' was even less attractive. It envisaged two Muslim federations constituted out of the Muslim-majority provinces. It abolished the centre as it had existed in British India, and it left minority Muslims high and dry. It envisaged the relationship between the federations being made by treaties. At best this gave the A.I.M.L. an equivocal role. It beggars belief that such a scheme could have recommended itself to Jinnah whose entire career and thinking had concentrated upon the centre, and getting Muslims a share of power in it. Only two months before the Lahore resolution was passed, Jinnah had spoken of a constitution which recognised that there were 'in India two nations who both must share the governance of their common motherland'.

Jinnah now decided to make a virtue out of his weakness. He took the logic of the provincial demand to its extreme, decided to espouse some features of the 'separation scheme' and made no mention at all of the centre, its future shape, and how it was to be arrived at. Just as Zafrullah had realised, Jinnah knew only too well that the Muslims were not the sole arbiters of their political destiny. The Congress High Command and the British alike had powerful reasons for wanting a strong unitary centre - the Congress High Command - to hold its movement together, and to discipline its own followers (not to mention cracking a whip over the Indian princes) and the British for their imperial interests, both strategic and economic. By apparently repudiating the need for any centre, and keeping quiet about its shape, Jinnah calculated that when eventually the time came to discuss an all-India federation, British and Congress alike would be forced to negotiate with organised Muslim opinion, and would be ready to make substantial concessions to create or retain that centre. The Lahore resolution should therefore be seen as a bargaining counter, which had the merit of being acceptable (on the face of it) to the majority-province Muslims, and of being totally unacceptable to the Congress and in the last resort to the British also. This in turn provided the best insurance that the League would not be given what it now apparently was asking for, but which Jinnah in fact did not really want.

* Article published in *Time and Tide*, London, 19 January 1940, cited in Rizvi, *Linlithgow and India*, p. 116. In an unpublished draft of the A.I.M.L. Working Committee's resolution of 22 October 1939 immediate independence for India was demanded on the basis of a 'constitution of a confederation of free states', in which the 'rights and interests of all communities and interests shall be adequately safeguarded'. (See A.I.M.L. Working Committee's resolution, 22 October 1939, AIML/File No. 128, p. 116.)
Some parts of the Lahore resolution were by now predictable. All Muslims agreed that separate representation was not enough; that the 1935 federal provisions would have to be scrapped; that Congress’s notion of a constituent assembly, where ‘brother Gandhi has three votes and I [Jinnah] have only one’;49 was unacceptable; and that all further arrangements now had to be ‘reconsidered de novo’, on the basis that Muslims were a ‘nation’ repudiating once and for all their minority status.50 This cleared the way for that ‘constructive scheme’ for which Linlithgow had been pressing. Here Jinnah had to tread carefully, balancing, trimming, obfuscating, giving with one hand, and surreptitiously taking away with the other. The resolution made no mention of ‘partition’, certainly none of ‘Pakistan’. In the League’s ‘considered view’, the Muslim-majority provinces were to be ‘grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign’.51 But the sovereignty of these ‘Independent States’ was something for the future. Admittedly, the League’s Working Committee was authorised to frame a scheme along the lines of the resolution ‘providing for the assumption finally, by the respective regions, of all the powers, such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs and such other matters as may be necessary’.52 The critical word was ‘finally’; this implied a transitional period, and plenty of opportunity to negotiate along the way.

In the resolution, Jinnah had been forced to make large concessions to get the backing of the majority provinces.53 Yet he had prevented their more specific proposals for the centre from being adopted. A critically important resolution which said nothing about the centre might seem the greatest setback for a politician whose whole career had been committed to promoting a nationalist demand at an all-India centre; but the

50 The A.I.M.L.’s resolution, 23 March 1940, ibid., p. 340.
51 Paragraph three of the League’s resolution reads: ‘Resolved that it is the considered view of this Session of the All-India Muslim League that no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz. that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the North-Western and Eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign’. (Ibid., p. 341.)
52 Ibid.
53 The provision, that even inside the ‘Independent States’ the units would be ‘autonomous and sovereign’, was clearly intended to appease the politicians of Sind and the N.W.F.P. Significantly, Jinnah asked Huq to move the resolution. He did so; Sikander voted for it and the resolution was adopted unanimously.
inwardness of the resolution was that Jinnah, with his characteristic political skill, took account of all the factors in the game, not only the present demands of strong Muslim-majority provinces, but also the future constraints which he believed the British and the Congress and indeed he himself would be able to put upon them. In this way he managed to make some real gains, while living to fight another day.

The contradictions inside the resolution, and evidence of Jinnah’s line of thinking, can be seen in its fourth paragraph which deals with the minorities. Just as Zafrullah Khan himself had envisaged, the resolution assumed that the boundaries of the ‘Independent States’ would in the main be the existing boundaries of the provinces. That would leave the Muslims in minority provinces outside Muslim ‘autonomous and sovereign’ areas. By trading safeguards for non-Muslims in the Muslim-dominated ‘units’, the fourth paragraph asked for the protection of Muslim minorities in those units outside the Muslim sphere. But it is significant that this paragraph talks of ‘the constitution’ (and not of treaty arrangements) to govern arrangements for both sets of minorities, Muslim and non-Muslim. In other words, Jinnah was keeping his options open for a constitutional arrangement which would cover the whole of India.

No one can argue that the Lahore resolution was a complete or coherent statement of Muslim demands. At no point between 1940 and the Cabinet Mission’s arrival in 1946 did the League expand, revise, or make more specific this incomplete and contradictory statement, even when its position was ostensibly stronger, and the need for clarification most urgent. This suggests that Jinnah was never in a position to confront his constituents in the majority provinces with the inwardness of his strategy. There were contradictions between Muslim interests in

54 According to the third paragraph of the resolution, there were to be some ‘territorial readjustments’. This was put in not because anyone was ready to give up any part of the majority provinces, but as a bid to get more territories, and better lines of communication between them. In October 1942, that is after the Cripps offer, Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman wrote to Jinnah about the potential disadvantages of such ‘territorial readjustments’; he stressed the importance of retaining links between the Pakistan areas and the minority provinces; ‘Long and hostile distances will intervene against the cultural influences of the minority Provinces on the Pakistan Zone.’ Moreover, ‘one of the basic principles lying behind the Pakistan idea is that of keeping hostages in Muslim Provinces as against the Muslims in the Hindu Provinces. If we allow millions of Hindus to go out of our orbit of influence, the security of the Muslims in the minority Provinces will greatly be minimised.’ (See Khaliquzzaman to Jinnah, 7 October 1942, SHC/U.P. vol. iv and Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore, 1961), pp. 424–7.) Significantly, in April 1946, the phrase about ‘territorial readjustments’ was dropped from the League’s revised version of the Lahore resolution.

55 And by inference inside ‘autonomous and sovereign’ non-Muslim states.
majority and minority provinces, and between an apparently separatist demand for autonomous Muslim states and the need for a centre capable of ensuring the interests of Muslims in the rest of India. At no point was Jinnah able to reconcile these contradictions. He came away from Lahore not with a coherent demand which squared the circle of these difficulties, but simply with the right to negotiate for Muslims on a completely new basis. He also had the advantage of being able to do so without being hindered by too specific a programme. Jinnah's priorities are revealed by his continued insistence after 1940 that he, as the president of the A.I.M.L., should be recognised as the sole spokesman of all Indian Muslims.

