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## Signing up to India

Karan Singh had a close brush with destiny. As Sir Hari Singh's son and heir, born in the French resort of Cannes to his father's fourth wife, he would have been the maharaja of Kashmir had the Dogra dynasty survived. 'I certainly had no ambition to become a feudal monarch. In fact, I was saved from a fate worse than death by not having to be that, and to make it in a fully democratic society on my own.'<sup>1</sup> Karan Singh demonstrated in his career many of the qualities his father so sorely lacked—articulate, confident and clever. He has been a parliamentarian and cabinet minister, once had ambitions for India's presidency, and with his broad horizons and commanding intellect has become one of his country's elder statesmen. So much so that he has often been reluctant to talk about Kashmir. He has insisted that his stage stretches far beyond the princely state his father once ruled.

Nevertheless, the feudalism he despised gave him a leg up in life. His first volume of autobiography was entitled *Heir Apparent*. His first public office was achieved entirely through the accident of birth. In 1949, with his father informally excluded from Jammu and Kashmir, he became regent. Three years later, Karan Singh was named Sadar-i-Riyasat, the titular head of state under Indian Kashmir's new Constitution. The Dogra monarchy had been abolished but in a sense he became the constitutional ruler his father never was. He reached that elevated position at the ridiculously young age of twenty-one, and mentioned in his memoirs how the usual age limitation of thirty-five had to be relaxed for his benefit.<sup>2</sup> Less than a year later, he was the man who—with Delhi's blessing—dismissed Sheikh Abdullah as Kashmir's prime minister. The 'Lion of Kashmir' spent most of the next twenty-two years in detention. Although groomed for power, Karan Singh was not fully prepared for it. In his autobiography, he recorded that it was only when he went to New York for medical treatment at the close of 1947 that he first saw snowfall—as a child he had never spent a winter in the Kashmir Valley. And it was



also on that trip to New York that he first got to talk to Sheikh Abdullah, who was there as part of India's delegation to the United Nations. They had never met in Kashmir.

Karan Singh has made no secret of the fact that he was not close to his father, whom he found remote and severe. It was the tribal incursion, he told me, which forced his father to abandon the vision of an independent Kashmir (a dream which he believed was encouraged by a Hindu holy man whose devotee the maharaja became), and to accede to India. 'I don't think he ever expected that this sort of invasion would come. Maybe he should have expected it. But he didn't, evidently. It was a Pakistan-inspired and financed invasion. And these tribesmen from the Frontier province were let in to take Kashmir. It was a fruit ripe for the plucking. And they just came and thought they would take it over. What it succeeded in doing was to force my father, more or less, to accede to India. That's not what Pakistan had planned, I presume'—he laughed aloud at the thought. 'It was really the invasion which, as it were, clinched the issue.' A maharaja renowned for being indecisive was forced to make up his mind.

It's not hard to see why Sir Hari Singh had no enthusiasm for acceding to either of the new dominions. Pakistan showed signs of being the more indulgent to princely rulers, but it was a nation with an explicitly religious identity founded on the basis that the region's Muslims formed a nation rather than a community. While most Kashmiris were Muslim, the maharaja was a Hindu. His court, ministers and senior administrators were preponderantly non-Muslim. His army was largely non-Muslim, and its senior officers even more so. Almost a quarter of his citizens were not Muslims, and these included the maharaja's own community, the Dogras of Jammu. From the start, Pakistan proved to be uncongenial territory for non-Muslims. Almost all Sikhs in Pakistan who survived the communal riots migrated to India—some of those from the Frontier moved into or through Kashmir. By far the greater number of Pakistan's Hindus also left. West Punjab, which once had a composite population, became monocultural, with a tiny Hindu community and next-to-no Sikhs. The mandirs and gurdwaras in cities such as Lahore no longer had any Hindu or Sikh worshippers. The population movement from Indian Punjab was almost as complete, with Muslims reduced to no more than one per cent of the population.

By the late autumn of 1947, the scale of the population movement precipitated by Partition was all too evident. Sir Hari Singh could hardly be confident that if Kashmir became part of Pakistan, his non-Muslim subjects would feel secure as Pakistani citizens. And while some of his

Muslim subjects—notably those in areas such as Poonch, Jammu and Muzaffarabad—would probably have welcomed becoming part of Pakistan, opinion in the Valley was much more difficult to judge. Mehr Chand Mahajan, the Indian lawyer who took over as Kashmir's prime minister in mid-October 1947, was convinced that the maharaja would not sign-up for Pakistan under any circumstances. 'He could not close his eyes to what had happened in Pakistan to the Hindu population nor forget how the property of every Hindu had been looted and almost the entire Hindu population massacred,' Mahajan wrote. 'He did not want such scenes to be enacted in his State, where Hindus and Muslims were at that time living like brothers even when massacres were going on in Pakistan.'<sup>3</sup>

The Pakistan government sent a representative, Major A.S.B. Shah, to Srinagar to try to argue the case for accession and win over the Kashmir government. It also kept open channels of communication with Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference. Major Shah reported a sharp rebuff. 'He said that for 3 or 4 days he was succeeding,' Sir George Cunningham, the governor of the Frontier Province, recorded after meeting Shah in Peshawar, 'but that the new Prime Minister [Mahajan] arrived and told him to clear out. He . . . thinks that aggression on Kashmir will make HARI SINGH join INDIA, and that that might very probably lead on to war in the next three or four months.'<sup>4</sup> Major Shah's judgement, shared by Sir George, was spot on.

The option of joining India, however, was hardly more attractive to the maharaja. The Indian government was headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, a close friend and associate of the maharaja's sharpest political critic, Sheikh Abdullah. Sir Hari Singh had tried to stop Nehru entering the princely state in the summer of 1946 after Sheikh Abdullah's arrest, and when this failed, he ordered the detention of the man who was to become India's first prime minister. This was not an act of statesmanship, and did not bode well for relations between India and the Kashmir court. Sir Hari's son, who had been inspired by Nehru's political writings and came to view him as a mentor, was horrified: 'instead of welcoming [Nehru] and seeking his co-operation, we had arrested him. I have no doubt that his arrest was the turning point in the history of the State.'<sup>5</sup> Sheikh Abdullah, who was head of the Congress-aligned States People's Conference, had been jailed for urging the deposition of the Dogra dynasty. Nehru had made clear his support for Sheikh Abdullah, and the campaign for responsible government in Kashmir. So for Sir Hari Singh, signing up to India would be akin to handing over power to his political nemesis—which is exactly what happened eventually.<sup>6</sup>



