



When Intelligence Made a Difference

— POST WW II —

The 1947 Pukhtoon Invasion of Jammu and Kashmir and India's 'Prescience'

by Christopher Snedden

The unification of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) with India in 1947 has long been a contentious issue. When Britain withdrew from the Indian subcontinent, the accession of the largest princely state to India or Pakistan was desired and divisive. India wanted J&K. Pakistan expected it. This was because J&K's major economic and social links were with areas that became Pakistan after partition on 15 August 1947. Three major rivers (Chenab, Indus, Jhelum) flowed through J&K into Pakistan. J&K's population was 77 per cent Muslim—although problematically the Maharaja (ruler) was a Hindu. Since 1947, India's narrative has been that the dispute over J&K only commenced when some 3,000 Muslim Pukhtoon tribesmen coming from, and almost certainly sent by, Pakistan invaded J&K's Kashmir Province on 22 October 1947. For India, these 'raiders' caused all of J&K's internal problems in 1947.¹ To defend his state from the Pukhtoons, Maharaja Hari Singh needed help. New Delhi would only provide assistance if Singh acceded to India, which he did on 26 October. The next day (27 October), a battalion of Indian troops began arriving by air in Srinagar to repel the Pukhtoons from India's latest acquisition. Indians claim this airlift was hastily, and brilliantly, organized: 'Never in the history of warfare has there been an operation ... put through with no previous thought, let alone organized planning, and at such remarkably short notice'.² Thus began the intractable India-Pakistan dispute over which nation should possess J&K—the so-called 'Kashmir dispute'.

India's narrative above is incomplete, even false. J&K-ites took two significant actions before the Pukhtoons' invasion and a third before Maharaja Hari Singh acceded to India.³ These actions instigated the dispute over J&K's international status—not the Pukhtoons' invasion. The first action by J&K-ites was an anti-Maharaja uprising soon after partition by militant pro-Pakistan Muslim rebels in the Poonch and Mirpur areas of southwestern J&K.⁴ Second was serious inter-religious violence in September-October in J&K's southern Jammu Province between pro-India Hindus and Sikhs and pro-Pakistan Muslims that killed and dislocated thousands. Third, on 24 October, the Muslim rebels established the Azad (Free) Jammu and Kashmir Government in the areas they had 'freed'. ('Azad Kashmir' was not 'free' in the sense of being independent; rather, it was 'free' from the Maharaja's, and later, from India's control.)

Another problem with India's narrative concerns intelligence. Despite claims to the contrary, New Delhi was well informed about events in J&K before Hari Singh's accession to India. Senior Indian ministers also knew beforehand that the Pukhtoons were preparing to invade J&K, a significant factor that enabled New Delhi to plan its military response.