No amount of detective work on what led to the resolution or how it came to be interpreted afterwards can hope to tease out its inwardness. It can only be discovered by looking at Jinnah’s shifting tactics in attempting to control followers more powerful than himself, and to negotiate with rivals who were not only more formidable but better organised than his own party. Contemporaries and historians have often described Jinnah as a player who kept his cards close to his chest; and a good player with a poor hand has to pretend to have different cards than those he is actually holding. So there is nothing surprising about Jinnah's inscrutability, or that the final result was so different from the one which he had so skilfully planned and fought so hard to achieve.

Section 3

The timing of the Lahore resolution had been dictated by British needs, which in their turn had been made more urgent by Congress’s demands. Its context had been deeply influenced by the weaknesses in Jinnah’s standing in relation to the British and the Congress, but particularly in relation to his potential constituents in the majority provinces. From the British point of view – and the angles of vision from London, New Delhi and the provincial headquarters were very different – the Lahore resolution was useful, but far from ideal. Its demand for ‘autonomous and sovereign units’, hedged though it was with ambiguities and qualifications, seemed to threaten the unity of India, so dear to the British.56 But for the time being Delhi saw a clear balance of advantage in accepting

56 This unity was important to British interests even in an independent India. As Zetland wrote, it was something ‘which we aim to perpetuate after British rule ceases’; the League’s resolution was a ‘counsel of despair’ and added up to a ‘Silly . . . scheme for partition’. (See Zetland to Linlithgow, telegram, 4 April 1940, Mss.Eur.F.125/19/94, I.O.L. and Linlithgow to Zetland, 5 April 1940, Mss.Eur.D.609/19, I.O.L.)
the resolution at face value, and not exposing 'the absurdity of the idea'.\textsuperscript{57} For the moment it was satisfied that the resolution made it most unlikely that Congress and League would come to terms. This would justify the British in making 'no further moves towards Congress', 'taking no action and . . . lying back'.\textsuperscript{58} The Lahore resolution cleared some obstacles in the way of the Viceroy's tactic of concentrating upon the war and putting the question of constitutional change to one side. He urged London to leave the 'post-war period to post-war man'.\textsuperscript{59} Since the Viceroy could see that Jinnah and the League had little influence in the Muslim provinces that mattered for the war effort, he was encouraged by the Punjab Governor's reaction that 'responsible Muslim opinion' did not think much of the resolution, seeing it mainly as a bargaining counter. As one Lahore newspaper boss told Craik, 'everybody knew it was a perfectly impracticable scheme, but it had the merit of having exposed the Congress pretensions to represent the whole of India'.\textsuperscript{60} As yet there were no strong Punjab reasons for Delhi to take a stand on the resolution. But the League's stature in the government's eyes as spokesman for Muslim opinion had been enhanced, albeit by default of an alternative.

This cleared the way for the next step in Jinnah's strategy, which was to get the government to accept him as the sole spokesman of Muslim India and to make no arrangements, now or in the future, without giving the League a standing equal to that of the Congress. Congress, on the other hand, now faced a situation which was less than promising; for one thing, it was difficult for its leaders to continue to claim that there were only 'two parties', the British and the Congress, in settling the Indian question.\textsuperscript{61} Now that the merits of co-operation were coming to be realised, Congress's revised terms, less uncompromising than its earlier demand for immediate independence, had less chance of being accepted. As it brought down its terms, Jinnah (to the Viceroy's relief) raised the

\textsuperscript{57} Which the new Secretary of State in London, L. S. Amery, wanted. (See Amery to Linlithgow, 25 January 1941, Mss.Eur.F.125/10/3, I.O.L.)

\textsuperscript{58} Linlithgow to Zetland, telegram, 8 March 1940, Mss.Eur.D.609/26, I.O.L. cited in Rizvi, \textit{Linlithgow and India}, p. 148, fn. 2.

\textsuperscript{59} Amery to Linlithgow, 11 December 1941, Mss.Eur.F.125/10/38, Linlithgow's comment is in the margin, I.O.L. cited in Rizvi, \textit{Linlithgow and India}, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{60} Craik to Linlithgow, 30 April 1940, L/P&J/5/243/ff. 198, I.O.L.

\textsuperscript{61} On 15 June 1940, Gandhi repeated his old line that: 'There is only one democratic elected political organisation, i.e. the Congress. All the others are self-appointed or elected on a sectional basis. The Muslim League is an organisation which, like the Congress, is popularly elected. But it is frankly communal and wants to divide India into two parts . . . Thus for the present purposes there are only two parties - the Congress and those who side with the Congress, and the parties who do not . . .' (See \textit{Harijan}, Ahmedabad, 15 June 1940.)
League’s demands. When Congress, setting Gandhi’s principle of non-violence to one side, announced it would be satisfied with a ‘National Government’ now, and a promise of independence after the war, the ‘composite cabinet not limited to any single party’ it had in mind was conveniently torpedoed by Jinnah’s insistence that such a cabinet would only be acceptable if the British ‘associate the Muslim leadership as equal partners in the Government both at the Centre and in all the provinces’. By ‘Muslim leadership’, Jinnah of course meant the Muslim League; Leaguers ‘must be fully trusted as equals and have equal share in the authority and control of the Governments, Central and Provincial’. Congress could not swallow such a demand; and Linlithgow was able to keep things as they were, giving Jinnah a vague assurance that he recognised the ‘importance of securing adequate representation of Muslim interests’ in any constitutional change that might be made.

The way was now clear for the Viceroy to issue a declaration of British policy in response to the Congress’s and the League’s statements of demands. It emerged as Linlithgow’s August offer of 1940. Despite its bland statements of goodwill and concern about the future, the Viceroy’s aim was simple: to block the Congress’s proposals for a National Government during the war, stand pat at the centre, and run the provinces wherever necessary through Section 93. If Congress did not bend, it would be broken. The Government of India was prepared ‘to crush the organisation as a whole’ if Congress resorted to its ultimate agitational weapon, civil disobedience.

The August offer, as it emerged from London’s revision, simply stated that H.M.G. would set up a representative body after the war to work out India’s future; Dominion Status was the goal; but no system of government denied ‘by

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64 Linlithgow pointed out that an expanded Executive Council would work together as a single Government of India, and there was no case for striking a balance between the different interests or of preserving proportions between important parties. As for Muslim representation in all British Indian provinces, it was entirely up to the Governors of Section 93 provinces to appoint advisers. If provincial ministries were formed in the Section 93 provinces, the ‘importance of the community from which Advisers are drawn in a particular province has a direct bearing’. In other words, the Viceroy assured Jinnah that even if equal representation could not be guaranteed, it might be granted ex gratia. (Linlithgow to Jinnah, 6 July 1940, ibid., pp. 45–6.)
65 Linlithgow to all Governors, 8 August 1940, L/P&J/8/507, I.O.L. The August offer was made on the same day.
66 London chopped and changed the Viceroy’s proposals. (See Rizvi, *Linlithgow and India*, pp. 156–8.)
Jinnah and the League’s search for survival

large and powerful elements in India’s national life’ would be forced upon Indians. In other words, Indians would have to agree. For the time being, Indians would be invited to join the Executive Council and the proposed war advisory committee. This effectively put paid to the Congress’s initiative. It was not as specific in recognising Jinnah’s claims to speak for Muslims as he would have liked it to be, but at least it set up the target at which he was aiming. Not surprisingly, both the Congress and the League rejected the August offer; it had been cast in terms to achieve just that result.