Caught between a rock and a hard place, and attracted in any event by the prospect of independence, the maharaja had every reason to stave off a decision on accession. He persisted in playing for time even when Lord Mountbatten during his visit to Srinagar in the summer of 1947, in snatched moments in the back of the car, advised Sir Hari to forget any thought of independence. Lord Mountbatten also—according to both his press attaché and the secretary of India's states ministry—told the maharaja that if he acceded to Pakistan, the Indian government had assured him they would not take this amiss.<sup>7</sup> The working assumption of some British diplomats and administrators appears to have been that Kashmir's Muslim majority and communication and trade links would oblige the state to join Pakistan. That was certainly the view of Mountbatten's predecessor as viceroy, Lord Wavell, who subsequently stated that he had 'always assumed . . . that Kashmir would go to Pakistan'. It was also the expectation of one of Mountbatten's inner circle, Alan Campbell-Johnson, who was advised when he arrived in India in March 1947 that 'the Maharaja would no doubt be tempted to throw in his lot with Jinnah'.<sup>8</sup> Aligning with Pakistan appears to have been the advice proffered by the Kashmiri pandit who was the maharaja's prime minister through much of the summer of 1947, Ram Chandra Kak. He shared the maharaja's desire for autonomy, but leaned towards a tie-up with Karachi (then the capital of Pakistan) rather than Delhi. If Partition had been a more orderly process, it is possible that the maharaja might have followed this course, but the intense communal violence which accompanied the transfer of power put paid to any chance of Sir Hari Singh voluntarily plumping for Pakistan.

Through the summer and autumn of 1947, the maharaja took a series of steps which suggested that he was edging towards India. Foremost among them was his dismissal of Kak as prime minister in mid-August, and his eventual replacement two months later by Mahajan, who was dead set against accepting overtures from Karachi. Mehr Chand Mahajan had been a Congress nominee on the Boundary Commission which considered the precise demarcation of the Partition line dissecting Punjab. It would have been outlandish to imagine that a lawyer primed to get the best possible deal for India on that commission would, a matter of weeks later, allow the considerable prize of Kashmir to slip through Delhi's fingers.

There were many other straws in the wind. Mahajan had talks in Delhi with India's leaders before taking up his post, but turned down an invitation from Pakistan to visit Lahore. The maharaja welcomed visitors from Delhi such as Mahatma Gandhi while repeatedly rebuffing Jinnah's suggestions that he make a personal visit to Kashmir. He sought an Indian

army officer on secondment to replace the British commander of the state's armed forces. His government sought arms and ammunition from India, which the Indian defence ministry was eager to supply but was thwarted by the British-staffed supreme headquarters. The road from Pathankot to Jammu, the only road link between India and Kashmir, was upgraded urgently, much to the consternation of the authorities in Pakistan. The Indian authorities sought to provide the petrol that should have come via Pakistan, but never made it with the breakdown of the standstill agreement. The growing war of words between Srinagar and Karachi about the failure to provide promised supplies of essential commodities and the collapse of postal, telegram and banking services, compounded by mutual accusations of complicity in communal violence or insurgency, was hardly likely to serve as a precursor to accession.

There have been suggestions that the maharaja had decided by August 1947, or certainly by mid-September, that he had no option but to join India, and that he was just waiting for the best moment and the most advantageous terms. There are snippets of evidence to support this assertion. M.C. Mahajan, then Kashmir's prime minister-designate, met Nehru in Delhi in mid-September to discuss the state's future. 'I told him the terms on which the Maharaja wanted me to negotiate with India,' Mahajan recorded. 'The Maharaja was willing to accede to India and also to introduce necessary reforms in the administration of the State. He, however, wanted the question of administrative reforms to be taken up later on. [Nehru] wanted an immediate change in the internal administration of the State and he felt somewhat annoyed when I conveyed to him the Maharaja's views. Pandit Nehru also asked me to see that Sheikh Abdulla[h] was released.' This appears to have been a testing of the waters rather than a firm decision by the maharaja to sign up to India—certainly Nehru wasn't greatly reassured by the conversation. Nevertheless, it was increasingly clear that if Maharaja Hari Singh was going to accede to either Dominion, it would be to India.<sup>9</sup> In Pakistan, the newspaper Jinnah had founded, *Dawn*, carried as its main news item on 14 October an article with the headline: 'Kashmir's accession to Indian Dominion regarded as a foregone conclusion'. The following week Margaret Parton of the *New York Herald Tribune*, newly arrived in Kashmir from Peshawar, wrote home to say that 'the Hindu Maharaja is determined to join the Indian Union . . . More fighting is inevitable if the tribes from the Frontier carry out their threat to march into Kashmir if it joins India—which they couldn't do until next Spring, but which they could certainly do then.'<sup>10</sup> The invasion, however, was not months away—



it started two days later. Even if there had been no tribal attack, Sir Hari Singh might well eventually have committed his princely state to India. What is certain is that the tribesmen's approach forced his hand, obliging him to sign up in a hurry and depriving him of the opportunity to haggle over the conditions.

The maharaja and his new prime minister arrived at Srinagar airfield on 23 October at the end of a tour of some of the violence-affected areas of Jammu province. Jammu had been beset by an armed rebellion against the maharaja, and by intense anti-Muslim violence in which the maharaja's forces were reported to be complicit.<sup>11</sup> On landing in Srinagar, they were told about the scale of the tribal raid launched very early the previous day. They initially appear to have believed that the state forces would be sufficient to repulse the invaders, perhaps unaware that a considerable number of the maharaja's Muslim troops had either mutinied or deserted. As soon as the seriousness of the tribal invasion became apparent, there was frenzied diplomatic activity.

The maharaja sent a senior member of his administration, R.L. Batra, to Delhi to appeal to the Indian government for help. There has been much mystery about the scope of Batra's mission. The prime minister, M.C. Mahajan, recorded in his memoirs that Batra left Srinagar for Delhi on 24 October 'carrying a letter of accession to India from the Maharaja and a personal letter to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and another to Sardar Patel asking for military help in men, arms and ammunition'.<sup>12</sup> The timing of the maharaja's accession to India is of some consequence, and has been the subject of enormous diplomatic and scholarly controversy. But no one has suggested that the maharaja signed up to India as early as 24 October. And until very recently, there was no sign of Batra's letter. It emerged in 2003 in the remarkable form of an e-mail attachment sent to a colleague of mine at the BBC World Service, in circumstances which do not entirely resolve the question of authenticity but point to the likelihood that it is genuine. The unevenly typed letter, on headed paper, is dated 23 October 1947:

I hereby authorise my Deputy Prime Minister, R.B. Ram Lal Batra to sign the document of accession of the State with the Indian Union on my behalf, subject to the condition that the terms of accession will be the same as would be settled with H.E.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad.<sup>13</sup>

The letter is signed by Hari Singh in his own hand, and underneath is typed 'MAHARAJA OF JAMMU & KASHMIR'. For a document of



this moment, it looks a little tawdry, as if it was put together in a hurry, which was no doubt the case. The letter does not, of course, amount to a formal accession to India. For one thing, a precisely worded form had been prepared for princely rulers for this purpose. For another, this was an offer of accession, and it was conditional—and the basis of that condition, the settling of terms for the ruler of Hyderabad to bring his state into the Indian Union, was never achieved.

