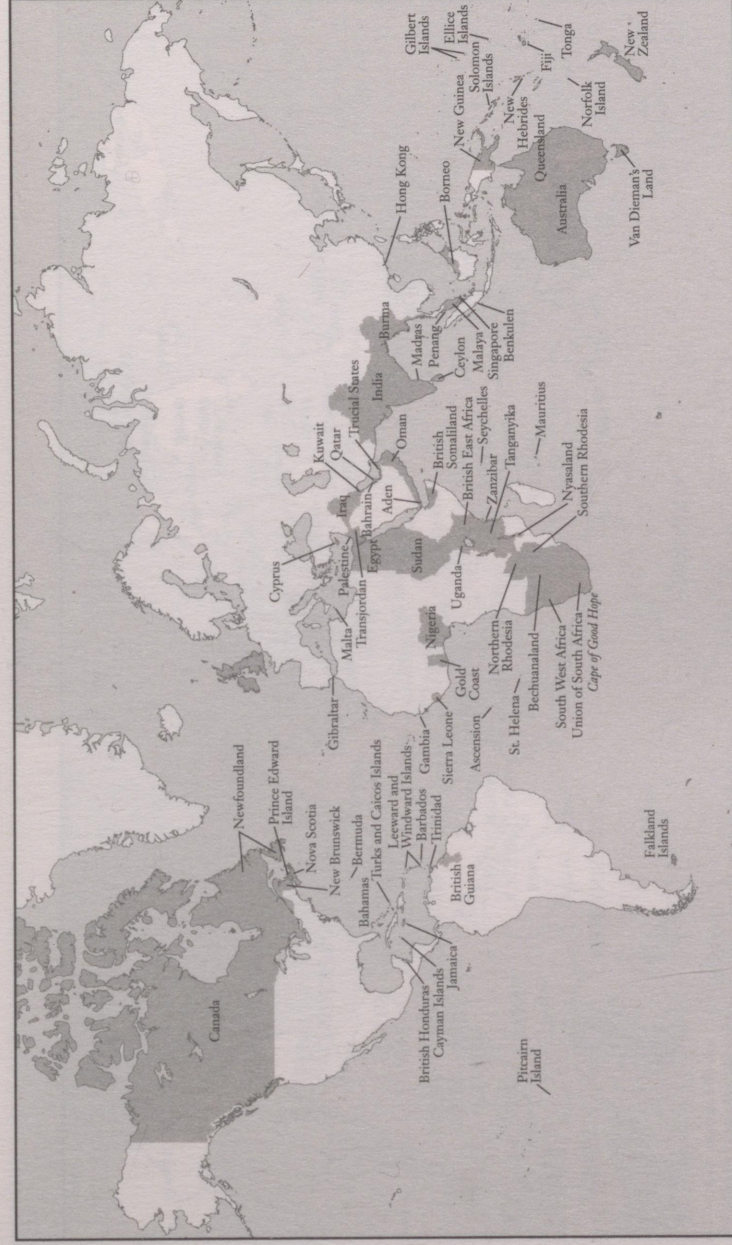
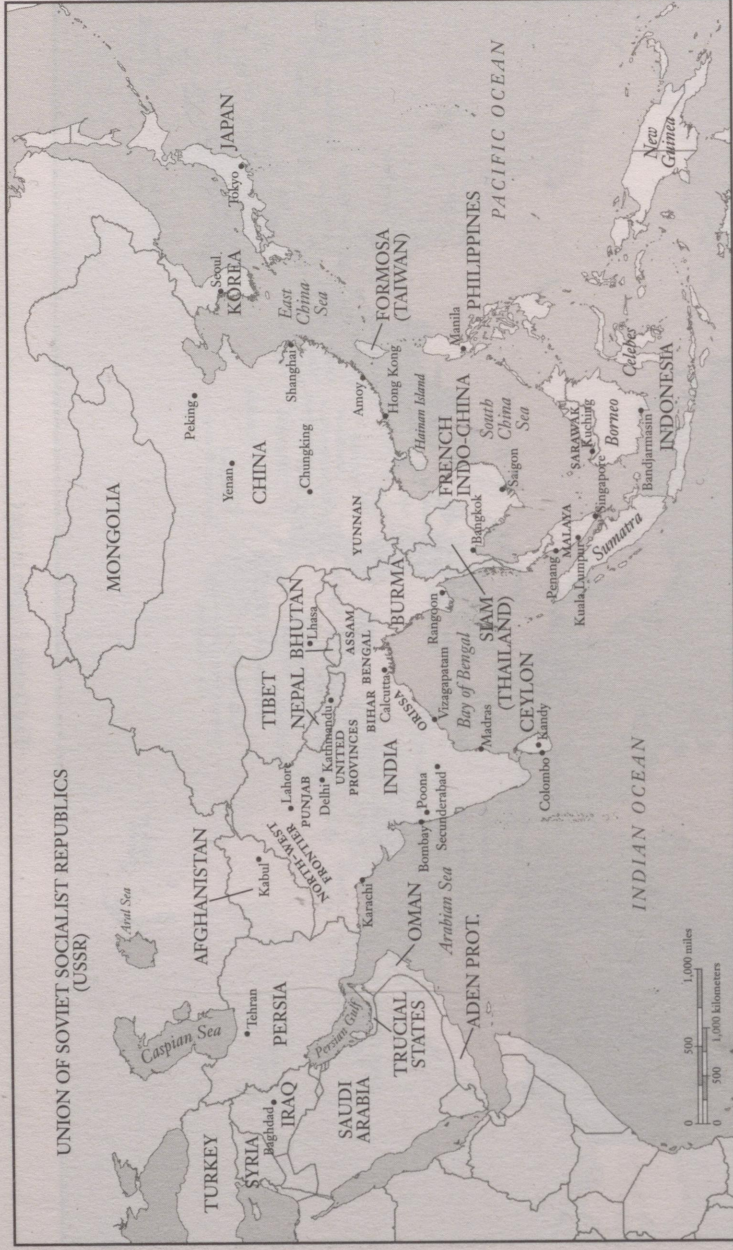


PART III

TRYSTS WITH DESTINY



The British Empire in 1945

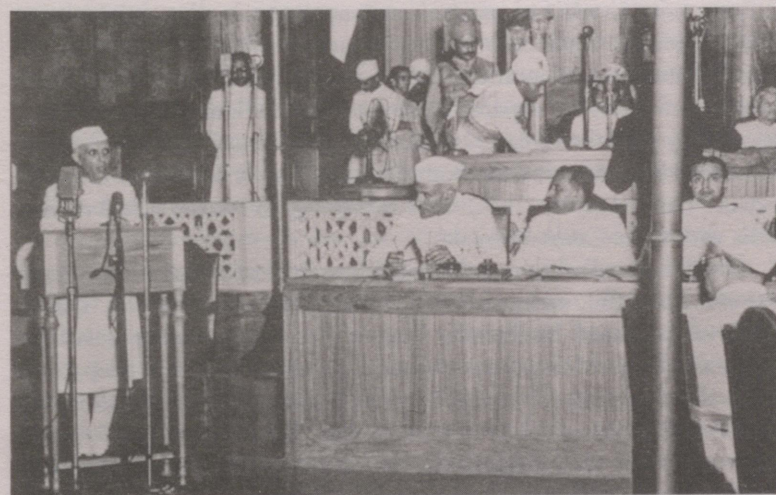


Asia in 1945



British states of emergency and main MI5 posts

On the evening of August 14, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru mesmerized India's Constituent Assembly with a speech that beckoned a future of hope and opportunity not only for India but for the entire colonized world. With his nation's independence hours away, Nehru appealed to the local and worldly sensibilities of the assembly members and reminded them that their collective dreams for the future transcended both time and place. "Long years ago," he proclaimed, "we made a



Jawaharlal Nehru delivering his "tryst with destiny" speech, August 14, 1947

tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially." As the soon-to-be prime minister continued with his historic speech, he exhorted his colleagues that "a moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity."¹

India was not the only nation facing a "tryst with destiny" in August 1947. Few were as keenly aware of Britain's imperial legacy, and its priorities, as Prime Minister Attlee and his cabinet. The nation's future economic and political standing in the new world order hinged on a postwar empire that refused to knuckle under to Britain's repressive tactics and its expanding policies of economic exploitation. Fueling the Labour government's discontent was the relentless criticism coming from the nation's wartime leader. Still bruised by his eviction from Downing Street two years earlier, Churchill hammered Attlee on India, calling the Labour Party's colonial policies Operation Scuttle.²

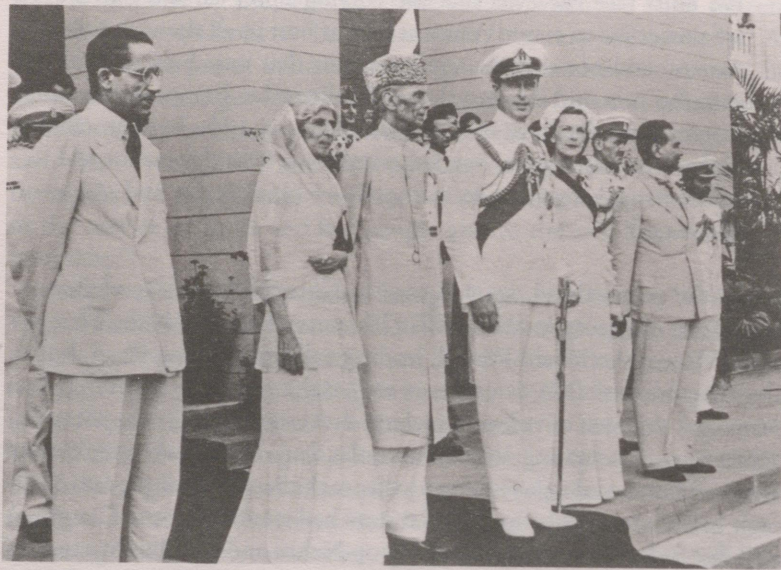
For Churchill, India was a deeply personal issue and one that stirred his emotions like no other part of the empire. His sing-along days in the North-West Frontier colored his recent memories of overseeing Cripps's failed mission to secure India's full cooperation and wartime support, endorsing violence to quell the Quit India movement, and refusing to send relief to millions of Bengalis hit by the region's worst famine since the eighteenth century. Thanks to Churchill's policies and practices and those of countless British governments before him, Attlee's government inherited a giant Southeast Asian tinderbox. It had worked desperately with the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, as thousands of soldiers from both the Indian Army and Bose's renegade Indian National Army (INA) were returning, to broker a deal to keep India within the Commonwealth.