After the offer had been made and rejected, Jinnah could afford to wait upon events. The real casualty of the abortive offer was Congress, not the League. Its offer of co-operation rejected, the Congress reluctantly was forced to try to save face by non-cooperation. Yet many powerful elements inside the Congress, whether on calculations of interest or ideology were against shaking foundations and removing the roof during a hurricane. Gandhi’s characteristic compromise of launching a campaign of individual satyagraha was intended to save face; it certainly did not frighten the British or bring the war effort to a stand-still. Its real aim was to encourage the British to offer the Congress something new and to allow it to return to the negotiating table. But no one in London or Delhi was ready to do so for the time being.

With Congress ministries out of office and much of its leadership under arrest, Jinnah could turn to his other main preoccupation – achieving a better balance between the League at the centre and its provincial satraps. The key province was of course the Punjab; everyone agreed ‘that Jinnah’s writ does not run in the Punjab’ and a ‘final split between him and Sikander cannot be long delayed’. The ‘so-called Muslim League’ in the province consisted mainly of ‘Unionists who owe allegiance from first to last to Sir Sikander’. If Jinnah pressed him, Sikander was not likely to budge, but would simply break with the League. When the League tentatively tried to call the shots by dictating

67 Linlithgow’s speech of 8 August 1940, Speeches by the Marquess of Linlithgow, vol. II, (Simla, 1944), pp. 238–42.
68 By June 1941 over twenty thousand Congressmen had been arrested, but the campaign had lost such impetus as it had. In October 1941, there were only 5,600 satyagrahis in jail and many in the Congress wanted to call off the campaign. The movement had failed to obstruct the war effort; the British were not ready to make any new offers, and symbolic acts of defiance had proven to be a dismal failure particularly in the Muslim-majority provinces. (See Tomlinson, The Indian National Congress and the Raj, pp. 151–2.)
69 Craik to Linlithgow, 20 June 1940, L/P&J/5/243, p. 172, I.O.L.
70 Barkat Ali to Jinnah, 4 December 1940, QAP/ File No. 215.
71 Barkat Ali complained that the Punjab League, dominated by the Unionists, had no intention or incentive to improve its organisation in the province. As a result: ‘the cause
that Leaguers should stand aloof from district war committees, in the Punjab no one paid the slightest heed.72 Nor did they do so in Bengal, certainly not as far as Huq and his followers were concerned. Here again if Huq were forced to choose between his provincial priorities and his distant commitment to the League, it was clear which way he would go,73 and it was not in Jinnah’s direction. So neither Sikander nor Huq, as Ispahani reported gloomily, ‘care two brass buttons whether they go over anyone’s head or throw the Muslims in the minority provinces to the wolves’.74 Of course Huq’s coalition in Bengal was much less secure than Sikander’s in the Punjab, and Jinnah could hope for better things in the future from the play of Bengali factionalism although he hardly controlled the game. In the outlying Muslim provinces of the north-west, the disjunction between Jinnah’s claims at the centre and the provincial realities was even more marked. In Sind, where no one could discover ‘any enthusiasm for Pakistan’,75 whether among those in office or those of the League has suffered a most irretrievable setback, and unless you seriously take in hand the question of the reorganisation of the League in this Province the organisation will die before long, however much [sic] politically minded Mussalmans agree with the League’. (Barkat Ali to Jinnah, ibid.) All Jinnah could tell Barkat Ali was that he had ‘no power to take action’, and matters concerning the League’s organisation had to be referred to the Working Committee of which Sikander was still a member. (Jinnah to Barkat Ali, 11 January 1941, ibid., p. 66.)

On 16 June 1940, the League’s Working Committee had passed a resolution asking Leaguers not to serve on the war committees but to await further instructions from Jinnah. In this way Jinnah hoped to gain some leverage during his negotiations with Linlithgow. But in the Punjab, many Leaguers including Sikander joined the war committees.

Huq had defined his attitude towards the war effort in December 1939. As a member of the provincial government, he saw his duty to support the war effort. Indeed, if it came to deciding between his membership of the League and his responsibilities as chief minister, the latter must prevail. (See Zaidi (ed.), Correspondence, pp. 137–8.)

Ispahani complained that both Huq and Sikander were openly flaunting the High Command’s authority, and the League had become the ‘laughing stock of our political opponents’. As for the so-called League members of the Bengal ministry, they were the same ‘reactionary forces’ which had made the ‘old League so undemocratic and moribund’. For the time being the ‘progressives will wait patiently until such time as existing conditions change or until you [Jinnah] feel that the salvation of the Muslim nation does not lie in the hands of such indisciplined and undependable colleagues’. (Ispahani to Jinnah, 21 June 1940, ibid., pp. 142–3.)

In February 1940, Allah Baksh had been forced to resign. Mir Bandeh Ali Khan, the leader of the Baluch group in the assembly, formed a new ministry which included three League ministers: K. B. Khuhro, Sheikh Abdul Majid and G. M. Syed. Jinnah would have liked to have some say over the ministry, and indeed the Sind Provincial Parliamentary Committee did try to force the League ministers to take orders from it. But the League trio contended that the ministry was neither a League cabinet nor a coalition League cabinet. (See Graham to Linlithgow, 25 July 1940, L/P&J/5/256,
hoping to get in, and where loyalties were qualified by self-interest, politics continued to see-saw in an intensive series of in-fights.\textsuperscript{76} In the N.W.F.P. Jinnah’s sanguine hopes of getting a League ministry, however nominal, came to naught,\textsuperscript{77} breaking on the factionalism of the Khans and the self-seeking interests of the local Leaguers.\textsuperscript{78} Here the Governor was less likely than his opposite number in Sind to help the factions resolve their differences inside a League ministry since he was content to run the province under Section 93, particularly after the Congress civil disobedience proved a failure.\textsuperscript{79} The ‘refreshingly local...\textsuperscript{76} Not surprisingly, the so-called League ministers ignored the resolution prohibiting Leaguers from participating in the war committees, and the Governor did ‘not encounter any enthusiasm for Pakistan either among my ministers or in the local press or in my visitors’. (Graham to Linlithgow, 9 October 1940, ibid.)

\textsuperscript{77} With the formation of Bandeh Ali Khan’s ministry, communal relations in Sind deteriorated. So the Governor wanted Allah Baksh back, since ‘the Muslim League is not so powerful as it pretends to be and... Allah Baksh still has a very considerable following not only in the Assembly but in the country’. (Graham to Linlithgow, 25 September 1940, ibid.) In November 1940, two of the League ministers resigned in favour of Allah Baksh and Ghulam Hussain without the permission of the League Provincial Parliamentary Committee. In March 1941, Bandeh Ali Khan, by now a member of the League, ‘collapsed through fear’ and resigned. Allah Baksh formed a new ministry; every one of the new Muslim ministers had been in Graham’s cabinets before, and he quipped: ‘Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.’ (Graham to Linlithgow, 12 March 1941, L/P&J/5/257, I.O.L.)

\textsuperscript{78} Ever since Dr Khan Sahib’s Congress ministry resigned in November 1939, Jinnah had been desperate to form a League ministry in this predominantly Muslim province. Just note the tone of his telegrams: ‘Form Ministry at any cost, even interim Ministry, waverers and others will come afterwards’; and when he was informed that it was impossible to form even a League coalition ministry, he wrote: ‘Your telegram. Great mistake, missing opportunity, form coalition Ministry, make every sacrifice, let others be ministers’. (Cunningham to Linlithgow, 12 November 1939, L/P&J/5/215, I.O.L.)