All the same, this is an important document. It is the key missing piece in the complex jigsaw of how and when the maharaja of Kashmir signed up to India, and is likely to be the item which some contemporaries referred to as an accession document, to the confusion of commentators and historians. The letter R.L. Batra carried to Delhi is clear evidence that as soon as the maharaja learnt of the scale of the tribal invasion, he set in motion moves not simply to secure India's military assistance but to accede. His ambition to achieve Kashmir's independence was quickly abandoned. It appears to be the first clear-cut written statement by the maharaja that he intended his principality to become part of India. Whether Hari Singh somewhat naively expected that the letter he gave his deputy prime minister would be sufficient to secure accession, or whether it was simply designed as a declaration of intent, is not clear. It was certainly the case that on 23 October 1947, it looked as if a deal was all but done to secure Hyderabad's accession to India. So the condition that the maharaja specified in his letter was not unrealistic. It was, ironically, the violence in Kashmir which in part persuaded the nizam's counsellors not to accede—and Hyderabad was eventually absorbed by force into India in September 1948.<sup>14</sup>

Jawaharalal Nehru, India's prime minister—in his broadcast to the nation on the Kashmir crisis in early November—recounted that it 'was on the 24<sup>th</sup> night that for the first time a request was made to us on behalf of the Kashmir State for accession and military help'.<sup>15</sup> Nehru passed on word of the crisis to Mountbatten that same Friday evening, at a buffet dinner in Delhi in honour of the Siamese foreign minister. He also convened a meeting of the Indian cabinet's defence committee for 11 a.m. the next morning. The committee had been established less than a month earlier, and Mountbatten—in something of a constitutional novelty for a Governor General, even one who had secured the wartime rank of supreme commander in South-East Asia—had been asked to chair the committee 'in view of his knowledge and experience of high military matters'.

At that cabinet committee, ministers heard of the scale of the threat posed by the advancing raiders, and discussed the strategic and tactical





merits of either sending troops directly in response to the maharaja of Kashmir's appeal, or promising to do so once he had acceded to India, or of accepting his accession on a temporary basis pending a demonstration of popular support in Kashmir for joining India. The minutes of that meeting do not fully capture what appears to have been Mountbatten's decisive contribution to the discussion. 'He considered that it would be the height of folly to send troops into a neutral State, where we had no right to send them, since Pakistan could do exactly the same thing, which could only result in a clash of armed forces and in war,' recorded Mountbatten's press attaché. 'He therefore argued that if indeed they were determined to send in troops, the essential prerequisite was accession, and unless it was made clear that this accession was not just an act of acquisition, this in itself might touch off a war.'<sup>16</sup> The defence committee sent V.P. Menon from the states ministry to Srinagar that same day. His task was to explain that India would send troops, but only once the maharaja had acceded to India, and to again underline the argument that Sheikh Abdullah must be brought in from the cold. At the same time, India's chiefs of staff were directed to prepare plans for the possibility of flying Indian troops to Srinagar.

Menon flew to Kashmir accompanied by representatives of India's army and air force, whose role was to assess the situation on the ground and liaise with what was left of Kashmir's own armed forces. By the time he reached Srinagar, the mood in the city—and in the palace in particular—had become grave. In spite of the approach of the tribesmen, the maharaja and his ministers had decided to proceed with a twice-annual durbar, or ceremony of allegiance, in Srinagar. This appears to have taken place on Friday, 24 October, the day after Maharaja Hari Singh's return to his capital. It happened just as the raiders either captured the princely state's power house at Mahura, on the Valley road between Uri and Baramulla, or were sufficiently close to cause its workers to flee. In any event, on that Friday evening the power supply from Mahura failed and the Kashmir Valley was plunged into darkness.

Among those at the court ceremony was D.N. Kaul, a lean and angular retired police officer when I met him at his Delhi home, and at that time an assistant superintendent in Srinagar. A Kashmiri Hindu, he remained in the Valley until 1990 when, along with so many other Hindus, he fled. On the October day that Mahura fell, D.N. Kaul was at the palace.

The maharaja was conducting his Dussehra durbar, where all gazetted officers are supposed to offer him a sovereign or half a sovereign





depending on their status to show allegiance to the maharaja. And I was also one of the crowd. As soon as we emerged out of the durbar hall, the lights went off. I said: hello, what has happened? And somebody said: why are you surprised, probably the raiders have captured the Mahura power station. Which was a damn fact! They had captured the power station, which was about sixty miles from Srinagar, and the whole city was plunged in darkness.

Karan Singh, the crown prince of Kashmir, also vividly recalled the sense of foreboding prompted by the power failure:

I happened to have been incapacitated as a result of a hip ailment and I was in a wheelchair. And there was a durbar going on, this very big ceremonial biannual gathering where my father sat on the golden throne and everybody paid homage. And everybody was out of the palace, and I was there alone. And suddenly all the lights went off, and we were plunged into darkness. And I recall that there was this terrible cacophony of jackals, howling in the darkness. And it was really a very eerie, sort of weird moment. One had heard that there was trouble brewing but it was at that moment that one realised an invasion was underway.<sup>17</sup>

The Dussehra dinner was able to go ahead—according to the prime minister, M.C. Mahajan—because that particular royal building had its own power supply, but he recalled that the collapse of the power supply to the city, and apparent imminence of the raiders, provoked alarm, and prompted many in the administration to flee the city.

The panic was evident in the palace more than on the streets. The prospect of the tribesmen reaching Srinagar brought with it not simply the probable overthrow of the Dogra monarchy but, given what was already known about the killing and destruction at Muzaffarabad and elsewhere, the likely targeting of non-Muslims, the royal family included, and the sacking of the Kashmiri capital. When V.P. Menon reached Srinagar, he found a city that was quiet, but deeply anxious. Sheikh Abdullah's supporters had moved to fill the power vacuum caused by the near collapse of the civil administration. 'Over everything hung an atmosphere of impending calamity.'