Until the final months and weeks before Indian independence, much was still uncertain, except for Churchill's bombastic behavior. During Commons debates, he liberally berated Foreign Secretary Bevin and gutted the Labour Party for its imperial policies. "It is with deep grief I watch the clattering down of the British Empire, with all its glories and all the services it has rendered to mankind," Churchill bemoaned to his fellow members of Parliament. He issued orders reminiscent of his last-stand commands for the troops defending Singapore:

We must face the evils that are coming upon us, and that we are powerless to avert. We must do our best in all these circumstances, and not exclude any expedient that may help to mitigate the ruin and disaster that will follow the disappearance of Britain from the East. But, at least, let us not add—by shameful flight, by a premature, hurried scuttle—at least, let us not add, to the pangs of sorrow so many of us feel, the taint and smear of shame.³

In the pages ahead, we will turn to Churchill's "smear of shame," picking up our story in World War II's immediate aftermath. That was when Viceroy Archibald Wavell, leading a decimated Raj, faced the trials of "traitorous" INA detainees as well as the return of Britain's Indian Army and millions of refugees picking their way through the subcontinent's ruins. Enervating Wavell were the festering Hindu and Muslim divisions that had deepened during the war's chaos. Recall the fate of the Quit India movement: the colonial state had snuffed out the Congress's civil disobedience campaign, locking up Nehru and Gandhi for much of the war. The Muslim League's Muhammad Ali Jinnah, however, did not join the protest and remained a steadfast British ally during wartime, convincing both the Raj and Muslim opinion that Hindu dominance was the real threat. Jinnah, like Nehru, was an Anglicized product of empire, disarming Raj officials with his Saville Row suits and silk ties, barrister credentials, clean-shaven look, and secular practices—he drank whiskey and rarely went to mosque. With the Lucknow Pact in 1916, he had been declared "the Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity," though his relationship with Gandhi, who was committed to a unified India, was a complex one. Gandhi's spiritualism irked him because it fed religious chauvinism, including Jinnah's own. During the Second World War, Jinnah had demanded that Muslims have their own state, even though it was unclear, even to him, what that meant.⁴

In Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, delivered around the same time as Nehru's "tryst with destiny" speech, he likened his new nation's religious tolerance to that of Britain's. "Roman Catholics and Protestants persecuted each other," he noted. But "what exists now is that every man is a citizen, an equal citizen of Great Britain, and they are all members of the Nation." Even as sectarian blood was spilling across newly created Pakistan and India, he continued without pause: "Thank God, we are not starting in those days [of persecutions]. . . . We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination,



Lord Louis Mountbatten handing over power to Muhammed Ali Jinnah, August 1947

no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle: that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one State."⁵ Gandhi called him "an evil genius."⁶

Britain had its own postwar designs. Despite Churchill's invectives to the contrary, India's pending freedom did not portend a sweeping moment of liberation for the rest of the empire, or so the Labour government repeated often and forcefully. On this point, Attlee's cabinet was unequivocal: "withdrawal from India need not appear to be forced upon us by our weakness nor to be the first step in the dissolution of the Empire."⁷ Instead, for Bevin and others, imperial priorities were in the Middle East and other parts of the empire equally coveted for their commodity production and geopolitical advantages. The foreign secretary and his successors, both Labour and Conservative, often promoted Churchill's policies of partnering with "suggestible princes and pashas," as opposed to the younger nationalist elements that the United States promoted in the oil-rich countries of the Gulf, Africa, and Southeast Asia.⁸ Such continuities, however, betrayed a tone deafness to the post-

war era and rested on the false assumption that wartime loyalties, as concocted as they were real, would carry on unaffected by the experiences of the war itself.

Just as Labour inherited an imperial ethos and framework from its predecessors, it was also poised to deploy the tools of repression that had evolved for decades across the empire. In some ways, British responses to local demands for freedom and authority scarcely deviated from those unleashed in Palestine's Arab Revolt. The Emergency Powers Order in Council of 1939 enabled colonial officials to deploy a legalized lawlessness similar to the policies and practices that had unfolded in the late 1930s Mandate. "The Emergency Regulations were continually being added to and tightened up," Palestine's postwar chief secretary Henry Gurney wrote, "so that in the end it might almost have been said that the whole book of regulations could have been expressed in a simple provision empowering the High Commissioner to take any action he wished."⁹

Britain also had new arrows in its quiver of imperial repression and destruction. Mass movements of prisoners of war—which included screening, categorizing, and implementing policies of reward and punishment—had evolved during the war and were poised to transform imperial battlefronts. The empire would soon witness the largest mass movement of civilians since the era of the transatlantic trade in enslaved peoples, as Britain introduced draconian methods of population control, surveillance, and interrogation to suppress revolts in such colonies as Malaya and Kenya. Its officials also enacted extraordinary measures to sidestep evolving human rights norms while attempting to reconcile the logics of violence that had animated liberal imperialism since the nineteenth century.

British practices of systematized violence were to be expunged from the imperial record. Plumes of document ashes littered India's independence day ceremonies, but they would recede in future end-of-empire exits. It was not that British agents of empire disengaged from wide-scale document destruction; rather, like the violence they inflicted on local populations, they became better at covering them up. As their nation faced its own "tryst with destiny" in the postwar years, British officials around the globe embarked on processes of document removal and destruction that reflected an increasingly secret Cold War government and further shaped the myths of British imperial benevolence and triumph.

Glass Houses

To use the past to justify the present is bad enough—but it's just as bad to use the present to justify the past. And you can be sure that there are plenty of people to do that too: it's just that we don't have to put up with them.

Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*¹

After enduring days of interrogation in New Delhi's Red Fort, Dharam Chand Bhandari offered little to those who sought answers from him. Interrogators demanded to know why he had defected from His Majesty's troops, and what exactly he had undertaken during his four years as a member of Subhas Bose's renegade army that the British had dubbed the "Jiffs," a term synonymous with "traitors."² Tight-lipped on most questions, Bhandari conceded that events he had witnessed in Singapore ignited his commitment to the Indian National Army and the future Azad Hind, the provisional government of Free India that had allied itself with the Axis. When the Malay Peninsula fell, Bhandari had joined the INA and directed propaganda at the Japanese prisoner of war camp, just north of Singapore. His job: to write and stage plays for prisoners that encouraged their "National Spirit." Dramas such as *Ek Hi Rasta* (*The Only Way*), *Milap* (*Unity*), and *Balidan* (*Sacrifice*) were "popular and effective at winning new recruits for the INA," according to Bhandari. Under British interrogation, another INA detainee recalled *Ek Hi Rasta's* message of "how Indians were treated with torture and brutality under the British yoke through the Indian Police" as particularly compelling.³

But it was a tattered copy of Bhandari's most coveted, and confiscated, document—*The Rani of Zamsbi: A Play in Three Acts*—that revealed the depths to which Bose's followers had deployed Britain's past to recruit soldiers. Set in 1857, the play gave life to the queen (*rani*) of the princely state of Jhansi, a leading figure in the Mutiny. The rani of Jhansi also lent her title to an eponymous regiment, an all-female unit that was "a feat unique and unparalleled in world history," according to the play. In its opening act, an illiterate weaver defines the Raj's arc of repression and uses a historical counternarrative that dispelled any ideas of future partnership:

You came as petty hawkers and now you pose yourself to be a Government? What kind of Government? Which Government? An impertinent vagabond called Clive came here a hundred years ago to work on a job of two hundred rupees a month, and he treacherously ruined Sirajuddaula. Warren Hastings forged a document himself and hanged Nandkumar a wealthy citizen of Bengal for it. He starved the Begums of Oudh in a locked room and extorted all their wealth from them. . . . Is this what you call your Government? Speak out . . . speak out!⁴

INA propagandists, literary and otherwise, were well aware of their army's significance. Since the uprising against the Raj in 1857, the INA spearheaded the only other mass armed rebellion against British imperial rule.

By the time of his interrogation in August 1946, Bhandari was one of eighteen thousand surrendered or captured INA members whom Raj officials transported back to India and locked up.⁵ For many detainees like Bhandari, interrogations continued for months after Japan's surrender in August 1945, which coincided with Bose's death in a plane crash on the Japanese-held island of Formosa (today Taiwan). The plane's impact had created a firestorm, and Bose stumbled out of the aircraft in a ball of flames. With third-degree burns covering much of his body, the forty-eight-year-old "Revered Leader" reportedly spoke of India's independence until he succumbed to his injuries several hours later. The Japanese soon cremated his charred remains, which they sent back to Tokyo for interment.⁶

When news of Bose's death spread, shock and sorrow overcame his war-weary and traumatized supporters. The "Nightingale of India," Sarojini Naidu—who had been imprisoned with thousands of other Quit India protesters—wrote movingly of Bose's contributions to India. An

esteemed Congress leader and poet, Naidu had opposed Bose's chosen path to freedom. Nevertheless, she emoted a "deep personal bereavement" that she shared with "myriads of men and women." "His proud, importunate and violent spirit was a flaming sword forever unsheathed in defense of the land he worshiped with such surpassing devotion," she wrote in a form of public eulogy. "A greater love hath not man than this, that he lay down his life for his country and his people."⁷ Naidu's stirring words for the "Revered Leader" transcended wartime loyalties for countless Raj subjects. Bose was now a martyr.

That some within Britain's military establishment were disconnected from their Indian troops and the toll that the war had taken on them was thrown into relief as INA detainees awaited prosecution. Military brass seemed impervious to the Indian Army's hardships and the war's impact on their nationalist sentiments. The troops had endured the conflict's strain and deprivations without respite. Most of the Indian Army's 2.5 million men were deployed for over three years, and few had had any leave for two. An estimated ninety thousand were killed or wounded. At fifty psychiatric centers in India, Burma, and Ceylon, mental health professionals chronicled "massive psychological dysfunction."⁸ For Britain's loyal Indian soldiers, the war did not end with Japan's surrender. Some were deployed to Indonesia and Indochina to help Britain's Dutch and French allies restore order. In November 1945 Britain deployed the Indian Army for the last time in combat: it launched twenty-four thousand troops and two dozen tanks and aircrafts to carry out a massive assault on the Indonesian city of Surabaya. Yet rapid demobilization did not follow. As of the spring of 1946, the army still had two brigades in the Middle East and Japan, and one brigade in Hong Kong, as well as four divisions in Burma and Indonesia, three divisions in Malaya, and one division in Borneo and Siam. Only 20 percent of its forces were demobilized, and it would take until April 1947 to run its numbers down to half a million.⁹

Wartime had taken an incalculable toll. Across the "Great Crescent" of Southeast Asia that stretched from Calcutta in the north to Singapore in the south, soldiers had borne witness to liberal imperialism's weaknesses and been subsumed in its physical and mental destructions.¹⁰ In Burma and Malaya, hundreds of thousands of refugees staggered home to a postwar landscape riddled with hunger, cholera, and tuberculosis. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Congress's general secretary, observed that "entire cities, children, the old, animals and all have been wiped out. What a demonstration of the limitless cruelty of Western civilization."¹¹ The Indian Army experienced such cruelties firsthand, and

they did not abate in the postwar years. In Malaya, a rapacious British Military Administration impressed local laborers to rebuild infrastructure and what was left of "Fortress Singapore." British officials threatened half-starved workers with force and enticed them with illegally trafficked opium. Widespread addiction resulted. Every six months, the British government went through 50 million opium grains, which were recognizable because of their uniquely colored hue. Inflation on a scale rivaling that of Weimar Germany crushed already decimated local economies, and basic staples like rice sold for thirty to forty times their prewar prices. British and Commonwealth troops controlled local black markets and openly flaunted their profits and corrupt practices. Local populations that had been left behind during Britain's 1942 evacuation were again treated as the empire's castaways. "The army," in the words of one European observer, "behaved as if they were in conquered territory," and any British moral authority that remained in the region evaporated.¹² Britain's empire in Southeast Asia, the one that was to serve as a springboard for the nation's domestic economic recovery, not to mention the maintenance of its Big Three status alongside the United States and Soviet Union, looked nothing like the empire of British nationalist imaginations.

