

## MILITARY PERSPECTIVE OF THE STRUGGLE FOR PAKISTAN

Today we live in a state of 'wardom' — a condition in which war dominates all other human activities.<sup>1</sup>

The genesis of Pakistan during a short period of seven years (1940–1947) has agitated the minds of a number of men of learning from all over the world leading to a variety of theories, some highlighting the role of individual leadership while others emphasising the interplay of geographic, historical, political, cultural and economic aspects, giving importance to some or all of these elements. However, the impact of the military factor is yet to be given a serious consideration by scholars.

Till the outbreak of World War II in 1939, there were little signs of weakening of the hold of European powers on their Afro-Asian colonies. Since there were no prospects of South Asian sub-continent becoming independent in the foreseeable future, Muslims of British India had mainly concentrated on protecting their rights by founding All-India Muslim League (AIML),<sup>2</sup> securing separate electorates,<sup>3</sup> fighting for the weightages and reservation of seats in the assemblies and for autonomy of provinces.<sup>4</sup> While doing so they were always conscious of their separate identity vis a vis other nationalities in India and continued to aspire for equality, if not superiority, of status with Hindus who were in preponderant majority in India. Hindus and their main organisation, Indian National Congress (INC) first tried to have a common platform with AIML during 1916<sup>5</sup> but drifted away from it after the failure of the Khilafat Movement in 1922.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter INC devised their own political initiatives and strategies independently with a view to securing power from British Government by sidetracking AIML and other political parties. The policy matured in 1937 when they refused to form coalition government with the elected members of AIML.

The outbreak of World War II afforded the Indians an excellent opportunity to press for independence.<sup>7</sup> Likewise it encouraged the Muslims to demand the establishment of a sovereign state of their own.<sup>8</sup> The fluctuating fortunes of the British in the war gave the Indians, in general, and Muslims in particular, the necessary incentive and confidence to fight for their objectives. The INC visualised that the end of the British rule in India was imminent. This led them to withdraw all cooperation to British Government and adopt policies which would force them to hand over power exclusively to INC.<sup>9</sup> They also closed the doors to independent cooperation with AIML.<sup>10</sup> For AIML all such devices as separate electorates, weightages in representation, reservation of seats, federalism and autonomy of provinces<sup>11</sup> became meaningless because these were required as long as British were the paramount power. Now that the British withdrawal from India was in sight, AIML was forced to work out the destiny of the Muslims independently and none but a sovereign state of their own was the obvious respectable solution which could ensure independence and equality of status for Muslims vis a vis Hindus.<sup>12</sup> The AIML therefore tried to follow an independent course of action lest it may become a camp-



follower of INC.<sup>13</sup> Unlike INC, AIML did not obstruct the support which Muslims were giving to the British in the war.<sup>14</sup> This positive role, helped by the negative policies of INC, such as, resignation of their ministries (1937), *Satyagraha* (1940) and Quit India movement (1942), contributed to the increasing importance of AIML.<sup>15</sup> The British were desperately in need of the Indian support, more than ever before, for they were engaged in a life and death struggle against powerful adversaries. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the British policy vis a vis India, in general, and Muslims in particular, changed drastically. On October 18, 1939, the Viceroy declared that after the war, HMG would consider granting India "her due place among the great Dominions" and would give full weight to the "views and interests" of the minorities.<sup>16</sup> In the words of Quaid-i-Azam:

After the war was declared, the Viceroy naturally wanted help from the Muslim League. It was only then that he realised that the Muslim League was a power. For it will be remembered that upto the time of the declaration of war, the Viceroy never thought of me, but of Gandhi and Gandhi alone.<sup>17</sup>

As the war progressed, the promise for the independence of India and the recognition of equal importance to Muslims vis a vis Hindus became more pronounced. On the eve of the Battle of Britain (1940) the British Government pledged that after the war a representative body would "devise the framework of the new constitution" and assured the minorities that they would not be coerced to submit to an unacceptable government.<sup>18</sup> When early in 1942, the Japanese successfully reached the eastern frontiers of the subcontinent, the British Government announced, in what is known as the Cripps' Offer of 1942, that after the war, "an elected body" would frame a constitution for India which would be acceptable to the British, subject to the right of a province to secede.<sup>19</sup> This clause was a British acquiescence in the demand for Pakistan, perhaps for the first time. The *volte-face* in the attitude of the British Government was due primarily to their dependence on Muslim India in the war effort. They needed Muslim help desperately, along with that of non-Muslims, in their war effort. The Muslims although constituted only 25 per cent of the population of South Asia, their number in the British Indian army was as much as 37 per cent as against 39 per cent Hindus, 11 per cent Sikhs, 9 per cent Gurkhas and 4 per cent Christians and others as is borne out by the Table on page 43.