From the aerodrome we went straight to the residence of the Prime Minister of the State. The road leading from the aerodrome to





Srinagar was deserted. At some of the street corners I noticed volunteers of the National Conference [Sheikh Abdullah's party] with lathis [sticks] who challenged passers-by; but the State police were conspicuous by their absence. Mehr Chand Mahajan apprised us of the perilous situation and pleaded for the Government of India to come to the rescue of the State. Mahajan, who is usually self-possessed, seemed temporarily to have lost his equanimity. From his residence we both proceeded to the Maharajah's palace. The Maharajah was completely unnerved by the turn of events and by his sense of lone helplessness.<sup>18</sup>

'It could be said,' Menon reported back to the Indian cabinet's defence committee the next morning, 'that the Maharaja had gone to pieces completely—if not gone off his head.' The army officer on the mission, Lieutenant Colonel Sam Manekshaw, accompanied Menon to the palace. 'I have never seen such disorganization in my life. The Maharaja was running around from one room to the other. I have never seen so much jewellery in my life—pearl necklaces, ruby things, lying in one room; packing here, there, everywhere. There was a convoy of vehicles. The Maharaja was coming out of one room, and going into another saying, "Alright, if India doesn't help, I will go and join my troops and fight [it] out".'<sup>19</sup> It's not clear whether V.P. Menon was able to have any discussions of substance with the maharaja about accession, but he certainly urged Sir Hari Singh to leave Srinagar with his family and moveable wealth and head south to the relative safety of the city of Jammu, his winter capital.

In the small hours of Sunday, 26 October, a long convoy of vehicles headed out of the palace on the arduous drive across the Banihal pass and beyond. Karan Singh recalled a sad, slow journey to Jammu, taking many hours:

Finally the convoy began to move. My father drove his own car with Victor Rosenthal at his side and two staff officers with loaded revolvers in the back seat. My mother followed with the ladies in several cars. I was in no position to get into a car because of the heavy plaster cast, so my wheel chair was lifted and placed in the back of one of the station wagons that my father used for his shikar [hunting] expeditions. It was bitterly cold as the convoy pulled out of the palace in the early hours of the morning . . . The journey was interminable, with numerous stops en route . . .



All through that dreadful night we drove, slowly, haltingly, as if reluctant to leave the beautiful Valley that our ancestors had ruled for generations. Our convoy crawled over the 9,000 ft Banihal Pass just as first light was beginning to break. . . . Victor told me later that throughout the journey my father spoke not a word as he drove. When the next evening he finally reached Jammu and pulled up at the palace he uttered but one sentence—‘We have lost Kashmir’.<sup>20</sup>

The Dogra dynasty had indeed, to all practical effect, lost Kashmir. Many Kashmiris saw the flight of the royal family as an abandonment of the Kashmir Valley. ‘Everybody was furious,’ remembered Leela Thompson, then in Srinagar. She recalled people saying that the maharaja was ‘running away, that he was abandoning everybody, that he was a coward. Saving his own skin, that’s what we all thought.’ There was something of a stampede among officials and the more privileged citizens to get out of Srinagar, though few had vehicles and even fewer had adequate supplies of petrol. V.P. Menon pointedly recalled that when he and Prime Minister Mahajan tried to reach to Srinagar’s airfield on the morning of 26 October to fly to Delhi, getting there proved difficult. ‘The Majarajah had taken away all the available cars and the only transport available was an old jeep. Into this were bundled Mahajan, myself and the air crew of six or seven.’ The airfield itself was thronged with people desperately trying to get a flight out of Kashmir.

Once in Delhi at breakfast time on Sunday morning, V.P. Menon took Mahajan to see Nehru and his deputy, Sardar Patel. Mahajan pleaded for an immediate Indian military intervention to save Srinagar. Nehru appeared to equivocate, to which Mahajan recalled responding: ‘Give us the military force we need. Take the accession and give whatever power you desire to the popular party. The army must fly to save Srinagar this evening or else I will go to Lahore and negotiate terms with Mr. Jinnah.’ This intemperate outburst provoked an angry rebuke from Nehru—but he quickly changed his tone. ‘Just then, a piece of paper was passed over to the Prime Minister. He read it and in a loud voice said, “Sheikh Sahib also says the same thing,”’ Mahajan recalled.<sup>21</sup> Sheikh Abdullah had been listening in on the conversation from an adjoining room, and intervened to endorse Mahajan’s appeal for a military airlift.

This almost comic off-stage intervention by Nehru’s friend and ally appears to have won over the Indian prime minister to immediate military intervention in Kashmir. At the cabinet defence committee meeting later



that morning, Menon and Manekshaw reported on the situation in Srinagar. The Indian government decided that in spite of the grave risks underlined by the army's commander-in-chief, General Lockhart, an infantry battalion would be flown to Srinagar the next morning, 27 October, in air force and requisitioned civil planes. The states ministry was directed to prepare an instrument of accession for the maharaja and a letter emphasising that its acceptance would be temporary pending the ascertaining of the will of the people. It was also instructed to take up with Sir Hari the issue 'of the formation, simultaneously with the signing of the Instrument of Accession, of an Interim Government under Sheikh Abdullah'.

From this point on, the story of Kashmir's accession to India becomes clouded by conflicting accounts and interpretations. The issue in dispute is whether Kashmir's maharaja signed the document acceding to India before or after the beginning of India's military airlift to Srinagar on the morning of Monday, 27 October. It can and has been argued that this is of little consequence. Indian troops were not invading Kashmir, but responding to repeated and urgent requests for help from its ruler. He had already made clear, in writing, that he wished to accede to India. There is no real dispute that Sir Hari Singh did sign up to India at some time twenty-four hours either side of his night-and-day car journey to Jammu, and that constitutionally—if not necessarily morally—the accession was legitimate. From the contrary perspective, it seems clear that even if the maharaja had already signed, the process of accession was not complete when the airlift began. Lord Mountbatten's signature on the document accepting the accession is dated 27 October. It is implausible that he signed before Indian troops took off for Srinagar at first light that morning, and odds against that he signed before they arrived, probably at around 9 a.m. What makes the issue of the maharaja's signature of continuing relevance is that India has built its case on Kashmir around a version of events that insists that the instrument of accession was signed before the airlift of troops. If that is not true, then India's case is diminished—because its account of the accession is inaccurate, because that inaccuracy can only have been introduced by those acting for the Indian government, and because the crucial point in India's diplomatic armoury, that its military intervention in Kashmir was a deployment within the Indian Union, becomes clouded.