When demobilized soldiers finally reached India, their pay was a pittance, in the face of skyrocketing prices. The Raj instituted rationing, and black marketers peddled basic necessities. Starvation conditions continued to haunt populations, particularly in Bengal, where survivors of the famine still littered the streets and scavenged for food, wearing nothing but rags. Memories of bloated and rotten corpses scarred cities and villages. While many in the army were Punjabi, Britain's callousness had grossly contributed to the deaths of 3 million Bengalis in 1943-44, as was widely known, as were the Raj's racialized views of India's population. At the time, Secretary for India Amery accused Churchill of having a "Hitler-like attitude" toward the entire lot, though he himself insisted that the famine was the result of some kind of Malthusian dilemma and refused to send relief.¹³ Nehru's sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, toured the famine-stricken region and observed "rickety babies with arms and legs like sticks; nursing mothers with wrinkled faces; children with swollen faces and hollow-eyes through lack of food and sleep; [and the] men exhausted and weary, walking skeletons."¹⁴ Much of the Indian Army refused to kowtow to British officers, who continued their paternalistic ways and whose sacrifices were scarcely on par with their own. That the war's damage transformed hundreds of millions of lives, and with

them nationalist sentiments, should have come as no surprise, and yet for many Britons, it did.

In this postwar context, the question of what to do with the INA detainees was a loaded one. Some Indians denounced Bose as "selfish, vain, [and] ruthless" and thought his followers should be sent to the gallows. Commander in Chief in India Claude Auchinleck thought the INA's alleged use of torture, and the brutal treatment it reportedly meted out to those who refused to join its ranks, were bridges too far. They were, but such allegations were mired in Britain's version of events: only harsh measures could have compelled Indian Army members to redirect their loyalties away from the empire toward Bose's traitorous regime. Indian grassroots support and that of the demobilized Indian Army, which was 2 million strong, were undeniable, however, and transcended sectarian divisions. Ultimately, the Raj asserted itself as the arbiter of what constituted legitimate violence. The irony of Britain claiming legal authority to parse differences between legitimate and illegitimate violence was not lost on its colonial subjects.¹⁵

In November 1945 Raj officials decided, after much deliberation, to release INA detainees who had only violated their oath and rebelled against His Majesty's government. They focused, instead, on prosecuting the seven thousand "black" detainees who had allegedly committed illegal acts of violence, which included flogging, torture, and murder. INA officers were the first in the dock. Recently released Congress leaders denounced Britain for contemplating such a move, though not necessarily because of their full-throated support for Bose's officers. Nehru thought they were "misguided," though "patriots" nonetheless. His bigger concern, and one that other Congress leaders shared, was losing control of a population that had ignited "mass glorification" campaigns of INA support across the Raj, particularly in Bengal. To maintain authority and capitalize on the moment, Congress leaders rode the detainees' popular support wave, turning unified anticolonial outrage into an electoral advantage.¹⁶

It was in Bengal, the site of quotidian violence for decades, that postwar tensions manifested in anti-British protests. "Long live the revolution!" could be heard as locals sought to avenge over two centuries of rapes, village burnings, crowd shootings, and widespread famine, for which the British were responsible. Hadn't the British in Bengal been as bad as the Nazis? locals queried. The press demanded to know: "Will the UN have the courage and the fairness to hold trials in India?" When INA detainees were released, crowds across India exuberantly welcomed

them as heroes. These moments of celebration often gave way to more anti-British protests and more violence and deaths at the hands of local police, who desperately tried to maintain some sense of order.¹⁷

During the war, Bose had cultivated broad-based religious support in his ranks, bringing together Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in opposition to British rule. The Raj's INA show trials were poised to ignite such unity, albeit temporarily, across India's postwar masses. As Japanese war criminals awaited their fates and Nazi officials were set for trial in Nuremberg, the Raj planned to make an example of Captain Shahnawaz Khan, Captain Prem Kumar Sehgal, and Lieutenant Gurbaksh Dhillon, putting them on trial for treason and for the execution and torture of INA soldiers trying to defect. The selection of these defendants—a Muslim, a Hindu, and a Sikh, respectively—was a British judgment error, feeding grassroots support that transcended religious differences. On November 5, 1945, the Raj prosecution opened its case against the accused INA officers at Red Fort in Delhi. The site of the trial, where the British had tried the last Mughal emperor after the 1857 Mutiny, was another miscalculation, sending the country into a memory-induced frenzy.¹⁸ The officers soon amassed a sizable defense fund thanks to the Congress's organizing efforts. The fund only grew when Indians in Delhi and across the Raj—and indeed throughout Southeast Asia—celebrated INA Week, honoring Bose and his followers for their defiance of British imperialism, which coincided with the start of the trial. The week culminated with INA Day, when locals closed shops and protests again turned violent. Nearly three days of protests left thirty people dead in Calcutta, and widespread disorder also erupted elsewhere across India.¹⁹

The Red Fort trial became a referendum on British rule and the international order enabling and legitimating it. Congress vigorously defended the accused, while its leadership, including Nehru, sat at the defense table. Indians outside the courtroom and across the subcontinent were mesmerized. Newspapers published the daily court transcripts, and the Raj's intelligence services reported widespread sympathy for the defendants, which seemed to grow by the day if the protests and violence were any measure of support. Defense tactics inside the courtroom zeroed in on liberal imperialism's moral and legal deficiencies and exposed further the folly of the prosecutions.

The defendants' lead counsel, Bhulabhai Desai, crafted a masterful argument, turning international law on its head by insisting it was not the preserve of European states. European empires were running roughshod over hundreds of millions of subjects, he said in his opening statement, while hiding behind their self-proclaimed role as the arbiter

of civilization and, with it, sovereignty. Why were "just wars" only those waged between sovereign European states? he asked. While the prosecution claimed that the British king-emperor's sovereign rule over India was unconditional, Desai demanded a full accounting of Western claims that denied subjugated populations the right to wage war. "International law in the question of war is not static," he insisted, and Europe's gate-keeping membership to the "law of nations" had "created a vicious circle, that [ensured] a subject race will remain in perpetuity a subject race. It can never make a legitimate war for the purpose of liberating itself."²⁰

Britain's moral failures and criminal deeds should be subject to legal scrutiny, Desai insisted. Shouldn't Lord Linlithgow also stand trial for the empire's famine-induced deaths of some 3 million Bengalis in 1943? Hadn't Percival handed over the Indians, and all His Majesty's subjects, to Yamashita when Singapore fell, and commanded them to "obey the orders of the Japanese in the way that you obeyed the British government. Otherwise you will be punished"? Hadn't foreign powers recognized the Azad Hind, much as some had recognized the United States of America in its infancy? Therefore, based upon Western precedent, the Azad Hind was an independent government with "recognition a proof . . . of statehood," and the INA was an independent army with the right to make war "for the liberation of its own countrymen."²¹ The British court ultimately rejected Desai's revisionist reading of international law and his challenge to Britain's unfettered sovereignty claims. It convicted the accused of rebellion against the king-emperor, though British officials never imposed the sentences of transportation for life, instead dishonorably discharging the officers from the Indian Army.²² "Any attempt to enforce the sentence," Auchinleck later confided, "would have led to chaos in the country at large and probably to mutiny and dissension in the Army, culminating in its dissolution."²³

Such dissension, however, was well under way. For all to see, the Red Fort trial exposed the Raj's inability to define what was and was not legitimate violence in the aftermath of the war, and its ripple effects betrayed Britain's inability to maintain repressive control. Quotidian civilian unrest was bad enough, but the military's breakdown of command revealed Britain's irreparable weakness. During the INA trials, members of the Royal Indian Air Force and Indian Army openly donated to the officers' defense fund and attended support rallies in full uniform. In early 1946 such support gave way to protests, if not outright mutinies, in the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Indian Navy. In January, an estimated fifty thousand men at fourteen air force stations across Southeast Asia protested their pitiable conditions and continued deployment

in Indonesia and throughout India; their call to arms soon spread across the empire, fueled in no small way by local presses, and strikes hit Royal Air Force bases as far afield as Gibraltar, Cairo, and Singapore.²⁴

Inspired by their air force counterparts, the Royal Indian Navy sailors on HMIS *Takwar* in Bombay launched their own massive protest against poor rations and continued racial discrimination. They marched through Bombay's streets holding aloft posters of Bose, demanding the release of the remaining INA detainees. Their ships flew Congress flags, as well as those of the Muslim League and the Communist Party. Demonstrations quickly spread across other vessels in Bombay's harbor and eventually to four hundred others in the subcontinent's seas. In total, thirty thousand men issued demands for demobilization, increases in pay, and the release of INA detainees. The massive outpouring of public support for the cause—which sparked further unrest—arguably had more to do with individual and communal anger over postwar conditions than with solidarity for the sailors' complaints. Protesters in Bombay and Karachi halted all commerce, burned trains and automobiles, and blocked streets. Were it not for the intervention of the Congress and the Muslim League, both of which feared a full-blown uprising that lacked direction and control, Raj officials would have needed to make good on their threats of force to quash the demonstrations, though whether they could have successfully snuffed them out was anyone's guess.²⁵

With some of its armed forces openly rebelling and protesting, and deeply unsure of the Indian Army's loyalty if it were asked to suppress the incipient mutinies, the Raj was done. Even if Attlee's government hadn't yet come to terms with this fact, local British officials saw the writing on the wall. Corresponding with his sister back home, one British observer remarked that he felt, while navigating through the streets of Calcutta, "rather like a Nazi officer must have felt walking along a Paris boulevard."²⁶ Ongoing British policies only exacerbated local anger and the communal tensions that were erupting alongside shows of INA solidarity. Lacking recourse to what sociologist Max Weber called a "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force," however legitimized through legalized lawlessness, the Raj could not carry on.²⁷

In the spring of 1945, Viceroy Archibald Wavell held a political conference in Simla to reconstitute his executive council; it collapsed when Jinnah insisted on having the Muslim League appoint Muslim representatives. The viceroy called for elections to form provincial governments and a central legislature that would restructure the constitution. The

results, announced in 1946, reflected a divided India where, for decades, political categories, a function of both British social engineering and indigenous responses to colonial rule, had arisen out of local religious affiliations and fed into the particularities of Indian society and politics. Congress won most of the non-Muslim seats, and the Muslim League took Punjab and Bengal and performed well with the Muslim populations in Bombay and Madras. Jinnah sold the election as a referendum on Pakistan, even if few had any idea of what that exactly meant territorially. The clear religious divisions between the parties brought a British delegation to India, hoping to negotiate a workable constitution and ultimately a transfer of power.²⁸

Again, Stafford Cripps arrived on the scene, recycling the distrust between British officials, the Congress, and the Muslim League. Nehru had not forgotten Cripps's failed wartime mission, or the years he and his fellow congressmen had spent locked up. Neither Congress nor the League could agree on major points of power sharing. Jinnah was "an obvious example of the utter lack of the civilised mind," Nehru thought. "What I am afraid of is . . . Gandhi," Jinnah confided to a friend. "He has brains and always [tries] to put me in the wrong. I have to be on guard and alert all the time."²⁹ Once more Cripps's mission was a failure.