\textsuperscript{79} Since 1939, the Governor had been urging the local Khans to form a ‘party strong enough to win the next elections’. (Cunningham to Linlithgow, 9 May 1939, L/P&J/5/214, pp. 34–5.) The League was the obvious alternative for the Khans, and it now became an essentially Khanate party with little popular support. The local League was known to consist of ‘self-seekers’; ‘they were not the men to excite either fervour or loyalty’ among the Pathans; not surprisingly it became the hotbed for ‘selfish, ambitious and private feuds’ among the Khans. There was a leadership struggle between Khan Bahadur Sadullah Khan and Aurengzeb Khan, not to mention other feuds amongst the many contenders for leadership in the province. (Cunningham to Linlithgow, 9 January 1940, L/P&J/5/216, p. 105, I.O.L.)

Understandably, most of the local Congress leaders in the Frontier were less interested in political questions involving the rest of India than in their local manoeuvrings. Dr Khan Sahib, although he did resign when ordered to do so by the Congress High Command, was strongly opposed to civil disobedience. Even Gandhi had to admit that the Frontier possessed no one fit to carry out civil disobedience in a non-violent manner. The Governor’s view was that Pathans were ‘simply not interested in Congress’. (Cunningham to Linlithgow, 9 April 1941, L/P&J/5/218, p. 107, I.O.L.)
outlook', the 'local jealousies', and a hardly remarkable lack of interest among the Pathans in the affairs of all-India meant that the Frontier ignored Jinnah, and even the local League became less active except in their 'quarrelling among themselves about the election of office-bearers'.

The experience of the first year after the resolution was passed dashed Jinnah's hopes of redressing the balance in the League between the centre and its provinces. Not one of the Muslim-majority provinces had fallen into line. In the Punjab, Jinnah's precarious compromise faced a new threat when some of the implications of the Lahore resolution began to sink in. As Jinnah himself told the Punjabis on more than one occasion, they held a 'key position in the scheme for the realisation in practice of the Lahore resolution'. But the Lahore resolution had been cast in terms which were unacceptable to Punjab's other two main communities, the Hindus and especially the Sikhs. In early 1941, the Khalsa Nationalists (a small section of pro-British Sikhs who had forged an alliance with the Unionists in 1937) entered into an agreement with some members of the Akali Dal (who had a larger base of popular support in eastern Punjab, had links with Bose's Forward Bloc and were anti-British) to form the Khalsa Defence of India League; they called on Sikhs to participate in the war effort and warned the Unionists that unless they denounced 'Pakistan' openly, the Khalsa Nationalists would join the opposite benches. Anxious not to lose Sikh support, particularly from the Khalsa Nationalist party, the Unionist bosses realised that their own provincial imperatives called for distancing themselves from the Lahore resolution. So Muslim ministers and prominent Muslim...
Unionists stayed away from the Pakistan Conference of March 1941. Sikander went further; in the Punjab legislative assembly, he denounced the Lahore resolution saying that it was not his doing, and in fact was an amended version which he liked less the more he understood it. He repeated the old axioms of the Punjab – complete autonomy for the provinces; Muslim opposition to an ‘all powerful Centre’ because it threatened provincial autonomy; a weak centre, not a ‘domineering hostile Centre looking for opportunities to interfere with the work of provincial Governments’. Significantly, Sikander admitted that the Muslim-majority provinces wanted complete autonomy only ‘because they are afraid that a communal oligarchy in power might undermine or altogether nullify the autonomy and freedom of the provinces. That is the suspicion that haunts them. It may not be well founded but there it is; and we must face facts’. But above all, Sikander wanted to show ‘the rest of India, that we in the Punjab stand united and will not brook any interference . . . then only we will be able to tell meddling busybodies from outside ‘hands off the Punjab’.

By the middle of 1941, the Congress civil disobedience movement had started petering out. The Viceroy thought it was an appropriate moment to expand his Executive Council and to create a National Defence Council. The Executive Council was to have eight Indian and four British members, so for the first time there was to be a non-official Indian majority even though most of the important portfolios were held by the British members. On 21 July, Linlithgow announced the names of the National Defence Council; the list included Fazlul Huq, Sikander Hayat and Muhammad Sadullah (the premier of Assam); all three were nominal members of the League and had been invited to the Council without reference to Jinnah. The Viceroy had ‘concluded that it would be preferable not to embarrass . . . [Jinnah] by inviting . . . [him] to make suggestions’. For Jinnah the inclusion of Leaguers in the Defence Council was indeed an embarrassment since it was hardly ‘fair or proper

85 The Pakistan Conference had been organised by the Punjab Muslim Students Federation, with the object of a ‘revival of enthusiasm for the Pakistan movement’. (Punjab Chief Secretary’s Report, first half of March 1941, L/P&J/5/244, I.O.L.)


87 Ibid., cited in Khaliquzzaman, Pathway to Pakistan, p. 254.

88 See Ahmad (ed.), Historic Documents, p. 415.
that they should be approached by His Excellency over the head of the President and the executive of the All-India Muslim League’. The Viceroy’s invitation to Muslim leaders to join the Defence Council had raised an issue critically important to Jinnah; it tested his claim at the centre to be consulted, and his authority to instruct provincial Leaguers on the line they should take at the centre. He had no choice but to direct the League’s Working Committee to pass a resolution demanding the resignation of the three Leaguers on threat of disciplinary action. Jinnah argued that the three League premiers had been invited in their capacity as representatives of Muslims, and not in their official capacity. Sikander went to Bombay for consultations with Jinnah; he could see the danger of being branded as a traitor to the Muslim cause if he refused to toe the League’s line. This would give his opponents in the Punjab an excuse to launch a campaign against him which would inevitably disrupt the fragile communal balance of the Punjab. By accepting Jinnah’s line, Sikander not only kept the High Command at bay, but also ensured that the war effort would not be disrupted. Sikander agreed to accept no proposal from the Government without first discussing it with Jinnah. ‘The situation is such’, Jinnah wrote to Sikander, ‘that the slightest mistake on our part now well undo all the work done by us hitherto.’ Later Jinnah admitted that the Viceroy had ‘double-crossed’ Sikander by giving the impression that the Muslim premiers had been invited in their official capacity, and thanked the Punjab premier for his ‘willing assistance’.

Sikander’s resignation from the Viceroy’s Defence Council saved Jinnah’s face. But the Bengal premier was less generous. Huq refused to bend to the dictates of the High Command and broke with the A.I.M.L., protesting ‘against the manner in which the interests of the Muslims of Bengal and the Punjab are being imperilled by Muslim leaders of the Provinces where the Muslims are in a minority’. Huq attacked Jinnah for the ‘arbitrary use of powers’; recent events had ‘forcibly brought home to me that the principles of democracy and autonomy are being subordinated to the arbitrary wishes of a single individual who seeks to rule as an omnipotent authority over the destiny of 33 millions of Muslims in the province of Bengal who occupy the key position in Indian Muslim Politics’.