Of the entire 23 regiments of British Indian Army, as many as 15 were of mixed class composition having about 50 per cent Muslim contribution.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Muslims of South Asia enjoyed almost a parity with Hindus in the British Indian Army. This factor emboldened the Muslims to demand parity in the political field as well. This formidable strength of the Muslims in the Army forced the British Government not to ignore the demand for Pakistan even at a time when they did not want to raise new issues and thus drive public attention away from the war efforts.<sup>23</sup>

However, after the war, the British attempted to eschew their promises to grant secession to Muslim India from the rest of country.<sup>24</sup> They thought of Pakistan to be a weak state to bear the burden of the defence of the subcontinent which would fall on its shoulders from both western and eastern directions.<sup>25</sup> Since, among other things, the safety of the Indian subcontinent from the domination of its neighbours was in the interest of the British, they countered the demand for Pakistan through various moves, such as, Simla Conference (1945), the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946), the concern for



### Communal and Provincial Composition of the India Army On January 1, 1941<sup>20</sup>

#### PROVINCE-WISE

Province	Strength	Percentage	Remarks
Punjab	201,000	48	This figure includes:— Muslims 96,000 Sikhs 51,000 Dogras 28,000 Jats 14,000 Others 12,000
NWFP	35,000	8	All Muslims.
Bombay, CP, UP and Bihar	63,000	15½	Congress stronghold.
Nepal	46,000	11	
All other Provinces	73,000	17½	
	418,000		

#### RELIGION-WISE

Category	Strength	Percentage
Muslims	155,000	37
Sikhs	51,000	12
Others	212,000	51

On January 1, 1942<sup>21</sup>

Category	Strength	Percentage
Muslims	242,467	37
Hindus	253,418	39
Sikhs	72,059	11
Gurkhas	59,489	9
Christians	24,222	4
and others	651,655	

The strength increased to about one million on about February 25, 1942, but the communal composition more or less remained the same.



having a joint defence, one Governor-General and a unified army for the entire Sub-continent, i.e. for both India and Pakistan. Lord Ismay admits that

I did my utmost to persuade Mr. Jinnah to reconsider his decision....I asked him to remember that an army was not a mere collection of men with rifles and bayonets and guns and tanks; it was a living entity with one brain, one heart and one set of organs.... Why not divide the Army on numerical lines in the first instance, India getting two-thirds, and Pakistan one third. ... But Jinnah was adamant. He said that he would refuse to take power on 15 August unless he had an army of appropriate strength and predominantly Muslim composition under his control.<sup>26</sup>

The INC also took a somersault and went over to the side of the British Government. In 1945, they cooperated with the British at Simla Conference. In 1946, they accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan with certain reservations and in 1947 they connived at the proposal for one Governor-General, the demand to have a unified army and finally agreed with the British to concede a "truncated" Pakistan.

British decision to withdraw from India was a consequence of World War II for more than one reason. Although successful in war, it was uneconomical for them to hold India any longer. British had pledged to agree to the independence of India soon after the war.<sup>27</sup> India was in a turbulent mood in as much as freedom from Britain was in sight and communal riots were the order of the day; there were economic difficulties due to demobilisation, rapid increase in population, poverty and illiteracy, fear of famine, lack of resources to develop agriculture, industry and communications; and the capability of the civil administration to overcome these difficulties was very doubtful. Any breach of pledge on the part of Britain so as not to quit India would have led to an armed collision between Britain and India. An unwilling Britain impoverished by war could hardly afford it. They were not in a position to maintain a reasonable balance between British and Indian soldiers in the Army which could guarantee British safety, The war had increased trained Indian manpower in uniform and out of uniform to an extent that a repetition of 1857 could not have been to Britain's advantage. The symptoms of a revolt were seen in the naval mutiny of 1946,<sup>28</sup> in the impressions of the Indian troops returning from Indonesia and in the sympathies of Indian soldiers during the INA trials. The European experiences could be repeated in India as well, e.g., the French soldiers who had fought for American independence also fought for a revolution to bring about "liberty, equality and fraternity"<sup>29</sup> in their own country. A similar reaction from Indian soldiers could not be beyond expectation. The British retreat had become inevitable. Similarly, British decision to concede Pakistan was also initially a consequence of World War II. Under the mounting pressure of the war, the British could ill-afford to displease any section of the peoples of India, least of all Muslims who constituted about two-fifths of the British Indian Army.<sup>30</sup> They responded sympathetically in favour of minorities in their August offer of 1940.<sup>31</sup> In March 1942, when Japanese were knocking at the doors of India and were threatening to penetrate into the Muslim majority provinces in the north-east, the Government conceded the principle of separation for the provinces and thus committed itself to the principle of the partition of British India.<sup>32</sup>

However, no sooner than the war situation improved in favour of Britain, the latter again wished to side-track the Pakistan issue.<sup>33</sup> The Simla Conference of 1945 was nothing but an attempt to establish a "national government" in British India. It was only



after its failure that the British authorities realized that the Pakistan issue was not a "bargaining counter" and could no longer be ignored.<sup>34</sup> It was a real issue which must be faced squarely. This is obvious from the fact that Wavell had planned that "crudity of Jinnah's ideas ought to be exposed" and even his methods to do so were considered by the British Government.<sup>35</sup>