No sooner had Britain's delegation exited than Jinnah called a Direct Action Day for August 16, demanding an "end [of] British slavery" and committing to "fight the contemplated caste-Hindu domination."³⁰ What began as a mass Muslim protest against the British in Calcutta quickly morphed into one of India's worst rounds of sectarian violence. Known as the "Great Calcutta Killings," the massacres left at least six thousand Hindus and Muslims dead and another twelve thousand wounded. It took the government nearly three days to suppress the disorder, which never fully abated. Corpses littered the streets, and cholera soon claimed as many lives as the fratricidal violence. Beyond Bengal, over sixteen hundred industrial actions brought commerce in the Raj to a virtual standstill. In the countryside, peasants were armed and mobilized against the landowners and usurers who demanded forced labor in return for rents and loans. Protests over the 5,500 remaining INA detainees continued into early 1947. In the end, Viceroy Wavell and Commander in Chief Auchinleck had no choice but to concede. All but twenty INA detainees were released; only twelve were convicted.³¹

The viceroy knew the imperial project in India was over, imagining a rapid "breakdown plan" in the hope of getting British residents and the army out alive. That clear concession of British powerlessness got the "martial paternalist" recalled, though it was the pace of power's devolu-

tion, not the transition itself, that was at issue. Bevin wrote to the prime minister that the Raj government was "trying nothing except to scuttle out of it, without dignity or plan," and he was opposed to setting a fixed date for Britain's departure. "A scuttle it will be if things are allowed to drift," Attlee replied, chastening his foreign secretary for having no alternative plan. If the prime minister was going to salvage something of Britain's "good governance" record, then an orderly political handover had to be fashioned. On February 20, 1947, Attlee announced to Parliament a timetable for retreat, scheduling Britain's exit from India for June 1948. "It is quite clear we can't go on holding people down against their will, however incompetent they are to govern themselves," Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Dalton confided in his diary a few days after the announcement. "For the whole pace, as determined in the East, has quickened over the war years, and it would be a waste of both British men and money to try to hold down any of this crowd against their will. They must be allowed to find their own way, even blood and corruption and incompetence of all kinds, to what they regard as 'freedom.'"³²

As the Raj's last viceroy, Attlee appointed George VI's cousin, Admiral Lord Louis "Dickie" Mountbatten, who demanded "plenipotentiary powers," which he got. Mountbatten was a statesman, administrator, and military commander whose "irresistible charm" and dashing good looks gave physical expression to the Raj's idealized images back home. The high aristocrat was as comfortable with celebrities as he was with nationalists, and Attlee gave him until June 1948 to do what others couldn't: bring Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah to the bargaining table and maintain Britain's legacy with "some form of central Government for British India."³³ Mountbatten was known for his military style and swift judgments, attributes that some saw as both a strength and a weakness. "No man could get us out of a mess more quickly, or into one, than Mountbatten," one of his men recalled.³⁴

Mountbatten was no less impulsive as India's viceroy, quickly sizing Jinnah up as "a psychopathic case" and declaring there was no reconciling the Congress and the Muslim League. Shocking everyone, he announced August 15, 1947, as the date for the power transfer—a full ten months earlier than Attlee's deadline. Debate remains over why Mountbatten moved with unrepentant haste, but the author of *Midnight's Furies* Nisid Hajari's explanation is convincing: "Most raj officials were burned-out and cynical, and they had no interest in refereeing a civil war."³⁵ Partition had to happen, and happen quickly, before India's sectarian violence brought Britain down with it. Years later Attlee would offer his own views on Britain's accelerated departure, principal among

them, according to one interviewer, "the erosion of loyalty to the British crown among the Indian army and Navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji [Bose]."³⁶

Lacking coercive means to maintain power, Britain stumbled forward with its partition plan to create two new independent dominions within the Commonwealth. While British officials in London quibbled over George VI's future signature—would he sign as king-emperor, "George Rex Imperator," or merely as "George Rex"—Attlee pushed through legislation in Parliament that outlined provisional boundaries separating Pakistan from India until a boundary commission could determine which "Muslim majority . . . and non-Muslim majority districts" in the territory's northwestern Punjab and southeastern Bengal would be permanently part of the two new nations.³⁷

Mountbatten drafted Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who had never before set foot in India, as the commission's chair. Radcliffe's commission set to work, first carving up the Punjab and then twisting its bureaucratic knife through Bengal. Sequestered in Calcutta's Belvedere House, the draftsmen, beads of sweat dripping down their brows, endured the swelter of India's summer moisture that wept from Belvedere's impossibly tall ceilings, chandeliers, oil paintings, and gargantuan arched-window panes.



Belvedere House, Alipur, Calcutta (Kolkata), painting by William Prinsep, c. 1838

Everything about their work was imposing and historic. Even Belvedere, a whitewashed eighteenth-century palace built in Italian Renaissance style and set on thirty acres of tropical gardens, had reputedly been gifted by Mir Jafar, *nawab* of Bengal, to Warren Hastings, the mythologized consolidator of the British Empire, who had lived there until he was recalled to London in 1785 for his misconduct and eventual impeachment trial.

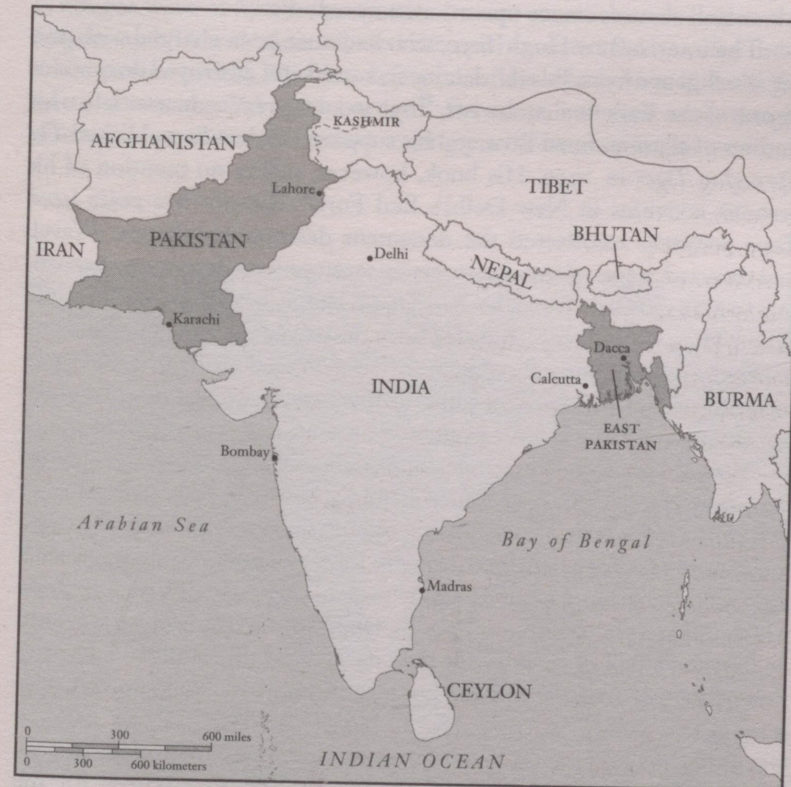
Sitting in Belvedere's Metcalfe Hall amid its massive Corinthian pillars supporting the room's wraparound interior balcony, the commission pored over maps and documents and heard testimonies from local political parties desperately trying to influence Radcliffe's decision making. His commission remarkably wrapped up its work ahead of schedule, and Radcliffe quickly slipped out of India while Mountbatten waited to release Pakistan and India's official boundaries until two days after independence, thinking it would slow down the massive population movements that were gaining chaotic momentum in anticipation of partition's official borders, which created, in Jinnah's words, "a mutilated and moth-eaten" nation-state pastiche.³⁸

Mountbatten's hubris and cold efficiency were staggering. In late July, Punjab's governor had reported to him that "feeling in Lahore is perhaps worse than it has ever been . . . daily fires, stabbings and bomb explosions." However, he insisted that "I think it will be wise to avoid postponing the relief of British troops for too long. It would be awkward if trouble on a large scale started while the relief was in progress." Mountbatten visited Lahore, where he would not permit British troops to help protect local populations, instead expediting the army's "relief."³⁹ By August, with sectarian violence poised to reach epic proportions, His Majesty's army in full retreat, and civilians evacuated, Britain prepared for its ceremonial transfer of power. On August 14 thousands flooded into New Delhi, where their new nation's tricolor flag would soon rise. There, too, were Mountbatten and his staff of colonial-clad officers. Having carefully choreographed their departure ceremony, Mountbatten and his men were a study in contrast with the exuberance that surrounded them. In physical comportment, they projected what their government at home sought to convey: that Britain was managing events not only in India but in the remaining empire as well.

Across radio waves in August 1947, Mountbatten could be heard reading George VI's message to India, Pakistan, his nation, and its vast, remaining empire: "Freedom loving people everywhere will wish to share in your celebrations, for with this transfer of power by consent comes the fulfillment of a great democratic ideal to which the British

and Indian peoples alike are firmly dedicated. It is inspiring to think that all this has been achieved by means of a peaceful change."⁴⁰ Britons also heard Jinnah's assurances of religious tolerance as well as the Cambridge-educated Nehru's eloquently clipped Edwardian words and were reassured that their nation's civilizing mission had been a resounding success.

After two hundred years of British rule, an orderly transfer of power was the coda to what Britain saw as the carefully tended record of civilizing triumph. Clearly colonial officials went to great lengths to shore up their nation's legacy, presenting evidence for it in the words of lofty speeches, in the reflection of Mountbatten's gilded epaulets, and in the jubilation of the independence day crowd in New Delhi, the force of



Partition of India, 1947

which broke through the specially cordoned area for colonial officials and subverted for one last time the pomp and circumstance of the British Raj.⁴¹ But in reality, one must imagine the lingering smell of char that infused the Indian summer air in 1947, the ash scattered along New Delhi's distant footpaths, and the weight of the smoke-filled sky that hung over India's independence day drama.

In the final days of the Raj, document pyres were the repositories of the British Empire's smoldering remains in India. In the infamous Red Fort's main courtyard, British agents dumped wheelbarrows full of files into bonfires that lit up New Delhi's skies for weeks. They culled, purged, and reduced to ash documents that, if they fell into the wrong hands, would embarrass His Majesty's government and undermine Britain's past, present, and future claims as the purveyor of moral authority throughout the world.⁴² Among these documents were untold numbers of intelligence files chronicling British interrogation systems and methods as well as surveillance operations across India.

The interrogator Hugh Toye, who had once been charged with prying intelligence from "black" detainees, sorted and destroyed documents as one of the Raj's final archivists. Toye would go on to memorialize his heroics of chasing down Bose and his supporters when he published *The Springing Tiger* in 1959. His book, however, makes no mention of his arsonist activities in New Delhi's Red Fort.⁴³ Twenty-five years later, Toye privately recollected the document destruction process. Wavell had directed some of it prior to his unceremonious departure. According to the viceroy's diary, he had an exchange with Nehru about the files. "They [Intelligence Bureau] have destroyed all the compromising papers," Nehru reportedly observed. "Yes," Wavell replied, "I told them to make sure of that."⁴⁴ According to the viceroy, Nehru then laughed, but whether it was a knowing one or a nervous one is anyone's guess.