Huq’s revolt gave his rivals in the Bengal League their chance to bid for power. Suhrawardy called out students and workers to

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89 Ibid., pp. 415–16.
90 Jinnah to Sikander, 29 August 1941, QAP/File No. 353, p. 38.
91 Jinnah to Sikander, 13 September 1941, ibid.
demonstrate against Huq, who retaliated by getting his friends to table
no-confidence motions against these rebels inside his camp, Suhrawardy
and Nazimuddin. On 1 December all the League ministers resigned,
certain that the Governor would call on them to form a new ministry. Since
the Leaguers had more votes, Huq had to offer his cabinet’s resignation.
But the Governor was having none of it; he decided to call on Huq again to
form the new ministry. This ministry brought in, as finance minister, the
leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, Shyma Prasad Mookerji – the symbol of
Hindu fanaticism. The move startled Muslim India; it was a red rag to
Jinnah and the League. The Bengal League was now an opposition party,
and Huq was able to survive as premier in Bengal by restructuring his
ministry with the support of the Progressive Coalition party.93

By the time Cripps was sent to India, Jinnah had neither made nor
broken a single ministry in the Muslim provinces; for the time being he
had been deprived of the support of even the Bengal ministry; the Punjab
was going its own way; Sind had a pro-Congress faction under Allah
Baksh in power, and Section 93 ruled the N.W.F.P. Leaguers in the
provinces had shown that they were ready to get into office by hook or by
crook.94 In this anarchy of self-interest effective linkages between centre
and provinces, created or controlled by the League, hardly existed.

So Linlithgow had no reason to bother to get ‘an appreciation of local
Muslim reactions to Pakistan’, whether public or private and Jinnah
conveniently ‘had been at great pains not to define exactly what he means
by that blessed word, and all we should get would be something pretty
woolly and general’.95 After a tour (admittedly mainly in the Hindu-

93 A grand name covering a multitude of political factions, some of Bose’s Forward Bloc,
various Krishak Praja men, Hindu Mahasabhis, a few Indian Christians, Anglo-
Indians and Scheduled Caste members.
94 For instance the Mamdot-Daultana faction in the Punjab; Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin
in Bengal; Aurangzeb Khan in the N.W. F.P.; and Khuhro amongst many others in
Sind. Aurangzeb Khan had gone so far as openly to denounce Jinnah’s policy on the
National Defence Council issue and ‘would jump at the offer of a seat on the Defence
Council had it been made to him’; and he would do so without reference to Jinnah. Not
only had Aurangzeb promised the Governor all aid including help in the war effort, but
had rubbed in the fact that Jinnah’s ‘real trouble is his jealousy for [sic] Sir Sikander
Hayat, and not any anti-British bias’. (See Cunningham to Linlithgow, 8 and 24 August
1941, L/P&J/5/218, p. 69 and p. 63, I.O.L.) The situation in Sind was even more
dismal. Here the Governor found ‘no regard at all for Jinnah and the League’s extra-Sind
affiliations’ amongst the ‘Sindhi Leaguers’; they were quite willing to support Allah
Baksh if he broke with the Congress. (See Dow to Linlithgow, 12 December 1941, L
95 Linlithgow to Amery, 8 January 1942, in N. Mansergh and E. W. R. Lumby (eds.), The
references are to page numbers).
The Reforms Commissioner, H. V. Hodson, made a characteristically acute assessment of Muslim opinion. Most Muslims with whom he had spoken, including 'orthodox supporters of Pakistan . . . from Jinnah downwards', were thinking in terms of the British staying on, with defence in British hands for an undefined 'transitional period'. The real point was that 'every Muslim Leaguer . . . interpreted Pakistan as consistent with a confederation of India for common purposes like defence, provided the Hindu and Muslim element therein stood on equal terms'.

This hardly surprised Hodson since no one with any political foresight in the Muslim-minority provinces believed in his heart of hearts that Pakistan could solve their problems. Pakistan, as this intelligent observer realised, was in essence a 'revolt' against the notion of minority status with safeguards. At best, such a status relegated Muslims to being 'a Cinderella with trade-union rights and a radio in the kitchen but still below-stairs'. The 'two-nation' theory was a better way of describing Muslim aims than 'Pakistan', since it turned from safeguards and minority rights to the solid gains of national status. There would be 'no retreat' from this new outlook, Hodson prophesied. What was now needed was a 'new terminology' which 'recognises that the problem is one of sharing power rather [than of] qualifying the terms on which power is exercised by a majority'.

So even though there was no 'genuine enthusiasm for Pakistan', no Muslim was ready actually to repudiate it, since it was an expression, however vague and contradictory, of 'Muslim solidarity which they feel to be vitally necessary at the present time'.

The Reforms Commissioner was looking at the Pakistan demand from the outside. But the insiders' view confirms his analysis. I. I. Chundrigar from Bombay, a Leaguer of pelf and persuasion, told the men down the line that the object of the Lahore resolution was not to create 'Ulsters', but to achieve 'two nations . . . welded into united India on the basis of equality'.

'Bold departure' though it seemed to be, the resolution was hunting for an alternative to majority rule, not seeking to...

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96 Note on the tour of the Reforms Commissioner from 8 November to 7 December 1941, to Madras, Orissa, Assam, Bengal and Bihar. (Annexe to document No. 30, ibid., 63). The only exception was Fazlul Huq, who ironically had moved the Lahore resolution. Among those who saw the Union Jack continuing to flutter over Government House were Khwaja Nazimuddin, Suhrawardy, Muhammad Sadullah, Sobhan Khan, Abdul Hamid Khan, Abdul Matin Choudhry, and Khan Bahadur Saiyid Muhammad Ismail. (Ibid., 66.)

97 Ibid., 67. 98 Ibid., 66.

99 I. I. Chundrigar, a member of Independent Pakistan's first cabinet, later had the distinction of serving as prime minister for two long months. But then life in Karachi, which was not Bombay, required some compensations.

100 Note by Chundrigar, April 1940, 'Must Face Facts', QAP/File No. 103.
destroy the unity of India. That Chundrigar’s interpretation was on the right tracks is suggested by the fact that Jinnah himself, Chundrigar’s neighbour in Bombay, often stated that ‘Pakistan’, with its connotations of partition, was not the League’s idea but a caricature thrust upon it by the Hindu press: ‘They fathered this word upon us’, he complained at Delhi in 1943. As he told Nawab Ismail in November 1941, he could not openly and forcibly come out with these truths ‘because it is likely to be misunderstood especially at present’. In a line which reveals more than a thousand pages of research and propaganda, Jinnah admitted: ‘I think Mr. Hodson finally understands as to what our demand is.’ But sadly for the course of the subcontinent’s history, the Reforms Commissioner’s note was not digested by those who drafted the declaration which Cripps brought to India.

Section 4

By the end of 1941, events abroad were coming to bear more powerfully upon the situation in India than what was happening in India itself. The Congress satyagraha movement had turned out to be something of a contrived fiasco; and Congress leaders, who had given up power in the provinces in their bid for a share of power at the centre, found themselves increasingly at a loss about how to get out of the cul-de-sac into which they had driven. What they needed was a British initiative which they could meet half-way, but Linlithgow was not prepared to give anything away. So Congress leaders were reduced to sending surreptitious messages to Westminster through the usual intermediary, that respectable channel of ‘moderate-liberal opinion’, Tej Bahadur Sapru, who for long had been reduced to being a mere postman between correspondents who mattered. Yet their urgent plea to London calling for an act of statesmanship to break the deadlock would have been ignored by the Cabinet, which had more pressing problems at hand, if it had not been subjected to pressures from outside India.

These came in part from Britain’s allies, deeply concerned about the fighting in the east and in part from the Labour members of Churchill’s National Government. The Japanese assault on Pearl Harbour had brought America into the war. America’s entry was Churchill’s best security for ultimate victory against the Axis Powers. But it also had its inconveniences. One of these was the President’s rather jejune, but well-
meaning, interest in India. Roosevelt’s view, typical of the State Department’s naivety about the nature of the world which America was beginning to join, was that Indian co-operation was the answer to Japan’s unchallenged advance through colonial Asia. The fall of Singapore in February 1942 seemed to confirm Washington’s reasoning that the best way of securing the gates of India against the Japanese was to promise Indians their freedom from colonial tyranny. This view, orchestrated by Roosevelt and fiercely resisted by Churchill, was echoed by Chiang Kai-shek who had paid a flying visit to India in February 1942.

