

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

The British Raj is over, the American demi-Raj is ending, and both have left interesting legacies.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, US ambassador to India, 1 September 1973¹

On 8 January 1958, Britain's prime minister, Harold Macmillan, touched down in a specially chartered Britannia aeroplane at New Delhi's Palam airport to begin the first leg of a whirlwind five-week Commonwealth tour. The first serving British premier to visit South Asia since the end of the British Raj, in August 1947, Macmillan was apprehensive about the reception that awaited him in India. Over the previous two years, Anglo-Indian relations had sunk to a post-independence nadir. In 1956, Britain and India had fallen out during the Suez and Hungarian crises. In the case of the former, the Bombay daily, *The Indian Express*, had excoriated Macmillan's predecessor, Anthony Eden, for providing 'Britain with her most inglorious hour'. By ordering British troops into Egypt to seize the Suez Canal, the *Express* opined, Eden had been guilty of launching a, 'wanton and senseless ... [and] barbaric onslaught ... on a small West Asian country'.² The following year, the Indian government reacted with cold fury when Britain backed a resolution in the United Nations Security Council that reiterated calls for a plebiscite in the contested, and largely Indian-controlled, territory of Kashmir.

To Macmillan's great relief, he met with a warm and effusive greeting in India. In a welcoming speech delivered on Palam's aircraft apron, India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, downplayed Anglo-Indian tensions and instead emphasised India's 'unique' shared heritage with Britain.³ As if to underscore Nehru's point, after responding to the Indian premier's address, Macmillan chatted casually with two Indian

¹ Moynihan to Alistair Cooke, 1 September 1973, I-353, Folder India Correspondence C 4 1973–5, Daniel P. Moynihan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

² 'Eden Has Provided Britain With Her Most Inglorious Hour', 8 November 1956, *The Indian Express*.

³ *The Times*, 9 January 1958.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 Introduction

soldiers sporting British campaign medals from the Second World War, and greeted General K. S. Thimayya, India's Chief of Army Staff, with a familiar, 'How are things going? We last met at my house.' In subsequent talks with Indian ministers and officials, Macmillan was delighted to discover that 'Indian leaders from Mr. Nehru downwards showed no disposition to rake over recent disagreements'. Indeed, when the British leader departed from India five days later, he did so, 'impressed by the respect in which the British people were now held and the balanced view which was taken by leaders of opinion on the value of their connection, past and present, with Britain'.⁴

In fact, by the time Macmillan had entered 10 Downing Street almost exactly a year earlier, the arrival of the Cold War in South Asia had already set in train a series of events that, over the next decade, would precipitate a steep decline in British power and authority in the Indian subcontinent. In the early 1960s, Britain continued to exercise a preponderant external influence over the political, economic and cultural affairs of India and Pakistan, and in India's case, its armed forces as well. By the early 1970s, following almost two centuries of regional hegemony, the onset of superpower intervention in the region had reduced the United Kingdom to the role of bit player in South Asia. Speaking in London, in October 1971, at the Chatham House headquarters of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, India's then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, observed that 'in Britain, which has such close historical ties with us, there is a wide gap in the understanding of the forces which have shaped our great history and which are influencing us today'. India's interaction with Britain, Gandhi intoned, had ceased to be determined by the 'old myth' of imperial and Commonwealth solidarity. Moving forward the value that India attached to its relationship with the United Kingdom, India's leader noted pointedly, would be based not on sentiment but rather a 'rational' assessment of Britain's standing in the post-war world.⁵

In 1947, when India and Pakistan first emerged as independent nation states, the administration of President Harry S. Truman in the United States paid little heed to the momentous events taking place in South Asia. At the time, Truman and his Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, were far more concerned with contemporaneous developments in Western Europe. Chronic post-war economic, political

⁴ 'Prime Minister's Commonwealth Tour', 4 June 1958, CAB 129/93, C (58), 120, The United Kingdom National Archives, Kew, London.

⁵ Indira Gandhi address to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 29 October 1971. Indira Gandhi, *India: The Speeches and Reminiscences of Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p. 185.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and social tensions appeared poised to rebound to the Soviet Union's advantage, and sweep communist regimes to power in Italy, France and across the Mediterranean littoral. Chester Bowles, America's ambassador to India at the time, bemoaned the lack of interest that senior US government officials displayed toward the subcontinent. Washington, Bowles subsequently complained, was inclined to interpret the region through a 'Kiplingesque' prism, imagining India to be 'an ancient land of cobras, maharajahs, monkeys, famines, polo players, over-crowded with cows and babies'.⁶ In the mid-1950s, as American policymakers identified a growing need to compete with the Soviet Union for 'hearts and minds' in the developing world, the United States began to reconsider the value of nascent post-colonial nations as Cold War allies, and none more so than India and Pakistan. From a strategic standpoint, South Asia acquired new significance in official American thinking, initially as a bulwark against Soviet expansion into the Middle East, and latterly as a buffer to restrict the spread of Chinese Communist influence in South East Asia. In 1954, the government of Dwight D. Eisenhower entered into a military alliance with Pakistan, and toward the end of the decade scaled up American economic and political support for India. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Kennedy administration expanded the United States' commitments in South Asia, frequently intervening in the affairs of the subcontinent alongside an, often reluctant, British partner.