Wavell and Toye were not alone. Officials in London were aware that their clumsy, rapid retreat from India left little time to dispose of two centuries' worth of documents. Such lessons would be carried into the empire's future where, according to the British government, colonial agents on the ground were to avoid "undesirable incidents such as those which apparently took place in New Delhi on the transfer of power in 1947 when a pall of smoke over the city marked the wholesale destruction of British archives and did nothing to improve Anglo-Indian relations at that time."⁴⁵

Other flames rose on the eve of India and Pakistan's independence. After his last day of ceremonial duties, Mountbatten retired for the evening with his wife, turning on Bob Hope's new romantic comedy,

My Favorite Brunette, to pass the time. As the final hours of British rule ticked away, terrifying scenes unfolded outside their well-guarded comfort at Viceroy House. In the months leading up to Partition, sectarian violence had spread, particularly in Punjab and Bengal, the two provinces vivisectioned by Britain's mapmaking. While Mountbatten settled into watching his televised comedy, he whispered to himself "for still a few minutes I am the most powerful man on earth."⁴⁶ Meanwhile, his remaining officials in Lahore—Punjab's capital, situated just over the new Pakistani border with northern India—scurried to catch the Bombay Express, navigating around dead bodies littering the streets before reaching the train station and its blood-soaked platform. They watched as their southbound train, an enduring symbol of British technological progress, carried them past village after village, ablaze.⁴⁷

The sectarian violence that had been building for years engulfed the Raj's last days, shattering the king's message of "peaceful change." A refugee wave of historic proportions swept across the subcontinent as Hindus and Sikhs desperately fled the newly created Pakistan for India, while panic-stricken Muslims left generations-old homes in India for safety across the Pakistani border.⁴⁸ En route, refugees were slaughtered, as were those who risked staying put. "Gangs of killers set whole



A refugee special train at Ambala Station, 1947

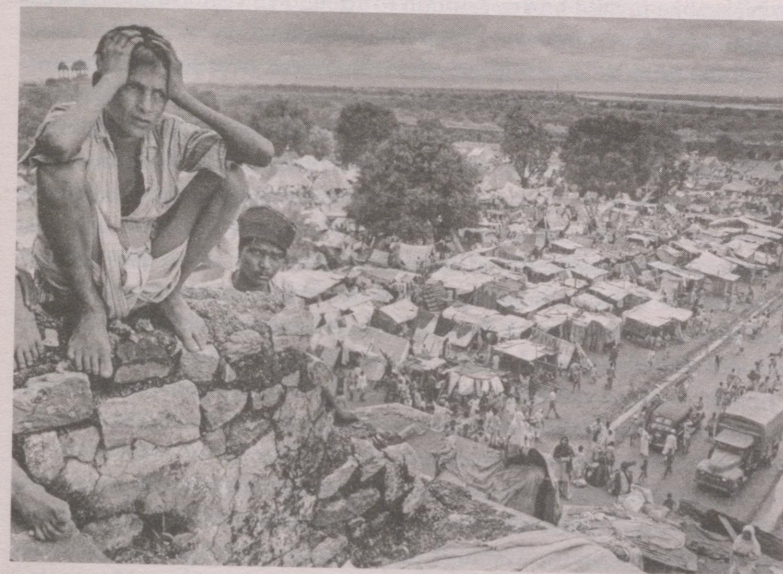
villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped," Nisid Hajari recounts in *Midnight's Furies*.

British soldiers and journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits. Foot caravans of destitute refugees fleeing the violence stretched for 50 miles and more. As the peasants trudged along wearily, mounted guerrillas charged out of the tall crops that lined the road and culled them like sheep. Special refugee trains, filled to bursting when they set out, suffered repeated ambushes along the way. All too often they crossed the border in funereal silence, blood seeping from under their carriage doors.⁴⁹

While the communal cleansing was most pronounced in Punjab, much of India was subsumed in it. In 1948 the great migration ended after displacing more than 15 million people. In her magisterial book *The Great Partition*, Yasmin Khan offers a sobering conclusion:

The Partition of 1947 is also a loud reminder, should we care to listen, of the dangers of colonial interventions and the profound difficulties that dog regime change. It stands testament to the follies of empire, which ruptures community evolution, distorts historical trajectories and forces violent state formation from societies that would otherwise have taken different—and unknowable—paths. Partition is a lasting lesson of both the dangers of imperial hubris and the reactions of extreme nationalism. For better or worse, two nations continue to live alongside each other in South Asia and continue to live with these legacies.⁵⁰

For nearly a thousand years, communities on the Indian subcontinent had coexisted in a cultural melting where religious identity was less salient than ethnic or linguistic identity. "A hybrid Indo-Islamic civilization emerged," according to the historian of India William Dalrymple. "In the nineteenth century, India was still a place where traditions, languages, and cultures cut across religious groupings, and where people did not define themselves primarily through their religious faith."⁵¹ Much as communities had negotiated means of coexistence in pre-Mandate Palestine only to see them unravel during British rule, the



Refugee camp in Delhi during Partition, 1947

subcontinent's communal arrangements corroded when the full weight of Britain's colonial state bore down on them. The Raj's divide and rule policies produced a chemical-like reaction, shattering long-standing traditions of coexistence and interacting with local personalities who had their own ambitions, passions, and allegiances. It was another liberal experiment in empire gone horribly wrong, and on a scale so epic that once history's chain of contingent events combusted, no one could contain it.

Estimates place Partition's death toll at 1 million to 2 million people. Those who survived faced cholera and typhoid epidemics in refugee centers that were "human dumps," in the words of one doctor. Gandhi predicted that "the peace of the grave" would come with Mountbatten's Partition deal, while Nehru responded in horror as post-Partition events unfolded. He confided to a fellow congressman that "I could not conceive of the gross brutality and sadistic cruelty that people have indulged in. . . . Little children are butchered in the streets. The houses in many parts of Delhi are still full of corpses. . . . I am fairly thick-skinned but I find this kind of thing more than I can bear." Mountbatten seemed rather nonplussed by the mounting deaths. When he paid a visit

to Nehru, he invited him to London to attend Princess Elizabeth's wedding to his beloved nephew, Philip Mountbatten.⁵²

A few months later, with war-fueled tensions over Kashmir mounting and India refusing to pay Pakistan 550 million rupees, Pakistan's share of Britain's outstanding war debt, Gandhi began to fast. "This time my fast is not only against Hindus and Muslims," the Mahatma said, "but also against the Judases who put on false appearances and betray themselves, myself and society."⁵³ The elderly and frail man who was India's symbolic political and spiritual leader went three days without food before India's cabinet agreed to pay Pakistan, something Nehru had long promised Jinnah he would do. The move was a Pyrrhic victory for Gandhi. Radical Hindu organizations had already labeled him "Jinnah's stooge" and "Mohammad Gandhi."⁵⁴ They saw Gandhi's calls for peace as acts of disloyalty, and his fasting over payments to Pakistan offered further grist for their mill.

On January 30, 1948, two weeks after his fast, the Mahatma was still recovering in New Delhi. At Birla House he made his way through the gardens to lead the evening's prayer meetings, his grandniece Manuben and adopted daughter Abha steadying him on either side. As they made their way past the gathered crowd, a radical Hindu nationalist, Nathuram Godse, stepped forward and at close range fired three shots into Gandhi. The Mahatma collapsed into his daughter's lap as the sun was beginning to set. Amid a din of cries, his robes soaked with blood, Gandhi reportedly uttered the words, "*Hé Ra . . . ma! Hé Ra . . . !* [Oh . . . God! Oh . . . !]"⁵⁵ A few hours later Nehru addressed the new nation, first in Hindi and then in English: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you or how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the Father of our Nation, is no more."⁵⁶

Gandhi was another casualty of empire's aftermath. So was his assassin, who, along with one of his accomplices, was sentenced to death. "In every one of his speeches is a drop of poison," Jinnah had said a few weeks before Gandhi's assassination. He was notably partisan in his eulogizing of Mahatma. "Whatever our political differences, he was one of the greatest men produced by the Hindu community, and a leader who commanded their universal confidence and respect. I wish to express my deep sorrow, and sincerely sympathise with the great Hindu community and his family in their bereavement at this momentous, historical and critical juncture so soon after the birth of freedom and freedom for Hindustan and Pakistan."⁵⁷ Around the world, however, an outpouring of grief and eulogies followed, universalizing Gandhi's character. In

Britain, left and right came together. Attlee spoke to Britons of his "profound horror" when he learned the news of the murder of "one of the outstanding figures in the world today [who] strove for peace and condemned the resort to violence."⁵⁸ Jan Smuts exclaimed, "A prince among men has passed away and we grieve with India in her irreparable loss."⁵⁹ Leo Amery, the arch-imperialist and secretary for India in Churchill's cabinet, revealed a deeper bitterness:

His part in the history of India and Anglo-Indian relations in the last generation can only be assessed by history. At any rate, it can be said that no one contributed more to the particular way in which the charter of British rule in India has ended than Mahatma Gandhi himself. His death comes at the close of a great chapter in world history. In the mind of India, at least, he will always be identified with the opening of the new chapter which, however troubled at the outset, we should all hope, will develop in peace, concord and prosperity for India.⁶⁰

As liberal imperialism's partnership motif was unraveling in postwar India, thousands of miles away in Jerusalem, on July 22, 1946, Richard Catling picked his way through roadblocked and barbed-wired streets en route to the King David Hotel. Over a decade earlier, the Suffolk-born Catling had had a chance encounter on the Ipswich train platform with a schoolboy friend who told him he had just signed up for the Palestine Police Force. Looking to leave behind the Depression-era hopelessness of his farming family, seek his fortune, and "see some other life and lives," an inspired Catling hurried to the Crown Agents office, empire's centralized finance and recruitment unit, at Millbank in central London. After a brief interview, he got a job in the Palestine Police Force. He saw considerable action in the Arab Revolt, which he recalled as "all good clean fun," and thereafter the wiry and often pursed-lipped Catling quickly rose through the ranks. By the time he strode up the front steps of the King David Hotel to see Roderick Musgrave, his old pal from the police special branch, he had reason to be proud. He was now assistant inspector general of the criminal investigation department and in charge of its Jewish affairs section.⁶¹

The circumstances in Palestine would have taxed any colonial police officer. Since Labour's election victory, Palestine was reminiscent of 1920s Ireland with its reprisals and counterreprisals. In July 1945 much of the Zionist community celebrated Attlee's rise to power. A Labour

resolution had called for an abrogation of the despised 1939 White Paper and, with it, allowance for unlimited Jewish immigration to the Mandate. Britain's move toward imperial resurgence rested squarely on the Middle East. Ernest Bevin was convinced that the oil-rich region was vital to Britain's economic recovery and crucial to the maintenance of Britain's Great Power status.⁶² But Anglo-Arab relations would have to be strengthened, a goal that ran counter to Labour's pre-election position on Palestine. Bevin, with the support of a pro-Arab Foreign Office and cabinet, nonetheless accomplished it.