But American pressure, though embarrassing, would not have been sufficient if it had not coincided with a reciprocal trend inside the Cabinet, not merely among Labour but also some Conservative members (as well as pressure groups outside Parliament) who were unconvinced by the diehard attitudes of the Prime Minister and his Viceroy. In the Cabinet, Attlee, who was second in command, Cripps who had recently returned from Russia with his reputation for statesmanship in fine order, and even Bevin, who had more urgent matters to deal with, felt that the time had come to give thought to the future of India, particularly since such an initiative might bring immediate benefits: public opinion at home and abroad would be reassured that British promises to India were genuine; the Americans would be placated, and those political groups in India which Labour had been conditioned to believe mattered most would be brought into active co-operation instead of being left grumbling outside. Attlee and Cripps argued that by grasping the nettle and by being specific about Britain’s post-war intentions in India, large gains could be achieved at little immediate cost. There was no question of loosening control over the executive in India, over defence or indeed over anything serious that related to the war effort. Little harm and some good might come by associating Indians in that effort, particularly at the centre. By February, pressure inside the Cabinet had built up and Churchill was forced to try and side-step the issue by his fantasy of creating a nominated Defence Council of Indians, later to be India’s constituent assembly. But this was soon exposed for what it really was: an impudent rejection of the democratic process. Attlee and Cripps returned to the attack, and demanded a declaration of British intentions. If such a declaration forced the Viceroy to resign that would be all to the good since they considered Linlithgow to be unfit for the job;\textsuperscript{105} and they believed that Congress was likely to be more co-operative under a new Viceroy.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{105} As Wavell later learnt to his cost, Attlee did not hesitate to give Britain’s proconsuls short shrift from the metropolis.

\textsuperscript{106} Attlee’s memorandum on the Indian question rejected the policy of doing nothing. He called for an ‘act of statesmanship’; and was convinced that the Viceroy was ‘not the man
But of course the resources of the old team, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State, and Linlithgow, though strained, were not exhausted. A draft declaration owing something to many sources – Cripps’s schemes of 1939, Amery’s view that ‘strengthening Provincial sentiment is the best corrective to the present over-centralised party dictatorships’ (of both Congress and the League) and, what was rapidly becoming the ark of the covenant, the interests of Muslims, particularly the martial races in the north-west – was prepared. The draft declaration, amended this way and that by successive hands, did however, suggest some new directions in British policy: the most important was the explicit statement that Dominion Status after the war would not depend upon a prior agreement between India’s conflicting parties; in other words, freedom would come even if unity could not be assured. What made this possible was the decision to allow provinces to opt out of an Indian union; they could, if they wished, stay under the British or achieve independent Dominion Status in their own right.

The draft declaration, if declared, would have precipitated a general crisis, in the metropolis and in India. Churchill would have fiercely resisted it; the Cabinet would have split and the Viceroy would have resigned immediately. That crisis was averted by Cripps’s timely offer to go to India to test reactions to the draft before it was given the formal status of declared policy. Churchill, and his embattled Viceroy, confidently expected Cripps to arrive in India with high hopes but to return from it with empty hands and a tarnished reputation. So from to do this’. So he concluded: ‘Lord Durham saved Canada to the British Empire. We need a man to do in India what Durham did in Canada . . . A representative with power to negotiate within wide limits should be sent to India now, either as a special envoy or in replacement of the present Viceroy . . . ’ (Memorandum by Attlee, 2 February 1942, L/PO/6/106a, War Cabinet Paper (42).)

Towards the end of 1939, Cripps prepared a scheme for a constituent assembly composed on the basis of the 1936–7 elections. There were to be a total of 2,000 representatives, 700 from Congress, about 450 from the League, 400 from other parties and 500 from the States. If he could obtain a general consensus in India, Cripps intended to propose that H.M.G. set up an assembly to frame a constitution for India by a two-thirds or three-fifths majority. The minority problem, and the question of the Indian States and defence, was to be settled through a treaty between Britain and India. (See Rizvi, Linlithgow and India, pp. 146–7.)

In his proposal for the expansion of the Defence Council, Amery argued that the best course ‘from the point of view of defence liaison with the provincial war effort and from that of future constitution-making’ was to get the provincial legislatures to elect the representatives. (Note by Amery, 7 February 1942, T.P., 1, 125.)

Churchill was sure that the offer would be torpedoed. And so it turned out; there were more than enough torpedoes for the task.
their point of view some good at least would come from the charade. The critics of perfidious Albion would be given token of her good intentions; Indian politicians would be shown in their true colours; and business would continue as usual. And so it proved to be – but only up to a point.

The real interest of the abortive Cripps mission lies not in the fact that it failed, or even in the reasons why it failed, but in the novel commodity which now was being touted around the great Indian political bazaar: the option for provinces to stay out of an independent Indian union. On the face of it, this was a break with the most sacred principle of British policy – the unity of India. So it is important to be clear how this had come about. Despite the apparently casual manner in which this new direction was taken, it cannot be ascribed to such varied factors as the war going badly, or its architects failing to realise the implications of local option. More to the point, it was emphatically not a case of a sudden conversion, whether by Whitehall or by Cripps, to the idea of ‘Pakistan’. Rather, the option that provinces could keep out of a future Indian union was an effort to bring into the open the contradictions in the League’s demand for Pakistan, to force the followers of the League to realise the implications of the Lahore resolution, and to drive a wedge between Jinnah and the League at the centre and their constituents in the Muslim-majority provinces. There was method in the draft declaration and policy in Cripps’s offer. During his 1939 visit to India Cripps had sensed the nascent fear of the Punjab and Bengal of a centre which Congress was bound to dominate; and had also seen clearly that Congress’s aim was to get power at the centre. By taking advantage of these provincial fears and by encouraging Jinnah to act as the spokesman of Muslim-majority provinces, Linlithgow had found a way of allowing the arguments for provincial autonomy and for a weak centre to merge into and, in a sense to be overlaid by, the rather different and broader question of the rights of Muslim minorities and relations between the communities throughout India. One main advantage that had flowed from this deliberate obfuscation was that the whole question of constitutional advance could be put into cold storage. Cripps’s aim was to reopen the question of India’s constitutional future by removing the obstacle which Jinnah’s demand

On 6 March, the provincial Governors sent a flurry of telegrams protesting against the local option clause. Some ministers and the India Office did not like it. R. A. Butler, for example, wrote to Hoare: ‘it would appear that the powers-that-be are reconciled to the idea of a Moslem Confederation in the North. This means two Indias, and I am pressing for some form of central government’; and the declaration, according to Butler, gave the impression that ‘the unity of India – the goal of British policy hitherto – must be set aside’. (Butler to Hoare, 6 March 1942, Templewood Papers, cited in Moore, Churchill, Cripps, and India, p. 73.)
for Pakistan had placed in its way. His plan was to achieve this by driving a clear distinction between on the one hand real attachment to provincial autonomy and the fears among provincial leaders of a strong centre once the British left, and on the other the vaguer sentiments of communal solidarity. Cripps could see that the politicians of the Punjab and Bengal had an outlook which was more provincial than communal. Their first concern was to retain Punjab for the Punjabis, Bengal for the Bengalis, and to shut out ‘busybodies’ from outside.\textsuperscript{112} The politics of these two provinces, with their very large non-Muslim populations, forced the provincial leaders, even when they were Muslims, such as Sikander or Huq, to realise that they needed to come to terms with other communities. Muslim leaders were concerned with their own provincial constituencies, not with Muslim minorities and their worries in other parts of India. They had been prepared to go along with Jinnah mainly because he had a limited utility for them at the centre. It suited Jinnah to metamorphose the provincial thesis into something rather different, and it suited the Viceroy to allow Jinnah his head (even though the more perceptive of the Governors were beginning to see the dangers of this course). But the provincial leaders had no urgent reason before Cripps came to India to challenge and deny Jinnah’s purposes. Cripps hoped to give them reason to do so.