It goes to the credit of Quaid-i-Azam that once AIML had taken a decision for the division of India, he stood firm on it and fought his case with single-minded devotion, sagacity and foresight. Under his leadership the AIML became a well-knit and well-disciplined organisation effectively controlled by him through various constitutional bodies. Successive amendments to the Constitution and Rules of AIML of 1940, 1941 and 1944 are a clear testimony to this fact.<sup>36</sup> Under his able stewardship the AIML could steer away clearly from any pitfalls which came in the way or were laid by enemies. However, the main reason why the party had become popular was that it had now before it a clear-cut goal—Pakistan — which became something like a "religious creed."<sup>37</sup> The Government could not dare reject it except at the risk of an armed uprising by the Muslims. The British could see that to ignore the demand for Pakistan "would be to consign India to almost certain civil war... like China between the two wars, and a plague spot from which war might spread throughout Asia and even beyond."<sup>38</sup> Again, it was to avoid the risk of another war that Pakistan had to be conceded.

## NOTES

1. J.F.C. Fuller, *The Decisive Battles of the Muslim World*, London, 1954, Vol. I, p. xi.
2. AIML was founded at Dacca in 1906.
3. AIML demand for separate electorates was accepted by Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909.
4. These demands were included in AIML session held at Lucknow in 1916.
5. The AIML demands were accepted by INC in 1916. This is commonly known as Lucknow Pact.
6. M.K. Gandhi (1869-1949), leader of INC, unilaterally withdrew from Khilafat Movement by way of calling off the non-cooperation movement in February 1922. *A Short History of Pakistan*, Book IV, ed. I.H. Qureshi, Karachi, 1967, p. 188.
7. On October 10, 1939, INC Working Committee demanded Indian Independence. H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide*, London 1969, p. 77.
8. AIML Lahore Resolution 1940. *Statesman*, March 24, 1940.
9. Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad, *Some Aspects of Pakistan*, Pakistan Literature Series No. 3, Lahore, n.d., pp. 200-205 and I.H. Qureshi, *The Struggle for Pakistan*, Karachi 1965, p. 166.
10. INC took initiatives without consulting AIML. They launched Quit India Movement to achieve independence and deny Pakistan to Muslims.
11. These demands are included in various AIML resolutions as well as in Mr. Jinnah's Fourteen Points, 1928.
12. AIML Lahore Resolution 1940.
13. AIML rejection of Quit India Movement vide AIML Working Committee resolution of August 20, 1942, etc.
14. AIML Working Committee resolution of September 18, 1939.
15. For the first time, in 1943, AIML ministries were established in all Muslim provinces, except the Punjab where the Leader of the Unionist Government had reached an understanding with President of AIML, commonly known as Sikandar-Jinnah Pact.



16. J. Ahmad, *Historic Documents of the Muslim Freedom Movement*, Lahore, 1970, pp. 351-52.
17. Quaid-i-Azam, March 22, 1940, AIML Session Lahore.
18. Viceroy's announcement of August 8, 1940. Nicholas Mansergh and other, eds., *The Transfer of Power 1942-47, Vol. I. The Cripps Mission, January - April 1942*, London, 1970, pp. 877-79, and *Inqilab*, August 10, 1940.
19. *Dawn*, March 29, 1942.
20. Lockhart's (Maj. Gen.) note dated February 25, 1942 circulated to War Cabinet Committee on India cited in *The Transfer of Power 1942-47, Vol. I, op. cit.*, p. 288.
21. Ministry of Defence, Government of Pakistan cited in Latif Ahmed Sherwani, ed., *Pakistan Resolution to Pakistan 1940-47*, Karachi, 1969, p. 55.
22. Sir Francis Taker, *While Memory Serves*, London, 1950, p. 653.
23. Noor ul Haq, *The Politics of AIML (1940-47)* (Unpublished M. Phil Thesis, Quaid-i-Azam University, 1983), p. 49.
24. Wavell, the Viceroy of India, planned that "Crudity of Jinnah's ideas ought to be exposed" (Viceroy's secret telegrams of August 6, 1945 to Secretary of State for India, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. IV, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 and 37).
25. Lord Pethic-Lawrence's note dated February 13, 1946 quoted in *The Transfer of Power 1942-47, Vol. IV, op. cit.*, pp. 955-61.
26. Lord Ismay, *The Memoirs of General The Lord Ismay*, 1960, p. 248.
27. Cripp's Proposals cited in Noor-ul-Haq, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-98.
28. Penderel Moon, ed., *The Viceroy's Journal*, Karachi, 1974, p. 216.
29. The slogan of the French Revolution, 1789.
30. Noor-ul-Haq, *op. cit.*, p. 307.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-74, 307.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 82, 307.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 307-8.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 298-99.
35. See note 24, above.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
37. Acting Viceroy's secret telegram of September 2, 1945, to the Viceroy in England, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
38. E.W.R. Lumby, *The Transfer of Power*, London, 1954, p. 74.