Anglo-American cooperation over Palestine, however, proved to be one of the most contentious and frustrating issues in the Labour government's broader imperial agenda. It was arguably at the heart of Bevin's dogged determination to get out from under Washington's thumb. Truman, an unelected and relatively unpopular American leader, relied heavily on the advice of his pro-Zionist White House advisers, who urged him not to antagonize the American Jewish vote. "I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs in my constituents," Truman said.⁶³ It wasn't all about politics, however: the images of post-Holocaust Europe were unshakable for the president. "In my own mind," he later wrote, "the aims and goals of the Zionists at this stage to set up a Jewish state were secondary to the more immediate problem of finding means to relieve the human misery of the displaced persons."⁶⁴ This was no fine point of distinction. Immigration was the most salient issue in the Anglo-American dispute over Palestine, as it would be in much of the controversy between Britain and the Yishuv. Even before Labour took office, Truman had asked Churchill at Potsdam to lift the restrictions on immigration.⁶⁵ Soon thereafter the president received U.S. representative of the Intergovernmental Commission Earl G. Harrison's report on displaced persons in Europe, which detailed the horrific conditions of the refugee camps. "We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them," the report stated, "except that we do not exterminate them. They are in concentration camps in large numbers under our military guard instead of S.S. troops."⁶⁶ Harrison recommended the British grant an additional one hundred thousand immigration certificates for displaced Jews to enter Palestine. Truman fixated on that number and refused to budge in any future negotiations.

Whitehall took a different view. It could not risk alienating Arab support in the region or, worse, inciting Arab anger over the specter of large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine. Instead, the Jews had to be

reintegrated back into Europe. Bevin's callousness regarding the plight of Holocaust survivors hardly endeared him either to Truman or to the Zionist movement. Moreover, the foreign secretary's odd humor and general insensitivity regarding wartime Jewish suffering led to a series of missteps that opened him to repeated charges of anti-Semitism. At the very least, Bevin harbored stereotypical views of "international Jewry" and believed a Zionist-Soviet conspiracy was brewing. "I am sure," the foreign secretary later wrote, that the Russians "are convinced that by immigration they can pour in sufficient indoctrinated Jews to turn it into a Communist state in a very short time. The New York Jews have been doing their work for them."⁶⁷

The challenges Bevin faced were daunting by any standard. They included Britain's fiscal insolvency; its strategic overextension and perceived dependence on the Middle East; and rising Zionist violence and accompanying Arab intransigence. American involvement and the saliency of its domestic policies were also constant factors. Bevin believed he could bring Truman around by appealing to reason. He endorsed the creation of a joint committee to study the problem of displaced persons in Europe and immigration into Palestine. Under the rubric of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, the two governments agreed to consult all parties concerned, and Bevin stated he would abide by the recommendations of a unanimous report. In presenting the commission's mandate to the House of Commons in November 1945, he assured his peers that he had Palestine in hand and declared, "I will stake my political future on solving this problem."⁶⁸

Bevin's refusal to repudiate the 1939 White Paper and his broader support for the creation of a binational state in Palestine rather than an independent Jewish one outraged the Jewish Agency, which forged a truce with the Irgun and Lehi. Together they entered into a tenuous alliance to extract concessions from Britain and ensure the terms set forth in the Balfour Declaration. In effect, just weeks before Bevin staked his political future on Palestine, the Yishuv established the Jewish Resistance Movement, and with that, the entire Jewish community declared war on Britain.⁶⁹

In fact, just days before the INA trials opened in Delhi, the Yishuv's paramilitary forces launched their first major combined strike on British installations in Palestine. On November 1, 1945, fifty Palmach sections sabotaged the Mandate's railway networks in over 150 different locations, while Irgun forces blew up train junctions, railway shunting points, and small bridges. Known as "The Night of the Trains," the spectacular

display of coordinated force extended to the Haifa oil refineries, which Lehi members bombed relentlessly. It also included the police patrol stations in Haifa and Jaffa, where Palmach operatives attacked and sank three boats that had been used to hunt down illegal Jewish immigration ships. As the smoke from the raging Haifa oil fires cast a dark cloud over Palestine's coastline, Bevin and the British government had not yet faced the realities of the Mandate's postwar landscape. Although the strength of the Yishuv's united militia was undeniable, Bevin was unmoved. He said as much when, around the time of the attacks, he challenged Weizmann in London: "If you want a fight, you can have it."⁷⁰

These were strong words coming from a foreign secretary poised to wage a war against a formidable opponent, from a position of economic and diplomatic weakness. In the fall of 1945, the Yishuv had a population of over 550,000, the result of 25 percent growth during the interwar years, and it had established 350 settlements in Palestine. The Zionist project was surging economically, industrial output increasing fivefold from 1937 to 1943, reaching P£37.5 million. Such a growth rate, and the realities of Palestine's Jewish-led industrialization, rendered the high commissioner's postwar economic plans, focusing on the Mandate's agricultural potential, stunningly out of touch. Militarily, the Jewish Agency's Haganah was nearly 45,000 strong, and its highly trained elite Palmach numbered close to 9,000. While the Irgun and Lehi were comparatively small in size—with approximately 1,500 and 400 members, respectively—the Revisionist militia with its proclaimed willingness to deploy violence played a major role in the campaign. Together the armed insurgents comprised nearly 10 percent of the Jewish population in Palestine, a staggeringly high insurgent-to-civilian ratio compared to that of other imperial conflicts.⁷¹

Politically, the Jewish Agency was well organized and disciplined within Palestine, and its networks beyond the Mandate's borders were equally as strong. The World Zionist Organization's objectives framed much of the Jewish Agency's agenda as well as the Haganah's strategy. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver's broader umbrella organization, the American Zionist Emergency Council, boasted a membership of 1 million people. The ZOA alone distributed more than a million leaflets and pamphlets to media outlets, and newspapers reprinted more than four thousand of its news releases in 1945. The Revisionists were similarly well organized. Under Begin's direction, the Irgun drew its foreign support primarily from the largest of American-based Revisionist leader Hillel Kook's organizations, the

American League for a Free Palestine, while Lehi drew its American support from the Political Action Committee for Palestine.⁷²

The rising strength of Zionism contrasted with Britain's growing infirmity. From the time Labour took office in 1945 until his death in the spring of 1951, Bevin pursued a grand imperial strategy and demonstrated no lack of will in the Middle East. Like his predecessors, his doctrine was above all pro-British, even if Britain's changing alliances undermined Middle Eastern stability, thwarting British interests, which were, at times, unclear. Indeed, if "war is a continuation of state policy by other means"—as the Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz famously said—then a succession of Mandate high commissioners experienced great frustrations. For over twenty years, London oscillated in different directions depending on which way the winds of perceived British interests blew. There were changing policies from on high, countless interpretations and commissions, and multiple, contradictory white papers. As the historian Tom Segev points out, for a man like High Commissioner MacMichael, "everything was possible, if someone would only tell him what to do. If they wanted partition, there would be partition. If they wanted a state, there would be a state. It was all the same to him. MacMichael had no interest in politics; he did not understand it. That was not his business, and it was not his job. His job was to keep order."⁷³

To do his job, MacMichael and others fell back on coercion, which the British military supported when necessary. This included punitive expeditions into insurgent territories, the destruction of villages and ethnic urban quarters, the humiliation and torture of civilian populations, heavy deployments of artillery and aerial bombing, and the hanging of suspects for even the most minor of infractions. In the end, coercion was not only inherent to British liberal imperialism but also a necessary tactic to maintain an upper hand over the cyclical Arab and Jewish violence that followed every bend in London's high-policy road.

When confronted with the Zionist insurgency, London once again changed personnel, believing that would solve the problem. In November 1945, Alan Cunningham lumbered in as the new high commissioner. The fifty-eight-year-old bachelor and career soldier brought lessons of his own personal failures during the Second World War. As a lieutenant general on the North African front, Cunningham had suffered early losses in an offensive in Libya, after which he recommended a curtailment of the operation. Instead, his superiors relieved him of his command and shipped him back to Britain, where he remained at a desk job

for the rest of the war. His later promotion to general and his assignment to a civilian posting in Palestine presented Cunningham with an opportunity for redemption.

Cunningham quickly grasped the conflict's nuances and the imperial constraints unique to Palestine. In the face of daily Zionist attacks, he had the power of unbridled force at his fingertips. Unleashing it, however, would potentially undermine the fading credibility of the moderate Jewish Agency and drive defectors into the camp of the Revisionists, who showed no mercy in their willingness to take out human targets. Moreover, international scrutiny filtered through the lens of Zionist propaganda proved to be a powerful and unprecedented check on British force.⁷⁴ As the high commissioner repeatedly pointed out, "military means had to be dovetailed into political requirements."⁷⁵

The escalating conflict, however, demanded some kind of immediate action. Cunningham turned to Defence (Emergency) Regulations and the legalized measures consolidated and deployed during the Arab Revolt. The wartime Defence of the Realm Act in Britain and the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939 informed the empire's 1939 Emergency Powers Order in Council, which empowered a colonial governor or high commissioner to declare a state of emergency when ordinary laws were insufficient for suppressing disorder and to make "such Regulations as appear to him to be necessary or expedient for securing the public safety, the defence of the territory, the maintenance of public order and the suppression of mutiny, rebellion and riot, and for maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community."⁷⁶ When the time came, Palestine's new high commissioner relied on fifty printed paragraphs of emergency regulations that enabled security forces to enforce curfews, confiscations, collective fines, arrests, and detentions. The new regulations reintroduced the death penalty for a range of offenses, including the carrying of firearms or explosives, and it reinstated military tribunals that had wide-ranging powers to enter summary judgments without pretrial inquiries, or furnishing evidence to the accused, or the right of appeal except to the general officer commanding (GOC) the British forces in Palestine, who had the sole authority to pardon, confirm, or dismiss a conviction.

The emergency regulations did little to quell the Jewish Resistance Movement's coordinated attacks, daily booby traps, destruction of government property, and assassinations of British officials. Moshe Shertok, head of the Jewish Agency's political department, gave voice to moderate Jewish sentiment, saying the emergency regulations were "murderous and atrocious laws, which threaten the public as a whole."⁷⁷ The

Revisionists devised strategies that attacked Britain's repressive measures head-on. "History and our observation persuaded us that if we could succeed in destroying the government's prestige in Eretz Israel, the removal of its rule would follow automatically," Menachem Begin recalled. "Thenceforward we gave no peace to this weak spot. Throughout all the years of our uprising, we hit at the British Government's prestige deliberately, tirelessly, unceasingly."⁷⁸

British officials on the ground knew exactly what this meant. The Irgun leaders "believe in the efficacy of their present tactics . . . that violence is the only means of inducing the British Government to make political concessions," one intelligence report noted.⁷⁹ Samuel Katz, a member of the Irgun's high command and "one of the wisest of men," according to Begin, understood the relationship between violence and Britain's political weaknesses in the postwar context:

There were limits of oppression beyond which the British government dared not go. She could not apply the full force of her power against us. Palestine was not a remote hill village in Afghanistan which could be bombed into submission. Palestine was a glass house watched with intent interest by the rest of the world. The British had discovered in 1945 that their behavior towards the Jews was an important factor in American attitudes and policies.⁸⁰

Begin's "Logic of the Revolt" underscored Katz's point. "Eretz Israel . . . resembled a glass house." Begin extended the analogy, noting that "arms were our weapons of attacks; the transparency of the 'glass' was our shield of defence."⁸¹ Underlying all this strategy was a broader Revisionist ethos—"We fight, therefore we are"—that was at once emancipatory in its logic as well as grounded in the realpolitik of British rule.⁸² "Josiah Wedgwood used to say that the British would not listen to anybody, or take a political movement seriously, until they had broken the windows of a few British embassies," recalled Benjamin Akzin, a Revisionist member and later a law professor at Hebrew University.⁸³

Neither British officers nor the rank and file sympathized with Cunningham's broader concerns over moderate Zionist support and international scrutiny. Nor did Britain's security forces care greatly about the political circumstances fueling the Zionist uprising. For many, the issue was the reestablishment of control using well-tested methods of repression. The high commissioner had to temper demands for unbridled coercion coming from successive GOCs as well as from Field Mar-

shal Bernard Montgomery in his role as chief of the Imperial General Staff. Montgomery saw no difference between the Haganah, the Irgun, and Lehi. With each assault, he further castigated Cunningham for his failure to stamp out the terrorists. In 1945 the entire Sixth Airborne Division of 20,000 men arrived in Palestine; troop strength would swell to over 100,000 at the height of the insurgency. By the historian John Bowyer Bell's count:

There were [also] two cruisers, three destroyers, other naval units off the coast, and naval radar and communication bases on the shore. The ratio of British security forces to the Jewish population was approximately one to five. . . . The Mandate was an armed camp, the countryside studded with the huge, concrete Tegart fortresses, British army camps, reinforced roadblocks, and observation points. The cities were constantly patrolled, and all government buildings protected by concertinas of barbed wire and sentry blocks. There were armed guards on the trains. For safety's sake, the British withdrew into wired and sandbagged compounds, self-imposed ghettos.⁸⁴

Cunningham refused to mount an Arab Revolt-like offensive because no green light had come from Attlee's cabinet, at least not yet.