The established Indian account of the signing is contained in the government's *White Paper on Jammu & Kashmir*, published in March 1948:



Indian troops were sent to Kashmir by air on the 27<sup>th</sup>, following the signing of the Instrument of Accession on the previous night.

The accession was legally made by the Maharaja of Kashmir, and this step was taken on the advice of Sheikh Abdullah, leader of the All-Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, the political party commanding the widest popular support in the State. Nevertheless, in accepting the accession, the Government of India made it clear that they would regard it as purely provisional until such time as the will of the people of the State could be ascertained.<sup>22</sup>

V.P. Menon, secretary of India's states ministry, provided chapter and verse in his book *Integration of the Indian States*. He recounted how, shortly after the defence committee meeting in Delhi on the morning of Sunday, 26 October:

I flew to Jammu accompanied by Mahajan. On arrival at the palace I found it in a state of utter turmoil with valuable articles strewn all over the place. The Maharajah was asleep; he had left Srinagar the previous evening and had been driving all night. I woke him up and told him of what had taken place at the Defence Committee meeting. He was ready to accede at once. He then composed a letter to the Governor-General describing the pitiable plight of the State and reiterating his request for military help. He further informed the Governor-General that it was his intention to set up an interim government at once and to ask Sheikh Abdullah to carry the responsibilities in this emergency with Mehr Chand Mahajan, his Prime Minister. He concluded by saying that if the State was to be saved, immediate assistance must be available at Srinagar. He also signed the Instrument of Accession . . .

With the Instrument of Accession and the Maharajah's letter I flew back at once to Delhi. Sardar [Patel] was waiting at the aerodrome and we both went straight to a meeting of the Defence Committee which was arranged for that evening. There was a long discussion, at the end of which it was decided that the accession of Jammu and Kashmir should be accepted, subject to the proviso that a plebiscite would be held in the State when the law and order situation allowed. It was further decided that an infantry battalion should be flown to Srinagar the next day.<sup>23</sup>



But it seems that while Menon tried to get to Jammu on that Sunday, he didn't manage it, and that whatever ministerial discussions took place, there was no formal evening meeting of the Indian cabinet's defence committee. What is more, the maharaja did not reach Jammu after his arduous road journey from Srinagar until late in the day. Menon's account, to put it bluntly, is misleading.

An enormous amount of scholarly energy has been put into tracking the movements of the cast of the Kashmir accession drama on the crucial days in question. The consensus now of the most detailed historical accounts, those generally sympathetic to India as well as those better disposed to Pakistan, is that Menon did not reach Jammu on 26 October, and so could not have secured the maharaja's signature on the instrument of accession in the manner he described.<sup>24</sup> The testimony of Alexander Symon, Britain's deputy high commissioner in New Delhi, is of particular importance. Symon tried to see Menon before he flew to Jammu that afternoon. 'I was told that the aeroplane was leaving from Palam aerodrome to which place I went at once. I found Mr Menon on the point of returning to Delhi because he had left it too late for the aeroplane to reach Kashmir before nightfall. I arranged with Mr Menon to see him at his house at 5 p.m.' When Symon called on V.P. Menon at the appointed time, an hour and a half after their encounter at Palam, Menon said that 'he would leave next morning for Jammu and would be returning by lunch-time next day'. At 4 the following afternoon, Symon noted that he had 'telephoned to Mr V.P. Menon's office a few minutes ago but was told that he had not yet returned from Jammu'.<sup>25</sup>

The account of Kashmir's prime minister, M.C. Mahajan, also contradicts V.P. Menon's version of events. 'The Cabinet meeting in the evening [of 26 October],' Mahajan wrote in his autobiography, 'affirmed the decision of the Defence Council to give military aid to the Maharaja to drive out the tribesmen':

Around dinner time, the Prime Minister [Nehru] sent a message to me that with Mr V.P. Menon, I should fly to Jammu to inform the Maharaja of this decision and also get his signature on certain supplementary documents about the accession. I frankly informed him that I was not prepared to go to Jammu till I got news from my aerodrome officer at Srinagar that the Indian forces had landed there. Panditji did not insist and said, 'You can fly to Jammu next morning.'<sup>26</sup>

And that's what Mahajan and Menon did. Mahajan was staying in Delhi at the home of India's defence minister, Baldev Singh:

In the early hours of the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup>, I could hear the noise of the planes flying over Sardar Baldev Singh's house and carrying the military personnel to Srinagar. At about 9 A. M. I got a message from the aerodrome officer of Srinagar that troops had landed there and had gone into action. On receipt of this message, I flew to Jammu with Mr V.P. Menon . . . . After some discussion, formal documents were signed which Mr. Menon took back to New Delhi . . .<sup>27</sup>

This suggests that the accession papers were signed a day later than the Indian official version states, once Indian troops were already on the ground in Srinagar. The implication is that V.P. Menon doctored his account of securing the instrument of accession to make it fit with the already widely circulated Indian official narrative that the maharaja had signed the document before the military airlift began.

It's not quite that simple. The Indian writer and historian Prem Shankar Jha has written a detailed account of the crisis which both accepts that V.P. Menon did not travel to Jammu on 26 October and asserts that Kashmir's maharaja did sign before the airlift. He argues that Menon persuaded the maharaja to sign the instrument of accession late on 25 October or in the 'first hours' of the following day, before the royal family left Srinagar. Menon brought the document with him to Delhi the next morning, Jha suggests, but did not present it formally to the defence committee because of a difference between Nehru and his deputy, Sardar Patel. While Patel wanted Kashmir's accession as soon as possible, and was happy to talk about political reform later, Nehru insisted that the maharaja should commit himself to bring Sheikh Abdullah into government as a condition of receiving Indian help. So Menon kept quiet about the maharaja signing the accession, concerned that Nehru would reject it if not accompanied by a clear statement of intent about the future government of the state, and returned to Jammu on Monday, 27 October, to get the maharaja's signature to a covering letter sufficient to reassure Nehru. It was a 'Byzantine intrigue in the Indian government'. In the meantime, the maharaja's clear intention to accede to India, and the pleadings of both M.C. Mahajan and Sheikh Abdullah, were sufficient to convince Nehru, and through him the defence committee, of the need for an immediate despatch by air of Indian troops.