The Pukhtoons' Invasion of J&K

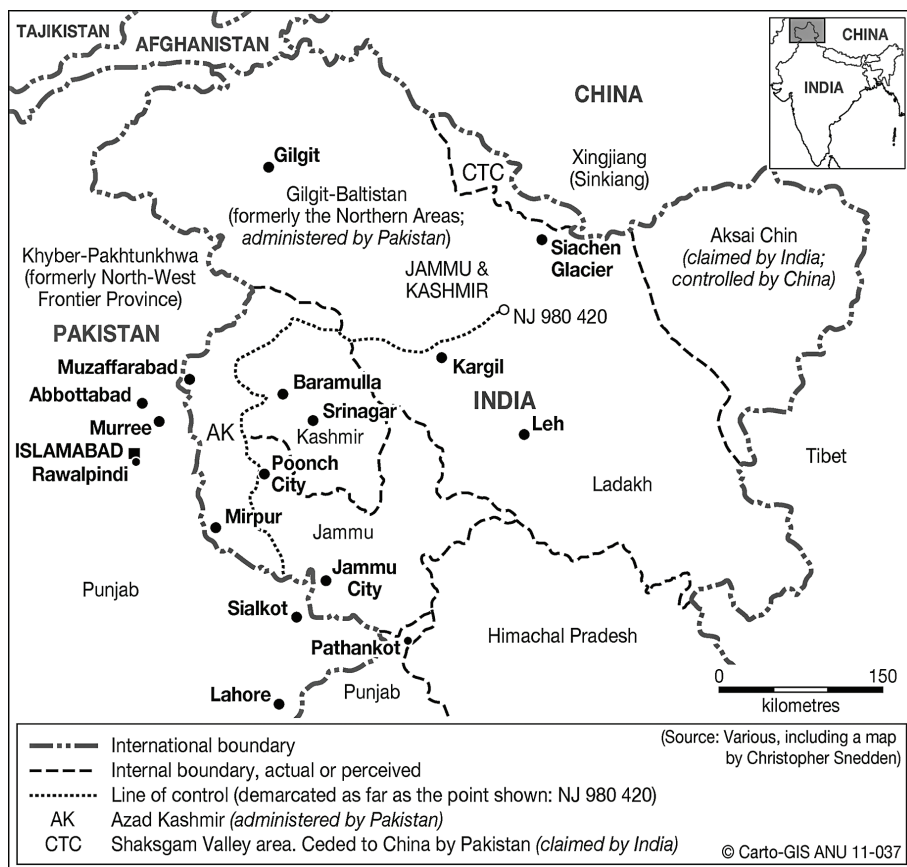
At 4.30 a.m. on 22 October 1947, marauding Pukhtoons—the British called them Pathans—invaded J&K's Kashmir Province. Concurrently, Muslims in the J&K State Forces deserted and seized a strategic bridge at Domel, near Muzaffarabad, on the all-weather Jhelum Valley Road that connected Rawalpindi with J&K's summer capital of Srinagar. This facilitated the advance of the Pukhtoons, who supposedly were heading to Srinagar to capture the J&K ruler and secure his accession to Pakistan. (Hari Singh had been vacillating on making an accession because he wanted J&K to continue to be independent.) The Pukhtoons, confirming their legendary desire for plunder, quickly got sidetracked. Instead of going quickly along the Jhelum Valley Road to Srinagar, they raped, pillaged and brutalized people, including fellow Muslims, in the intermediate towns of Muzaffarabad, Uri, and Baramulla.

1. White Paper on Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, Government of India, 1948, various pages.

2. V.P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, Bombay, Orient Longman, 1961, p. 382.

3. See Christopher Snedden, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012, chapters 2, 3.

4. See map (copied from Christopher Snedden, *The Kashmir Dispute in a Nutshell*, self-published (as required) article, last updated 2 February 2020).



Late on 24 October, vague, chaos-inducing reports of the Pukhtoons' invasion reached Srinagar where people were celebrating Hindu Dussehra (Ravan's death) and Muslim Id (end of Ramadan).⁵ Around 27-28 October, the Pukhtoons finally reached Srinagar's outskirts. Their plundering, plus some opposition by J&K State Forces, had significantly slowed what should have been a one-to-two day journey. Meanwhile, Maharaja Hari Singh had fled to Jammu, his hometown and J&K's winter capital, and had acceded to India. Ethnic Kashmiris had organized a 5,000-strong People's Militia, of whom 1,000 were armed.⁶ Indian troops comprising Sikhs, whom Pukhtoons despised (and vice versa), were being rapidly airlifted to secure Srinagar's airport and surrounds. These decisive actions deprived Pakistan of the prize of 'Kashmir'. (Kashmir comprises the 6,200 square mile Kashmir Valley, an old and famous area of the subcontinent. Because of its prestige, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was popularly called 'Kashmir'. The 'k' in the acrostic 'Pakistan' also stands for 'Kashmir'.)

5. M. Ganju, *This is Kashmir* (With Special Reference to U.N.O.), Delhi, S. Chand & Co, [1948], p. 21.
6. *New York Times*, 6 November 1947.