Meanwhile, the Palestine Police Force remained the first line of defense, much as it had been during earlier outbreaks of Arab and Jewish dissent. Its reputation for paramilitary training, using coercive tactics, and increasing indiscipline was widespread and not without merit. The Second World War had witnessed a marked increase in tensions between the force's British section and the Revisionist militia. Raymond "Caff" Cafferata, the Citroën-driving police officer who over a decade earlier had tackled the Hebron riots and was now the district commander of Haifa, was in the middle of the action. He oversaw police raids on Zionist settlements in search of arms and ammunition. In one instance, he commanded forty vehicle-loads of police who, together with nearly eight hundred soldiers who had aerial cover, raided the kibbutz of Ramat HaKovesh in 1943. The police herded Jewish men into cages similar to those used in the Arab Revolt, ransacked the kibbutz, wounded twenty-four settlers, and left another dead. One policeman claimed that he and others had been provoked into beating women and children who had formed human shields; these Jewish civilians had "behaved like demented wild beasts" and engaged in "vicious attacks" against the police and army, according to official reports.⁸⁵ Hebrew-

language newspapers voiced outrage, and the mandatory government summarily shut them down, which only incited more violence, this time in Tel Aviv. In the years ahead, the raids would continue, and Cafferata would lead an operation in the kibbutz of Givat Haim that included tank-supported security forces in full battle armor who left scores of settlers wounded, seven dead, and a trail of self-defense claims.⁸⁶

In some ways, as we saw in chapter 4, Cafferata was a typical police officer in Palestine. A former member of the Royal Irish Constabulary before his transfer to the Mandate, he rose to the top of the force, where his facile ethos—the familiar "I'm merely pro-British"—informed his actions. Suffering from a manpower shortage during World War II, the Palestine administration, backed by parliamentary legislation, placed its police force under military command, thus ensuring a retention of men when their three-year contracts ran out. It also meant that the Palestine Police Force, according to an internal report, was "a military force, subject to military law."⁸⁷ This move only reinforced the force's Black and Tan-inspired paramilitary culture. In 1943 five out of the eight district police commanders in Palestine had formerly been of the Black and Tans; together, they helped shape the force's actions and had little fear of discipline from above.⁸⁸

Manpower issues dogged Palestine's colonial administration in the postwar years. Despite recruitment campaigns, its police force was routinely and alarmingly under strength. At the end of 1945, nearly three thousand policemen departed at the end of their contracts, which prompted Chief Secretary John Shaw to plead desperately with the Colonial Office that reinforcements were a "vital necessity."⁸⁹ The Palestine Mobile Force, an elite, paramilitary force, was also grossly understaffed, with only half of the two thousand men needed in its ranks. In 1946 the British government lowered the mobile force's age requirement. Nearly 75 percent of its new recruits were eighteen or nineteen. In a few short weeks, these youngsters became quasi-soldiers through "square-bashing" (marching drill) exercises, weapons drills, and the bare minimum of language training. (Less than 4 percent of the total force spoke Hebrew.) The mobile force was outfitted and trained on military lines. Its members wore battle dress uniforms and were equipped with mortars, Brownings, machine guns, and smoke dischargers. They patrolled the Mandate in armored cars that could have passed for light tanks.⁹⁰ In effect, teenagers with an intense incubation in paramilitary culture but with no combat experience were placed into heavily armed mobile units that were often poorly organized and inadequately officered, then dispatched into high-risk and immensely stressful situations.

It's no wonder Montgomery thought the Palestine Mobile Force "could never be any better than third class soldiers."⁹¹

These youngsters confronted escalating attacks on a daily basis. During the first six months of the insurgency, the Jewish Resistance Movement launched nearly fifty strikes. On February 25, 1946, a combined Irgun and Lehi attack on the RAF airfields at Lydda, Qastina, and Kfar Sirkin dealt the British a most humiliating blow. The Zionist militia destroyed three Halifaxes and crippled eight others, while it exploded seven Spitfires, two Ansons, and three other small aircraft. Commando-style raids, sneak attacks, and remote destruction using mines and explosives were not limited to Britain's imperial infrastructure. Human targets were increasingly fair game. Relentless raids against the police ensued, as the Revisionists targeted the criminal investigation department, whose agents tried, often unsuccessfully, to infiltrate insurgent networks. The British deemed Zionist tactics "dishonorable" and "despicable."⁹² The insurgents, many of whom had cut their teeth during the Arab Revolt and later as Special Operations Executive operatives during the Second World War, had fought shoulder to shoulder with the British and had learned not only British tactics but their weaknesses as well.

Britain was fighting the entire Yishuv, which refused to share information. "The truth is that no Jew will ever inform to a Gentile on another Jew," Palestine's new chief secretary, Henry Gurney, wrote.⁹³ His predecessor had left because of death threats; not surprisingly, fear had a chilling effect on potential Jewish informants. Palestine's criminal investigation department remained ill-equipped to run its own intelligence operations. Even Catling, the head of its Jewish section, didn't understand Hebrew. "Throughout that time I was in Special branch in Jerusalem, Police HQ—there was no more than two British officers who could speak Hebrew with reasonable fluency," he recalled. "This was disastrous. It meant that we were limited in our means of interrogation; in our ability to translate confiscated documents in Hebrew; and our ability to conduct operations—to overhear conversations, for example, between two Jewish suspects put in the same cell."⁹⁴

Despite attempts to reorganize the Mandate's intelligence units, complete with MI5 operatives dropping in to offer advice, there was too much ground to cover. Decades of poor organization, underfunding, and an overall lack of interest in learning local languages and cultures—the crucial gateways to understanding subject populations—hamstrung British efforts. As the situation worsened, the criminal investigation department focused as much on keeping its members alive as it did on

gathering intelligence. Moreover, successive military leaders gave intelligence a low priority relative to the perceived value of brute force. MI5's best inroads came with the handful of career intelligence agents who were brought in for the job. Major Desmond Doran was one such operative. Having been stationed in Cairo with Security Intelligence Middle East during the war, Doran transferred to Palestine, where his impeccable Hebrew, textbook knowledge of Lehi, and renowned interrogation skills also made him a prime target for the Revisionists. He was gunned down in his Tel Aviv home, which Irgun assassins then blew up, in September 1946.⁹⁵

In contrast, the British could take few initiatives without the Zionists having at least some forewarning. Those in the police force who were from the Yishuv masterfully spied on their British colleagues. One police officer later recollected that they were, "I think . . . if not a fifth column, then certainly a fourth column."⁹⁶ Many Jewish members of the police force were sympathetic to the Haganah, while others were active in its underground.⁹⁷ Still others worked in various lower-level ranks within the colonial administration. Cafferata's secretary, for example, dutifully typed out his letters—and then made a copy for the Haganah. Lehi, whose members hadn't forgotten what Cafferata had done in Ramat HaKovesh and Givat Haim, had him on its hit list. On a rainy spring day in 1946, he narrowly managed to escape gunfire sprayed across the back window of his car. He was soon shipped home.⁹⁸

In the wake of an April parking lot attack that took out several members of the Sixth Airborne, Lieutenant General D'Arcy strained to keep his troops under control. According to D'Arcy, who had led the retaking of Dublin's post office during Ireland's Easter Rising, his men in Palestine "took the law into their own hands for a short time" and were primed for a retributive rampage for the "mass murder" of their comrades.⁹⁹ He met with Cunningham, demanding collective punishment and the forcible disarming of all Jews in Tel Aviv. To his disgust, the high commissioner agreed only to an extended curfew. Cunningham's hands were in fact tied. On April 30, 1946, he received notice that any serious reprisals against the Yishuv would need cabinet authorization from London. Not coincidentally, on the same day the Anglo-American Committee report was published, and much to the outrage of Attlee and Bevin, Truman endorsed its recommendation that one hundred thousand more Jews be allowed into Palestine. Britain continued to view any increase in Jewish immigration as a potential source of Arab incitement, and Attlee's government would not allow more Jewish refugees into the Mandate.¹⁰⁰

The Haganah, incensed by Britain's rejection of the Anglo-American Committee's recommendation, blew up ten train and road bridges, mostly along the Transjordan border. The Irgun followed this June 16, 1946, "Night of the Bridges" with a brazen kidnapping of five British officers while they lunched at the Tel Aviv Officers' Club. Begin's men chained the officers in a cellar hideout, then released two of them with a message. They would execute the other three British officers if the Mandate government did not release two Irgun members it had condemned to hang.

The time had come for British forces to claim the initiative, and Field Marshal Montgomery took the lead. Having toured Palestine earlier in June, he was "much perturbed by what [he] heard and saw" and noted that "British rule existed only in name; the true rulers seemed to me to be the Jews."¹⁰¹ He placed blame not only at the feet of Cunningham but also at the hapless decision making in London that had rendered Britain's security forces impotent. In a heated cabinet meeting, Montgomery wrested Bevin's support to launch an offensive, and on June 29, D'Arcy's replacement, Evelyn Barker, ordered Operation Agatha.