Jha's account, while not entirely implausible, has the feel of facts being pulled and squeezed to fit a hypothesis. There was certainly a sharp difference of emphasis on Kashmir between Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru. While Patel developed a cordial and strong relationship with the maharaja, Nehru had little time for him and saw Sheikh Abdullah as the embodiment of hopes for a democratic and stable Kashmir. But given the urgency of the despatch of Indian troops to safeguard Kashmir and save Srinagar (which, as Mountbatten was keenly aware, had up to 400 British residents among its population of approaching a quarter of a million), and Mountbatten's emphasis on the constitutional propriety of securing accession before sending troops, it would have been remarkable for Menon to sit through a meeting of the defence committee without mentioning his success with the maharaja, to the extent of being party to an instruction to prepare a document that he knew had already been signed.

Jha points to several accounts which he suggests support the notion that the maharaja of Kashmir signed the accession document before leaving Srinagar. Those of Mountbatten's press attaché, Alan Campbell-Johnson, and of Mahajan are, respectively, fleeting and inconsistent on this crucial point. The evidence in which Jha reposes most faith is that of Colonel Manekshaw, who accompanied Menon to Srinagar. Manekshaw says of that visit: 'Eventually the Maharaja signed the accession papers and we flew back in the Dakota late at night.' He added: 'I did not see the Maharaja signing it, nor did I see Mahajan. All I do know is that V.P. Menon turned around and said, "Sam, we've got the Accession."' <sup>28</sup> Manekshaw's reminiscences, however, set down forty-seven years after the event, are so unreliable on other matters which are not in controversy—notably the day on which Indian troops were sent into Kashmir, and the location of the tribal invaders at the time of his visit—that it is hazardous to place too much reliance on them.

And then there is the simple objection of the evidence of the document itself. The whereabouts of the original instrument of accession has at times been unclear. A copy of the crucial page bearing Maharaja Hari Singh's and Lord Mountbatten's signatures was published in the 1970s as a frontispiece to a volume of Sardar Patel's correspondence. More recently, the entire document has been posted on the Indian ministry of home affairs website, though it remains unavailable for detailed inspection. <sup>29</sup> The maharaja's signature is unambiguously dated 26 October. It could have been signed in the early hours of 26 October, just as the maharaja was leaving his capital. But the letter accompanying the instrument of accession, also dated 26 October, was written from The





Palace, Jammu, which the maharaja only reached quite late in the day. It is easier to imagine Menon prevailing on the maharaja to append a date a day earlier than that of the signature to help India's case, rather than to envisage the circumstances in which the maharaja would post-date his signature.

Sir Hari Singh's letter to Mountbatten was a powerfully expressed plea for help. 'The number of women who have been kidnapped and raped makes my heart bleed. The wild forces thus let loose on the State are marching on with the aim of capturing Srinagar, the Summer Capital of my Government, as a first step to overrunning the whole State.' The maharaja sought India's help and confirmed his decision to join India, stating: 'I attach the Instrument of Accession for acceptance by your Government. The other alternative is to leave my State and my people to freebooters.' He expressed his intention to set up an interim government and ask Sheikh Abdullah to 'carry the responsibilities in this emergency' along with Kashmir's prime minister. The letter was quite probably written in Delhi, under the instructions issued by the defence committee, on the assumption that Menon would meet the maharaja on 26 October, and carried by Menon when he eventually went to Jammu the following day. If Hari Singh signed this letter on the Monday and acquiesced in it being dated the previous day, it is entirely feasible that he did the same with the accompanying instrument of accession.

Certainly Nehru clearly acted at the time as if the maharaja's signature was secured by V.P. Menon in Jammu on 27 October. On that day, Nehru wrote to the maharaja:

Shri V.P. Menon returned from Jammu this evening and informed me of the talks there. He gave me the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement which you had signed, and I saw also your letter to the Governor General of India. Allow me to congratulate you on the wise decisions that you have taken.<sup>30</sup>

Nehru's letter to Sheikh Abdullah of the same day also mentioned that 'V.P. Menon came back from Jammu this evening bringing the agreement for accession . . . duly signed by the Maharaja of Kashmir.' It's impossible to pronounce with certainty, but the weight of evidence is that the maharaja had not formally signed up to India when the first Indian troops landed at Srinagar. He probably signed within a few hours of the beginning of the airlift. But the soldiers of the Sikh Regiment who spearheaded the operation were not, it seems, landing on Indian territory.<sup>31</sup>



The wording of Mountbatten's response to the maharaja's accession has also occasioned lasting controversy. It has often been described—at the time and subsequently—as a provisional, or conditional, or temporary acceptance of Kashmir's accession:

... my Government have decided to accept the accession of Kashmir State to the Dominion of India. Consistently with their policy that, in the case of any State where the issue of accession has been the subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the State, it is my Government's wish that, as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and her soil cleared of the invader, the question of the State's accession should be settled by a reference to the people.

A few days later, Nehru pledged a plebiscite in Kashmir under international auspices. The idea was later taken up at the United Nations, and enshrined in Security Council resolutions. The plebiscite has never been held. While this means that Mountbatten's intention was frustrated, it does not invalidate Kashmir's accession to India. Intriguingly, the issue of a plebiscite to confirm accession was discussed at the cabinet's defence committee meeting on the morning of Sunday, 26 October—and the minutes record that the option of an independent Kashmir was still being discussed. 'It was agreed that when the accession was accepted this should be subject to the proviso that a plebiscite would be held in Kashmir when the law and order situation allowed this. The Governor-General suggested that this plebiscite should be on three questions—to join India—to join Pakistan—or to remain independent . . . The Prime Minister said that the Government of India would not mind Kashmir remaining an independent country under India's sphere of influence.'<sup>32</sup> That's about the last that was heard in Delhi, or Karachi, about an independent Kashmir.

Both India and Pakistan have always been inclined to think the worst of each other over Kashmir. Both have developed elaborate conspiracy theories to depict the other as having long-planned military ambitions on Kashmir, stretching back well before the crisis of late October 1947. The Pakistani authorities were infuriated by India's airlift to Srinagar—which they heard about at the same time as news of Kashmir's accession to India. Jinnah was reluctant to accept that the airlift had been planned and organised within forty-eight hours—an achievement which Mountbatten described as without parallel in his military experience—and suspected a much longer history to the operation. To counter that,



Mountbatten asked the heads of all three wings of India's armed forces, at that time all British, to make a signed statement about the origins of the airlift, which he showed to Jinnah when they met in Lahore on 1 November. The chiefs of staff recorded:

On 24<sup>th</sup> October the C-in-C, Indian Army, received information that tribesmen had seized Muzaffarabad. This was the first indication of the raid.

Prior to this date, no plans of any sort for sending Indian forces into Kashmir had been formulated or even considered. . . .

On the afternoon of 26<sup>th</sup> October we finalised our plans for the despatch by air of troops to Kashmir.