Unlike the Viceroy’s short-term priorities, Cripps’s offer took a longer view of political futures. British India, with the Congress out of the picture, may have been a convenient scenario while the war lasted. But once India began to move towards self-government after the war, it was inconceivable to think of it without the Congress. Congress and a strong centre were the best insurance the British could take out to prevent chaos and balkanisation in the India they proposed to leave. But giving Congress the strong centre it wanted was difficult to square with the provincial thesis of the Punjab and Bengal. This was the dilemma that Cripps was trying to resolve. His proposed solution was to give provinces, but not communities, the right to decide whether to come into the Indian union or not; it had the additional merit of showing what the logical consequences of Jinnah’s unspecific demand for Pakistan were likely to be, and how feeble the League’s grip was over its most important constituents, namely the Muslim-majority provinces. By offering a provincial not a communal option, Cripps hoped to provide a powerful incentive for those very constituents on whom Jinnah’s strategy depended to unhitch their wagons from the League’s train.

\textsuperscript{112} As for Sind and the N.W.F.P., although they were predominantly Muslim, they were more particularist and even more divided than the two majority provinces that really mattered.
This is why the Viceroy did not like Cripps's initiative, and this is why Cripps's offer, far from being a step in the direction of giving Jinnah what he was after, represented the gravest threat to his entire strategy. At a stroke the draft declaration threatened to pull the rug, which had so painstakingly been woven together, from under the Viceroy's feet — destroying 'the whole policy of throwing the primary responsibility on Indians to settle their own internal problem'. By forcing Congress to take account of provincial demands, Cripps's offer, if accepted, would have removed the communal sting from the political debate. The inwardness of Cripps's offer can be most clearly seen in the way it embarrassed Jinnah. The local option clause in fact gave the Punjab (and other Muslim-majority provinces) precisely what Jinnah had been compelled reluctantly to demand on their behalf. Until now, he had managed to keep the Lahore resolution silent about the relationship of Muslim provinces to any centre, and in this way had managed to avoid an explicit endorsement of the Punjab's preferences for a weak federal centre. Jinnah's strategy had depended on the assumption that the British would never entertain such an extreme version of the provincial thesis — the right of provinces to secede. Yet here was Cripps doing the unthinkable and taking the provincial demand, implicit in the Lahore resolution, at its face value. It was a way of flushing Jinnah out into the open and forcing him to show where he stood on the question of the centre. Jinnah's tactic, which had the Viceroy's tacit approval, had been to keep quiet about the awkward choice between his more immediate need to back the Muslim-majority provinces, and hence their demand for provincial autonomy and a very weak centre (if there was to be a centre at all) and the unswerving commitment to a strong centre which his overall strategy, as representative of all Muslims rather than of particular provinces, demanded.

The Punjab of course was the key province, and until now Linlithgow, just as many politicians in the Punjab, had avoided facing the imperatives which the delicate balance between the communities imposed upon its politics. By offering the Punjab what it wanted Cripps was forcing its politicians and Government House to recognise these imperatives and to see how rampant communalism would undermine, not secure, provincial prospects. So now the Viceroy warned London: 'if we go too far towards meeting Jinnah we are bound to get into trouble either with Sikhs (and consequently in Punjab with Muslims) or Hindus or both'. Therefore, he preferred a formula which 'avoids laying down precisely

113 See Linlithgow to Amery, 9 March 1942, T.P., 1, 381. What of course the Viceroy meant was that the declaration would destroy the policy of depending upon Indians to fail to settle their own problems.
the post-war plan . . . does not exclude Pakistan but does not advertise local option’. In other words, things should return to the *status quo ante* Cripps. The Viceroy did not wish to face all the contradictions inherent in the situation: the potential clash between the communal and the provincial approach, the fact that the ‘Pakistan agitation’ with its communal overtones was bound to endanger the intra-communal alliances upon which the stability of the Punjab and Bengal depended, and the divisions inside the League about the future of the centre. Linlithgow simply wanted Jinnah’s imprecision to be mirrored by a continuing imprecision on the British side, since British interests at the centre would at this stage benefit from imprecision. Both Linlithgow and Jinnah realised that Cripps’s offer would concentrate attention upon the facts of political life in the Muslim-majority provinces, and make it clear where power lay in the balance between these provinces and their all-India spokesman. Once local option was on the table, it became an urgent matter for communal feeling in the Punjab to be damped down. Unless this was done, Punjab would not be able to take advantage of that option. As the ex-Governor of the Punjab warned: ‘moderate Muslims in the Punjab do not really like . . . Pakistan’; local option if exercised under the umbrella of an all-India communal party, would break the fragile intra-communal balance – Pakistan for the Punjab would be interpreted by other communities, the Sikhs in particular, as an invitation to demand the right for minorities to opt out: ‘Sikhs will certainly resist by force inclusion in Pakistan.’

Punjab was also critically important for Jinnah’s strategy. Yet his most loyal supporters were not in the Punjab, or in Bengal, but in the minority

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114 Linlithgow to Amery, 9 March 1942, ibid., 384.
115 Linlithgow pointed out that: ‘the fatal defect in the present draft is the precision given by the local option pledge to the still shadowy prospect of a decisive struggle for power after British authority departs among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in areas where none of them holds an obviously commanding position and above all in the Punjab . . . any fresh undertakings . . . must be confined to generalities on procedure . . . once we go beyond a broad offer we shall be obliged to define prematurely our attitude towards communal proportions’. (Linlithgow to Amery, 8 March 1942, ibid., 366–7.)
116 Craik’s comments are enclosed in Linlithgow’s letter to Amery, 9 March 1942, ibid., 384. Glancy endorsed Craik’s view, and felt that Punjabi Muslims were bound to exercise local option to remain separate; the Sikhs would probably want to go their own way, and so the spectre of civil war in the Punjab would rear its head. (See Glancy to Linlithgow, 4 March 1942, ibid., p. 321.) Linlithgow told Amery that the Hindus would interpret the draft declaration as ‘a virtual promise not merely of Pakistan but of Sikhistan also, and as containing greater possibilities of disintegrating India than even Jinnah claims’ and would almost certainly be regarded by them as an invitation to minorities in the Muslim-majority provinces to ‘force separation on exorbitant terms by mere refusal to agree’. (Linlithgow to Amery, 9 March 1942, ibid., 384–5.)
provinces. Local option gave them nothing. There was 'no comfort' here 'to Muslims in the U.P. and Bihar', for example. The emphasis of Cripps's offer (in much the same way, it must be said, as the Lahore resolution itself), was provincial not communal. Local option showed just how hopeless the League’s plan of covering Muslim bets in minority as well as majority provinces was likely to prove if there was no all-India centre which included them both. So Jinnah himself might be forced to come out against local option, and hence lose even the appearance of support from the Muslim-majority provinces, thus removing a main obstacle to a political settlement between the British, the Congress and the Muslim provinces severally.