The military imposed a curfew throughout the country, and nearly the entire strength of the British security forces—one hundred thousand men—surrounded scores of Zionist settlements. One of Barker's staff officers, Peter Martin, said that settlers at Mishek Yergoa stared down Agatha's security forces and tanks, blocking the gate of their kibbutz with a human shield of women and children. Martin's men threw gas grenades into the settlement, which children quickly covered with a "wet sandbag . . . and then a woman scooped it up, and tossed it in the back into water." What was to be an orderly search quickly descended into mayhem as the acting brigadier shouted, "Shoot them, Shoot them." "But [at] that moment," according to Martin, a soldier who was building barbed-wire cages for interrogations

came up with two wasp flamethrowers, but these flamethrowers, instead of having flame fuel had been filled with crude oil from oil changers on the vehicles. So they were absolutely full with thick dirty frisky, dirty black oil. So I addressed [the settlers] and I said that if they did not move out of the way that we would open fire with these wasp flamethrowers. . . . I can remember them now quite clearly. One woman in particular in a white cotton dress with big red flowers on it . . . was absolutely in the center of the target area. . . . I gave note to fire and out shot a

solid jet of thick black crude oil and it struck the women on their hairs and faces and cotton frocks.¹⁰²

Security forces raided the Jewish Agency's offices and removed tons of documents as evidence, including some of those that Cafferata's secretary had dutifully copied. Their widespread searches uncovered over thirty arms caches containing a half-million rounds of ammunition, more than five hundred weapons, and a quarter-ton of explosives. Mass arrests ensued; by the end of the day, security forces had picked up over one thousand suspects. They included four Jewish Agency executive members, Moshe Shertok among them. All prisoners were immediately shipped to the Latrun Detention Camp, and hundreds eventually went to camps in East Africa where they were detained without trial for the duration of the insurgency. Operation Agatha, or the "Black Sabbath," as locals called it, weakened the Haganah, but it barely touched the Irgun or Lehi, despite continued curfews, roadblocks, and interrogations. Still, Britain's show of strength gave its forces a renewed sense of control. Those at the top commuted the sentences of the two Irgun prisoners who were set to hang. The next day the Irgun chloroformed and boxed into a crate the three British officers it had kidnapped, then unceremoniously dumped them onto Rothschild Avenue in downtown Tel Aviv.

Even in the midst of the insurgency, there was nothing like Jerusalem's elegant King David Hotel in the rest of Palestine or, arguably, Britain's empire. For military officers, administrators, and high-end civilians, it was a four-and-a-half-acre slice of heaven perched above the Old City, surrounded by a cordon of barbed wire, antigrenade netting, state-of-the-art alarm controls, machine gun pits, and countless security force members. Gentlemen in dark suits and tuxedos, ladies in evening dresses, and Sudanese waiters plying aperitifs mingled there after a day of tennis or swimming and before a night of recitals, literary events, or some other form of cultural incongruity relative to the conflict that raged outside the hotel's artillery and bombproof walls. The British Army had requisitioned part of the hotel ever since the Arab Revolt, and the Mandate's secretariat had moved most administrative functions to its upper three floors in the south wing.¹⁰³ It was there that the senior police officer Richard Catling was chatting with his friend Roderick Musgrave on July 22, 1946, when an explosion sent them both racing to the balcony for a closer look through the midday sun. Catling hustled

down the steps to ask his driver idling outside what had happened. The event was dismissed as a minor explosion.¹⁰⁴

As Catling made his way back through the hotel lobby, seven large milk churns filled with explosives detonated and shredded the military and secretariat offices. Catling survived with only minor injuries, which was miraculous given the carnage. "You could see the bodies of people trapped by the rubble," one police officer recalled.¹⁰⁵ The Irgun's strike, which had entailed weeks of planning and subterfuge, had used force the size of a thousand-pound aerial bomb. The south wing of the hotel collapsed, one story crashing into the next from the detonation's force. By the time the smoke finally receded, the so-called bombproof build-



British security forces search for survivors after the King David Hotel bomb explosion, July 28, 1946.

ing had been reduced to piles of mangled concrete and shattered glass. Various government departments had lost nearly a quarter of their staff to injury or death. The secretariat's staff, with whom Catling had been chatting moments before the blast, was the hardest hit. Musgrave was killed. "So you see, these are the reasons why I think this stays with me as the worst atrocity," Catling recalled, assessing the impact of the day's events. "The size of the death toll—innocent people—absolutely innocent—most of them Palestinian—and the fact that I only just got away. And when you come close to death the circumstances at the time do remain in your mind. . . . If you were implicated at all in the particular incident, you would never forget it."¹⁰⁶

Personal loss touched nearly everyone in the Mandate's administration and security forces. Demands for retribution ran all the way up to Montgomery, who wrote, "We shall show the world and the Jews that we are not going to submit tamely to violence."¹⁰⁷ This was the Irgun's most spectacular hit. The Jewish Agency and Lehi knew who was responsible for the attack, and British intelligence had "theories . . . but we in the investigation that followed this attack on the King David Hotel did not identify, arrest, and take to court those responsible," said Catling.¹⁰⁸

In the wake of the King David Hotel's destruction, British forces launched Operation Shark, sealed off Tel Aviv, and conducted house-to-house searches and interrogations of the entire adult population. A thousand suspects were detained. Police Sergeant T. G. Martin picked out Yitzhak Shamir, the mastermind of the Lord Moyne assassination and the Lehi leader, in a lineup, even though he was disguised as a rabbi. Shamir was deported to an East African detention camp for interrogation. Martin was gunned down on a tennis court in Haifa two months later.

The Jewish Agency could not stomach the levels of violence and withdrew from the Jewish Resistance Movement, even though it continued its illegal immigration operations. As far as Ben-Gurion was concerned, "the Irgun is the enemy of the Jewish people," and Begin was as much a threat to the Yishuv as the British.¹⁰⁹ The head of the Jewish Agency tried to walk the line between London's unacceptable policies and the Revisionist ascent within the Mandate. Cunningham hoped Ben-Gurion's men would carry out a "Little Saison," releasing some of their detainees as a good faith gesture. But with no immigration concessions, that wouldn't come to pass.

Irgun and Lehi violence continued "deliberately, tirelessly, [and] unceasingly," making a mockery of British rule. "In the development of certain British Colonies the whip has been made to serve an educational

purpose," Begin wrote. "It is applied, of course, not to recalcitrant boys but to adults who are treated like disorderly children."¹¹⁰ The Irgun zeroed in on this loathed symbol of imperial paternalism, a method of "civilizing" reform, and turned it against British soldiers with startling effect. At the end of 1946, Begin declared through the Irgun's underground publication, *Herut*:

For hundreds of years you have been whipping "natives" in your colonies—without retaliation. In your foolish pride you regard the Jews of Eretz Israel as natives too. You are mistaken. Zion is not exile. Jews are not Zulus. You will not whip Jews in their Homeland. And if the British Authorities whip them—British officers will be whipped publicly in return.¹¹¹

True to his threat, and in retaliation for British security forces caning two young Irgun members, Begin had several of his men abduct Major Paddy Brett while he dined with his wife at a waterfront hotel in Netanya. Shortly thereafter armed Irgun fighters took three more British officers hostage. They whipped the captured men severely, binding them to a tree in a public garden, where a search patrol later found them.¹¹²

Britain's security forces felt that the entire Yishuv was culpable for the violence, deaths, and humiliations. It was no longer possible, according to one high-ranking officer, "to differentiate between passive onlookers and active armed members of the Jewish population, and the word 'terrorist' is no longer being applied to differentiate one from the other. All suffer from the martyrdom complex and instability of temperament, which makes their reactions in circumstances of any political stress both violent and unpredictable."¹¹³ After the King David Hotel attack, General Barker issued a nonfraternization edict and ordered all security forces to stay away from Jewish establishments. It "will be punishing the Jews in a way the race dislikes as much as any," he announced, "by striking at their pockets and showing our contempt for them."¹¹⁴ An uproar from international Zionist organizations followed, and Barker backpedaled publicly. Privately, however, he confided to his affluent Arab lover, "Yes I loathe the lot—whether they be Zionists or not. Why should we be afraid of saying we hate them—it's time this damned race knew what we think of them—loathsome people."¹¹⁵

Mounting security force frustration and its plummeting morale translated into open hostility. The Jewish Agency routinely filed complaints against soldiers and policemen who used anti-Semitic slurs. Security force members shouted "Bloody Jew," "pigs," and "*Heil Hit-*

ler," promising to finish off what Hitler began.¹¹⁶ Members of the police force derided the Jews as "dirty" and "filthy." "You could have kicked the Arab up the bottom and nothing would have been said, but if you put a little finger on a Jew-boy Westminster would have gone crazy. . . . When I came out of the force, I thought, well, I wouldn't urinate on a Jew if he was on fire," one of its officers scoffed.¹¹⁷ Others in the police force were more measured, and their sentiments shifted as British policies oscillated between Arab and Zionist support. "I suppose it's the way the pendulum swings," one officer recalled. "In the first years, the Jews were our friends and the Arabs our enemies. . . . The Jews became more aggressive," at which point police force sentiment swung the other way.¹¹⁸

Montgomery was furious not at his troops but at the British government. He had returned to Palestine to repress Zionist insurgents with the same force that he had used to quash Arabs a decade earlier. Instead, the situation had gone from bad to worse. Britain's casualty rate was up to two a day. "If we are not prepared to maintain law and order in Palestine," Montgomery told Attlee, "then it would be better to get out."¹¹⁹ He went on to eviscerate Cunningham, calling his policies "gutless and spineless"; the high commissioner had "failed to produce law and order in Palestine . . . and [he needed to adopt] a more robust mentality in his methods to keep the King's peace."¹²⁰ Moreover, Cunningham was damaged goods as far as Montgomery was concerned. "You will remember," the commanding officer said, "he gave in at Sidi Rezih in December 1941 forty-eight hours too soon."¹²¹

Cunningham continued to push for a political solution with the Jewish Agency, but by the end of 1946, support for this was greatly diminished. Churchill in Parliament made a laughingstock of Bevin's policies, deriding him that Britain was on "the road of abject defeat."¹²² A widely circulated War Office memo made clear the military's position: "Viewed from a military standpoint the policy of appeasement has failed. . . . The restoration of law and order can depend only on the adoption of a consistent and vigorous policy in dealing with disturbers of the peace. Such a policy is not in force. If we are to prevent the present situation in Palestine from getting out of hand, strong military preventive action must be taken in Palestine at once."¹²³ After the flogging incident, and at Montgomery's urging, Bevin and the Labour government finally gave him the go-ahead following a New Year's Day cabinet meeting. He was informed that a new policy would be implemented "firmly and relentlessly and despite world opinion or Jewish reaction in America."¹²⁴ Cunningham soon received new orders: "All possible steps will be taken

at once to restore law and order. . . . The police and troops should be designed to take the offensive against breakers of the law and to ensure that the initiative lies with the forces of the Crown."¹²⁵ A cabinet directive, which Montgomery drafted, followed that offered "the full support of His Majesty's Government . . . [for] such action as you may take to implement the policy outline," with "such action" enabled through statutory martial law.¹²⁶ In January 1947 the field marshal expected to regain an initiative that his hundred-thousand-strong force had never had and to win the conflict through Britain's repressive strength alone.

Exit Palestine, Enter Malaya

Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase . . . into the dustbin where it belongs.

George Orwell, 1946¹

In December 1947, George Orwell ruminated over these words while living on the island of Jura, just off Scotland's west coast. He'd rented Barnhill, a farmhouse on Jura's desolate northern tip, using the proceeds from *Animal Farm* to buy tranquility away from London's postwar gloom and the melancholy that had haunted him ever since his wife's untimely death. Nature did not cooperate, nor did his worsening health. Temperatures plummeted, snow drifted against Barnhill's shingles, and frost crept inside, crocheting across the windows, down tattered draperies, and onto the plank floors. Orwell abandoned drafting his new manuscript and sought medical attention in Glasgow, where he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Nurses temporarily confiscated his typewriter, but not his cigarettes, and he endured painful procedures, including having his lung collapsed. None of it did much to ease his infection's ravaging effects.²

Orwell needed the new "miracle drug" streptomycin, an antibiotic that was widely available in the United States but years away from production in Britain. With limited dollar reserves, the British government spat in the ocean of need, buying just fifty kilograms of the drug from the United States and setting up randomized allocations to study