At first light on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> October, with Kashmir's Instrument of Accession signed, the movement by air of Indian forces to Kashmir began.<sup>33</sup>

The commander-in-chief of the Indian Army, General Rob Lockhart, had received news of the tribal incursion by telegram from the headquarters of the Pakistan army—one of the most astonishing military aspects to the crisis was the level of liaison between senior British officers in the two armies. When he and the air force chief, Air Marshal Elmhirst, briefed the cabinet's defence committee on 26 October, they offered a litany of reasons why an immediate airlift of a battalion of Indian troops to Srinagar was a 'considerable military risk'—there was the issue of the availability of transport aircraft, they couldn't be sure that the Srinagar airfield would still be secure by the time planes arrived, the operation would divert military effort from relief work in Punjab, it would be difficult to supply a battalion once in Srinagar, it would not be able to take motor transport, and would be an insufficient force in the event of a 'general popular uprising' in Kashmir.

The operation was not for the faint-hearted. It was by far the most adventurous, ambitious, logistically complex, and politically risky military operation that India had undertaken since the transfer of power—the first real military test for independent India. The committee minutes give some indication of how the discussion was resolved. 'Finally, General Lockhart asked to what extent the Kashmir situation was vital to India. The Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister both stated that the future of Kashmir was vital to India's very existence.'

The initial plan was to despatch to Kashmir a unit of the Gurkha Rifles. This posed two problems. The defence committee greatly preferred

sending an Indian battalion rather than Nepalese troops. And the Gurkhas had a number of British officers, raising the prospect of a row with London. The supreme commander to whom chiefs of staff in both India and Pakistan reported in the initial months of independence, Field Marshal Auchinleck, was busy reassuring the ministry of defence in London that in 'no circumstances will British forces be used for operational purposes to assist either Dominion in Kashmir or elsewhere. Orders to this effect have been in force since 15<sup>th</sup> August.'<sup>34</sup> So the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Sikh Regiment, which was then deployed at Gurgaon just outside Delhi, was drafted in. There was later some criticism, certainly from London, that Sikh soldiers were deployed in Kashmir against Muslim tribesmen who had a particular animosity towards Sikhs because of their perceived role in the communal slaughter in Punjab. It was seen as throwing fuel on the fire. But given the time constraints, India's chiefs of staff didn't have much option.

A signal to prepare for an airlift to Srinagar was sent to Lieutenant Colonel Ranjit Rai of the First Sikhs. That was followed by a detailed operational order, which reflected the uncertainty about the military situation Indian troops would find on arrival:

1. It is understood KASHMIR is acceding to the INDIAN UNION and that SHEIKH ABDULLAH is being invited to form a popular Govt.
2. Tribesmen, numbers and arms unknown but reliably reported to be in large numbers, reported moving on SRINAGAR from W and NW areas of state. Situation in SRINAGAR reliably reported 26 OCT to be deteriorating. . . .
4. . . . On arrival SRINAGAR you will
  - (a) secure SRINAGAR airport and civil aviation wireless station
  - (b) take such action as your first task and available troops allow to
    - (i) drive tribesmen away from SRINAGAR and
    - (ii) aid local Govt. in maintenance of law and order in SRINAGAR. . . .
16. If wireless com[municatio]n between you and SRINAGAR civil aviation centre is not established and you are not given the land signal, you will NOT land but go to JAMMU and land there. . . .
17. In the event of landing in JAMMU, you will . . . requisition local t[rans]p[or]t and send a recce on the route to SRINAGAR as close to SRINAGAR as it can go with safety and secure the route as far NORTH from JAMMU as possible.<sup>35</sup>



The troops were being despatched without any certainty that the security situation would allow the planes to land. Two Delhi airports, Palam and Willingdon, were used for the airlift. The First Sikhs were ordered to report to Palam airport at 4 a.m. on the morning of Monday, 27 October. The only planes suitable for the operation, given the modest nature of the Srinagar airstrip, were Dakotas. The Royal Indian Air Force did not have sufficient planes, so the defence ministry requisitioned DC3 Dakotas from civil airlines which as a result had to abandon most of their scheduled services around India. The military made use not only of civil planes, but also of pilots on contract to these airlines—so some of the early flights of Indian troops into Srinagar were flown by Australian, British and, it seems, American pilots. The British High Commission also organised an evacuation by air of British nationals from Srinagar, the planning for which—in a display of foresight not evident on the political front—had been under way for a couple of weeks.

Staff Officer S.K. Sinha was largely responsible for drawing up the operational order for the Sikh battalion, which their commander only received when he arrived at the airport, and for getting the initial detachment airborne. 'I arrived at Palam at about 3 a.m., an hour before the Sikhs were expected,' Sinha wrote in his military memoirs. 'With the cooperation of the aerodrome officials and some officers from the Delhi Area we started making arrangements for receiving the battalion. The aerodrome was floodlit to facilitate loading and we had tea ready for the troops. Ammunition, rations and ordnance stores were stacked at the airfield for issue to the unit. We were racing against time but fortunately things somehow worked all right and we had everything ready by the time Rai and his men arrived.' The first planes took off from Palam 'in the grey twilight' of dawn.<sup>36</sup> The Dakotas could carry at most seventeen men, with their personal arms, equipment and bedrolls, and a further 500 lbs of equipment. Major L.E.R.B. Ferris was on one of the early flights:

The air-lift flight to the Valley of Kashmir was a nightmare. There was no information of any sort available as to what exactly was happening, where the raiders were, what was the plan of action, what personal kit was due to be taken and a hundred other queries which remained unanswered. In short we just did not know what to expect . . . Aircraft from the various civil aviation lines were pressed into service. The luxury fittings were ripped out, comfortable chairs pulled out of their fixtures, and within minutes fully-armed troops clambered aboard—as many as could fit in . . . The flight itself was uneventful. One had to squat on the deck of the Dakota and





from such a position the windows were too high to look out and see the countryside below.<sup>37</sup>

The first plane touched down at Srinagar at around 9 that Monday morning. On board was Brigadier Hiralal Atal, who recalled that as the plane came in to land, the runway was thronged by people desperate to get a flight out of Srinagar. 'I was astonished to see a large multitude of human beings emerging as if from the earth; they had all taken cover—very effectively—in the nullahs and undulating ground surrounding the airport which was turf and not tarmaced.'