When Churchill failed to prevent this roving envoy from going to India, he took comfort in the prospect that Cripps’s efforts would prove a ‘thankless and hazardous’ task, and would show ‘the problem . . . to be for the time being insoluble’. But it would also show the Americans ‘our honesty of purpose’ and would buy time, the most precious commodity of all. Amery as usual took comfort by getting hold of not quite the right end of the stick. Just as he had been persuaded by the merits of local option because it might breach the powerful dictatorships of all-India parties, so now he took pleasure at Congress’s fury that the draft declaration had apparently laid ‘Pakistan cuckoo’s egg’ in the Indian nest. He had a better insight into a rather different consequence of this initiative: Cripps’s offer would force Congress and Muslims alike to face the need for ‘compromise’; an ‘entirely new constitutional solution’ was now the only alternative to ‘a divided India’; but if Congress had now to come to terms with Muslim provinces, Muslims themselves would be forced to ‘realise what Pakistan may involve in respect of Muslim minorities elsewhere, of the Sikh difficulty, of holding down the richer and more numerous Bengal Hindu minority, and last but not least of economic dislocation’, realisations which neither Jinnah nor the Viceroy felt the Muslims were ready to swallow and digest.

At the first meeting of the Executive Council at which the Cripps offer was discussed, Firoz Khan Noon brought out other important implications of local option for the Punjab and Bengal. In both these provinces, Muslim members of the assembly were in a bare majority; in both the population was predominantly Muslim, but not by a large margin. On a straight vote on local option, Muslims would have to vote solidly, with

117 Linlithgow to Amery, 6 March 1942, ibid., 328; and Linlithgow to Amery, 6 March 1942, ibid., 330.
118 Churchill to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, ibid., 394–5.
119 Amery to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, pp. 396–7 and Amery to Linlithgow, 10 March 1942, ibid., 402.
hardly a defection, if they were to prevent accession or assure secession. Such unanimity would be without precedent; and it was not at all likely. When pressed, Cripps was ready to lower the requirement: if less than sixty per cent voted for accession, then a plebiscite of the entire electorate would decide the issue. But this was a typically double-edged concession. If the elected Muslim representatives were an uncertain factor, it was likely that the voters at large might be equally unpredictable in the way they voted in a plebiscite. But the plebiscite that Cripps envisaged gave a vote to the entire electorate of the province, not simply the voters of the majority community – this too was consistent with having a settlement on provincial rather than communal lines. The long and the short of it was that those in favour of exercising the local option to keep out of the union would have to win a majority of voters drawn from all communities and, to be certain of winning that vote, required cross-communal understandings in the Punjab and Bengal. These two provinces could remain autonomous and undivided only if Muslims kept their alliances with other communities in good repair, not by steering a communal line. Local option obviously held many attractions for the Muslim politicians in power in the majority provinces. That Jinnah at least could see the pitfalls of the Cripps offer is shown by the way he concentrated on the problems of how local option was to be worked in the Punjab and Bengal, while the Congress leaders, anxious to have an immediate say at the centre, failed to seize the opportunity of using local option to undermine Jinnah. If Congress had accepted it, Jinnah would have been in danger of being dumped unceremoniously but permanently into a wilderness from which this time there would be no return. So he tried to blunt the point of Cripps’s thrust by stressing the communal line, and demanding a plebiscite of Muslims alone to decide the question of secession in their majority provinces – self-determination for Muslims alone. The irony of Jinnah’s contention that he was ‘rather surprised’ at the ‘distance . . . [local option] went to meet the Pakistan case’ may not have been lost on Cripps. One sharp lawyer had met another. Since Cripps’s proposal for a plebiscite did not form any

120 See note by Cripps on his interview with Jinnah, 25 March 1942, ibid., 480.
121 Of course Congress had to take account of the fact that its acceptance of the local option clause might encourage its provinces to go their own way. For the moment it seemed easier to reject local option and keep ‘Pakistan’ with its communal connotations on board. Once again Congress’s imperatives kept Jinnah’s strategy in play.
122 Initially Jinnah thought that Cripps’s suggestion of a plebiscite was better than a vote in the provincial assemblies, but he did not like the 40% requirement to get a plebiscite. Later, Jinnah denounced plebiscites where everyone voted, claiming that Muslims alone should decide the issue.
123 See note by Cripps on his interview with Jinnah, 25 March 1942, T.P., I, 480.
part of the draft declaration, it was safe for Jinnah to raise the issue of self-determination for Muslims only without risking an outright rejection from London. As for the draft declaration itself, it ensured that the constituent assembly would be a sovereign body 'with a preference for an all-India Union', since it would be elected proportionally from all the provincial assemblies meeting together as one electoral college. Hence it would be predominantly Hindu and could not 'come to any other conclusion except the Union'. Not only were the Muslims to be deprived of the old security of separate representation, but the decisions of the proposed constituent assembly would be on the basis of a bare majority. Gandhi would enter the assembly 'with a dead certainty' of getting a Congress-dominated all-India union.124

Once again it was the Congress which unsuspectingly came to Jinnah's rescue. Since the nineteen-twenties, Bengal and the Punjab had been its blind spots, mainly because it had failed to control the politics of these provinces. Now instead of making the most of the local option clause to allay the fears of these two provinces, the Congress concentrated all its attention upon the centre, and upon the steps that Cripps might take to give it a share of power there right away. But the High Command was asking for concessions in just those matters where Cripps's hands had been most firmly tied before he left London: the executive authority of the Viceroy was not to be touched during the war. It was out of the question to have an Indian defence minister with effective powers on the Viceroy's Executive Council, which was what the Congress wanted. The Executive Council would not be given joint responsibility; and a Congress majority would not be allowed to dominate its proceedings. Understandably, the War Cabinet in London was adamant on these points. So Congress, frustrated at the centre, turned down the offer, and Cripps had to admit failure. Naturally, he felt let down and thought that the Congress had lost an opportunity both to cut Jinnah down to size and to clear the way for advance at the centre. But it is a telling comment on how far the question of the Muslims and minorities had come to dominate everyone's thinking that Cripps blamed the failure of his mission upon the communal problem, by now the universal scapegoat in abortive constitution-making. Jinnah's own standing had survived a grave threat. He was now ready to turn Congress's rejection of the offer to his advantage; he could point with renewed emphasis to the dangers ahead of overweening Congress ambition which was unwilling to countenance the concessions made by Cripps to the Muslim-majority provinces. Provincial option, he argued, was clearly an insufficient security.

An explicit acceptance of the principle of Pakistan offered the only safeguard for Muslim interests throughout India and had to be the precondition for any advance at the centre. So he exhorted all Indian Muslims to unite under his leadership to force the British and the Congress to concede ‘Pakistan’. If the real reasons for Jinnah’s rejection of the offer were rather different, it was not Jinnah but his rivals who had failed to make the point publicly.\footnote{The failure of his mission left Cripps with the choice of either blaming the Viceroy and some of his colleagues in the War Cabinet, or the Congress. Not surprisingly, he chose to blame Congress and its demand for an immediate National Government at the centre. He interpreted Congress’s stand as implying a demand for a system of government ‘responsible to no legislature or electorate . . . and the majority of whom would be in a position to dominate large minorities’. (Broadcast by Cripps, 11 April 1942, cited in Rizvi, \textit{Linlithgow and India}, p. 203; fn. 2.)} A commentary perhaps on the fact that neither the Congress leadership nor the politicians of the Muslim-majority provinces had as yet recognised the need to take Jinnah and the League seriously.