Despite denying it, significant Pakistanis supported the Pukhtoons. Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province government had clearly been involved. Official patronage was needed to secure the 200-300 trucks and scarce fuel required to transport an armed force unhindered, and seemingly unnoticed, across Pakistan, into J&K.⁷ Additionally, NWFP's Chief Minister, Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan, was an ethnic Kashmiri originally from Baramulla. His position and local knowledge of Kashmir would have helped the Pukhtoons. A rival Kashmiri claimed Qayyum not only wanted to secure J&K for Pakistan, but 'aspired to become the ruler of Kashmir'.⁸ If so, Qayyum mistook the Pukhtoons' capabilities and intentions. Their devastation, ironically particularly in Baramulla where the Pukhtoons

killed some 3,000 people, including foreigners and fellow Muslims,⁹ destroyed Pakistan's popularity on the Indian 'side' for many years.

Probably, the Pukhtoons had the 'blessing' of Governor-General Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founding 'father', and his Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan. Utilizing 'plausible deniability', Jinnah disclaimed knowledge of the Pukhtoons' action. Liaquat, however, almost certainly played an active part organizing the first of Pakistan's (many) proxy efforts in J&K.¹⁰ Certainly, India's leaders thought that senior Pakistanis were heavily, and officially, involved in 'Operation Gulmarg': Pakistan's plan to capture Kashmir. (Gulmarg was/is a popular hill station in the Kashmir Valley.) Pakistanis struggled to deny their involvement, which factor, along with the Pukhtoons' despicable behavior, enabled India to quickly capture the 'moral high ground' in the Kashmir dis-

7. V.P. Menon, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, Bombay, Orient Longman, 1961, p. 378.

8. Sheikh Abdullah, *The Blazing Chinari: An Autobiography*, Translated from Urdu by Mohammad Amin, Srinagar, Gulshan Books, second edition, 2013, p. 327.

9. *New York Times*, 11 November 1947.

10. Andrew Whitehead, *A Mission in Kashmir*, New Delhi, Viking, 2007, pp. 52, 57, 58.

pute. India retained its superior moral position until August 2019 when New Delhi divided, and demoted, Indian J&K into two territories. Concurrently, India's draconian security measures made Kashmir an 'open air prison'.¹¹

In 1947, some J&K-ites surmised, or knew, that the Pukhtoons intended to attack J&K. On 12 October, J&K's Deputy Prime Minister, R.L. Batra, told the Indian press that the 'only thing' that would change Hari Singh's non-accession was 'if one side or [the] other decides to use force against us'.¹² Given the Pukhtoons' later invasion, Batra either was prescient or the J&K Government had intelligence about Pakistan's nefarious plan. J&K's newly-appointed Prime Minister, Mehr Chand Mahajan, confirmed the latter: 'a loyal friend' had provided Hari Singh with 'information about this contemplated attack on the State a month before it actually came'. Mahajan also was personally informed a week before about this 'attack'.¹³ On 24 October, Kashmiris realised something was amiss when Srinagar plunged into darkness. The advancing Pukhtoons had destroyed the region's powerhouse.

The Indians Knew

Official correspondence confirms that Indians knew about the Pukhtoons' invasion plan. Almost one month beforehand (on 27 September), India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote to Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, 'about Kashmir'. Nehru told Patel that he was aware of events in J&K from the many reports he had received.¹⁴ This included information that the Muslim League in Punjab and NWFP were 'making preparations to enter Kashmir in considerable numbers'. Specifically, the intruders would enter Kashmir Province via the Jhelum Valley Road 'by the end of October or, at the latest, the beginning of November'. The 'Pakistan strategy is to infiltrate into Kashmir now and to take some big action as soon as Kashmir is more or less isolated because of the coming winter'.¹⁵ (Around December, snow impairs access to Kashmir.) On 2 October, Patel wrote to Maharaja Hari Singh stating that he was 'expediting' telegraph,

telephone, wireless and roads links between J&K and India as 'we fully realize the need for despatch and urgency'.¹⁶ Patel, it appears, was preparing for Singh's alignment with, or accession to, India, something Nehru suggested on 27 September should be achieved 'as rapidly as possible'.¹⁷