The Sikh troops began to land just an hour or two before the tribal forces attacked the Baramulla mission and killed one of their officers. The pilot of the first plane, fending off the would-be evacuees, took off from Srinagar to make a reconnaissance flight of the road to Baramulla, reporting back that 'there was no movement whatsoever on the road to Srinagar and that Baramulla was aflame in places and smouldering in others'. The plane's fuel tank was struck by a bullet, but the airlift of troops continued. By the end of the day, twenty-eight sorties had been flown and about 300 soldiers of the Sikh Regiment had reached Srinagar.<sup>38</sup> Some modest forces under the Sikh maharaja of Patiala had already been deployed in Kashmir, but the Patiala troops seem not to have been integrated into the Indian armed forces and Delhi appears to have been unaware of their presence or considered it of little consequence. The Sikhs who jumped out of their Dakotas onto the none-too-even ground of the Srinagar landing strip were the first operational Indian soldiers to reach Kashmir. This was the beginning of India's military presence in what has become its most disaffected state.

The news of India's military deployment in Kashmir ricocheted around the world. In London, the *Daily Express* and the *Times*, helped by the time difference, got a couple of sentences from a Reuter's news agency flash about the airlift of Sikh troops into their later editions on that same morning. The Indian newspapers had been hinting at Kashmir's likely accession. The *Hindustan Times* on 27 October pointed to the likelihood of an 'important statement' on Kashmir in the coming forty-eight hours. But they had to wait until the next day to trumpet the news of the airlift, with both the *Statesman* and the *Hindustan Times* opting for the same banner headline: 'Kashmir Accedes to India'. By then, the Sikh troops had reached the front line, and the optimistic—and misleading—headline in the *Times of India* read: 'Indian Troops Rolling

Back Kashmir Rebels'. The exchange of letters between the maharaja and Lord Mountbatten had been released to the press. And the *Times of India* quoted Sheikh Abdullah, on his way back from Delhi to Srinagar, as saying that Kashmir was in dire peril, and the first duty of every Kashmiri was to defend his motherland against the intruder.

If India was upbeat both about securing Kashmir's accession and the prospect of beating back the tribal raiders, the authorities in Pakistan were furious at India's military intervention. The Indian government was dilatory in informing Pakistan of its deployment in Kashmir. Jinnah was in Lahore with the governor of West Punjab, Sir Francis Mudie. The British high commissioner to Pakistan reported to London that 'until Col. Craster, Military Secretary to the Governor of West Punjab, heard the news of the despatch of Indian troops to Srinagar over the wireless on October 27, and took it in to Jinnah and Mudie after dinner, they knew nothing of it. Jinnah's first reactions are known to you.'<sup>39</sup>

Jinnah's reaction was to take a step of enormous moment—he ordered Pakistan's army into Kashmir. Not simply a few more officers to assist the tribesmen, but a full-scale military mobilisation. This could only mean war. As Nehru had put it in a letter to a colleague on 27 October: 'Kashmir has now formally acceded to the Indian Union and we have accepted that accession. This makes a big difference in the constitutional position and if Pakistan Army goes into Kashmir State anywhere it means war. I rather doubt if they will do this . . .'<sup>40</sup> At about the moment Nehru was committing that judgement to paper, Jinnah was trying to prove him wrong. The order to mobilise was made—through Sir Francis Mudie—to Pakistan's acting commander-in-chief General Douglas Gracey in Rawalpindi. He refused to obey, insisting first of all on consulting supreme headquarters in Delhi. There was a shouting match over the phone between Mudie and Gracey. The novelty of an army commander-in-chief refusing an order from his political master to mobilise until he had consulted with senior officers based in what could only be described in these circumstances as the enemy capital is astonishing.

Jinnah's instruction was to send Pakistani troops into Kashmir to seize Baramulla and the capital, Srinagar, to take the Banihal pass, the crucial strategic point on the road between Srinagar and Jammu, and to send forces into the Mirpur district where there was already an indigenous rebellion against the maharaja. Pakistan's army would not have required an airlift to reach Kashmir. Once orders had been issued and the logistics sorted out, the troops could have been in Kashmir within hours, well before

the Sikh Regiment had been able to muster in force and dig in effectively. At 1 at night, General Gracey phoned his supreme commander, Field Marshal Auchinleck, in Delhi, and told him of this dramatic turn of events. If pursued, the deployment of Pakistani troops in this manner would have entailed the issue of a 'stand down' order, the withdrawal of all British officers from both the Pakistan and Indian armies which—given Pakistan's acute shortage of senior officers, and staff officers in particular—would have been a very substantial blow.

The next morning, Auchinleck flew to Pakistan to meet Jinnah for what was certain to be a difficult and enormously sensitive meeting. India and Pakistan were on the brink of war. General Gracey travelled to Lahore from Rawalpindi. Sir George Cunningham came down from Peshawar. 'Found Government House LAHORE buzzing with Generals, including GRACEY, and a real flap,' he recorded in his diary. Auchinleck cabled a 'top secret' account of his talks to London later that day:

3. Met Jinnah who is in Lahore and discussed situation at length explaining situation vis a vis British officers very clearly. Gracey also emphasised military weakness of Pakistan while I pointed out incalculable consequences of military violation of what is now territory of Indian Union in consequence of Kashmir's sudden accession.
4. Jinnah withdrew orders but is very angry and disturbed by what he considers to be sharp practice by India in securing Kashmir's accession and situation remains explosive and highly dangerous in my opinion as further successes by irregular tribal forces now in Kashmir or massacre of Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir State by State Forces or Indian Union troops which are quite possible might so inflame feelings on both sides as to force open conflict. Control by Government in such circumstances likely to be ineffective . . .<sup>41</sup>

Still, for the moment, the crisis had eased, and Auchinleck was able to ring Mountbatten, at the time presiding over yet another meeting of the Indian cabinet's defence committee, to say that he had succeeded in persuading Jinnah to cancel the order for Pakistan's troops to be moved into Kashmir.

That averted the immediate prospect of war between India and Pakistan. But it did not imply that the Pakistan authorities were willing to accept the legitimacy of the maharaja's accession to India. Later in the





week, the Pakistan government issued a strongly worded communique alleging that 'the accession of Kashmir is based in fraud and violence and as such cannot be recognised'. And there was a real possibility that the Pakistan-backed tribal irregulars, because of their numerical superiority, might prevail against the still modest deployment of India's Sikh troops. As the airlift got under way, Lord Mountbatten, who had much more experience in war than any of the Indian cabinet, counselled Sardar Patel, India's deputy prime minister, of the military perils ahead. 'I must remind you,' he wrote, 'that the risk is great and that the chances of keeping the raiders out of Srinagar are not too good.' On that same day, Jawaharlal Nehru gave a graphic indication of the size of the stakes, declaring: 'It has become a test of our future.'<sup>42</sup>