On 5 October, India's Prime Minister confirmed that he knew what was happening in J&K when he again wrote to Patel. Nehru enclosed a report about J&K from Dwarkanath Kachru, Secretary of the All-India States Peoples' Conference, who had been in Srinagar for four days.¹⁸ Kachru reported that the National Conference, a popular Muslim-led but secular party in the Kashmir Valley, had 'decided for the Indian Union', although its decision was yet to be announced. Additionally, Kachru discussed 'the utter collapse of [J&K's] administrative and government machinery', which alerted India that it needed options re J&K's future. On 7 October, Home Minister Patel wrote to India's Defence Minister, Sardar Baldev Singh, asking him to immediately send arms and ammunition to J&K, by air if necessary. For Patel, there was 'no time to lose' as the Pakistani intervention was 'going to be true to [the] Nazi pattern'—presumably swift, overwhelming and conclusive.¹⁹

On 27 October, India rapidly airlifted troops to secure Srinagar. For one Indian, 'contrary to Pakistan's belief, there was no preparation before hand [sic] by the Indian Army'.²⁰ Rather, this major operation was organized after Maharaja Hari Singh's acceded to India on 26 October. The evidence suggests otherwise. India had received specific intelligence that gave Indian defence planners at least three weeks to militarily and logistically prepare the Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF), and other officially commandeered aircraft, to airlift Indian soldiers to Srinagar.

Conclusion

The 'outstanding achievement' of the Pukhtoons' invasion of J&K was 'to make up the Maharaja's mind for him': the vacillating Hari Singh finally acceded to India.²¹ Although senior Indians feigned ignorance

11. Riyaz Wani, 'Life Under Siege in Kashmir,' *The Diplomat*, 21 January 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/life-under-siege-in-kashmir/>.

12. Ajit Bhattacharjee, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir*, New Delhi, Roli Books, 2008, pp. 105, and 111, footnote 3.

13. Mehr Chand Mahajan, *Looking Back*, New Delhi, Har-Anand Publications, 1994 [first published 1963?], pp. 273-274.

14. Durga Das, Editor, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Volume I, New Light on Kashmir, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1971, pp. 45-7.

15. Jawaharlal Nehru, *India's Foreign Policy, Selected Speeches*, September 1946-April 1961, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961, p. 443.

16. Letter from Vallabhbhai Patel to Maharaja Hari Singh, 2 October 1947, in Durga Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Volume I, p. 42.

17. S. Gopal, General Editor, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Volume 3, New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1985, p. 265.

18. Enclosure, 'Nehru to Patel', 5 October 1947, in Durga Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Volume I, p. 54.

19. Sardar Patel to Sardar Baldev Singh, 7 October 1947, in Durga Das, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence 1945-50*, Volume I, p. 59.

20. Sisir Gupta, *Kashmir: A Study in India-Pakistan Relations*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1966, p. 126.

21. Lord Birdwood, 'Kashmir,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 3, July 1952, pp. 302, 303.

of the Pukhtoons' invasion, they knew about it in advance. This enabled India to secure the Kashmir Valley and to seize the 'moral high ground' in the Kashmir dispute. Pakistan claimed Hari Singh's accession to India was 'based on fraud and violence'.²² The 'fraud' was underhanded Indian activity to obtain his accession; the 'violence' was the Indian Army's 'occupation' of J&K. However, had the Pukhtoons' incompetent invasion delivered J&K to Pakistan in 1947, New Delhi probably would have accused Karachi of obtaining the princely state by 'fraud and violence'. Such was India-Pakistan rivalry and dislike. The need of each nation to best the other in every endeavour was, and still is, a compelling factor in their relations.



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22. Keesing's *Contemporary Archives*, London, Longman, Volume VI (1947), p. 8931.