Indeed, between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, American governments sponsored a host of diplomatic initiatives in South Asia, and lavished \$12 billion in economic and military aid on India and Pakistan with little, if any, substantive returns to show for their investments. To Washington's frustration, rather than confront a purported communist 'threat' to the subcontinent, Indian and Pakistani leaders channelled their nations' energy and resources into a sterile and enervating internecine feud. Following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, turned his back on the subcontinent and redirected American power into holding the line against communism in South East Asia. In December 1965, US Under Secretary of State George Ball jibed that the Soviets were now free to 'break their lance' in South Asia.⁷ By the time that Indira Gandhi delivered her Chatham House speech, late in 1971, the US Embassy in New Delhi lamented that Washington had come to see India as 'an oversized political entity lacking cohesion with massive economic and social problems which

⁶ Chester Bowles, 'America and Russia', *Foreign Affairs*, 49 (July 1971), 636–51.

⁷ Brief for Ayub Khan Visit, 14 December 1965, President's Office Files, Jack Valenti meeting notes, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Introduction

threaten its viability and preclude its ability to wield power effectively and entail the provision of endless external existence'. 'Evidently,' one American diplomat recorded, 'White House strategists view India much more as a drainpipe than a fountain head.'⁸

This book offers a re-examination of how and why the Cold War in South Asia evolved in the way that it did, at a time when the national leaderships, geopolitical outlooks and regional aspirations of India, Pakistan and their superpower suitors, were in a state of considerable flux. In August 1947, as the last British flag was hauled down in South Asia, a new 'Great Game' began to take shape in the subcontinent. In common with its nineteenth-century antecedent, immortalised in the pages of Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*, over the next two decades Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) vied for influence in a region that, in the early 1960s, represented a major theatre in the global Cold War.⁹ More particularly, this study critically re-evaluates the remarkable collaborative efforts undertaken by governments in Great Britain and the United States after 1947, to engineer an Indo-Pakistani rapprochement; recast the nature of India's relationship with the West; and minimise Soviet and Chinese sway in the subcontinent. Moreover, in placing the ongoing political, economic, territorial and military rivalry between India and Pakistan (and India and China) in a broad historical context, this monograph calls into question the efficacy of post-war Anglo-American interventions in South Asia, and elsewhere on the global stage.

This book was not conceived as a conventional history of post-war Anglo-American diplomatic relations. Others have ably and extensively covered that particular historical canvass.¹⁰ Nor is its intention to rake over the well-worn, and now clichéd ground, of post-war British

⁸ Lee T. Stull (US Embassy Delhi) to Anthony C. E. Quainton (State Department), 28 December 1971, RG 59, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Records Relating to India 1966–75, Lot, 76D30, Box 20, Folder Mrs Gandhi 1971, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Macmillan, 1901). For an historical context on the Victorian 'Great Game', see Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: John Murray, 1990); and Robert Johnson, *Spying for Empire: The Great Game in Central and South-East Asia, 1757–1947* (London: Greenhill Books, 2006).

¹⁰ Notably, Nigel J. Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); C. J. Bartlett, 'The Special Relationship': *A Political History of Anglo-American Relations since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992); John Dickie, 'Special' *No More: Anglo-American Relations: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994); David Dumbleby and David Reynolds, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988); Alan Dobson, *The Politics of the Anglo-American Economic Special Relationship, 1940–87* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1988); John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations in the Cold*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

‘decline’ and American ‘hubris’. There already exists a voluminous body of work, of variable merit, addressing such themes.¹¹ Rather, it sets out to trace how and why the extension of the Cold War into the Indian subcontinent, precipitated by the United States’ military alliance with Pakistan in 1954, and the inevitable Soviet riposte that followed, transformed South Asia from an international backwater into an important locus of superpower rivalry. In the first half of the 1960s, an unprecedented period of regional instability shattered the political status quo in India and Pakistan, and placed both countries’ relationships with the international community, and each other, on a new and very different footing. In the space of five years, South Asia was buffeted by the backwash from a collapse in India’s relations with the PRC; Moscow’s estrangement from Beijing; the Sino-Indian border war of 1962; the end of the Nehru era; and a fresh bout of Indo-Pakistani hostilities. Simultaneously, Britain’s traditional position of authority in the subcontinent was severely proscribed by broader global trends. Tellingly, when Harold Wilson tried to intercede in the affairs of India and Pakistan toward the end of the 1960s, one member of the British cabinet recorded that New Delhi and Islamabad ‘just ignored him’.¹²

The conclusion that this study draws, explicated in the chapters that follow, is that collaborative Anglo-American interventions in the Indian subcontinent in the early Cold War period invariably proved to be misguided, ineffectual and counterproductive. In contrast to the more carefully calibrated actions of the Soviet Union and PRC, British and American policymakers plunged together into the morass of South Asian politics on the basis of a series of highly questionable and often contradictory assumptions: that India and Pakistan could be cajoled into settling their differences; that the spectre of Communist Chinese power would persuade India to abandon its policy of non-alignment;

War and After (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961–1965: Britain, the United States, and the Creation of Malaysia* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Wm. Roger Louis and Hedley Bull (eds.), *The Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations Since 1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); and David Reynolds, ‘A “Special Relationship”? America, Britain and the International Order Since the Second World War’, *International Affairs*, 62, 1 (1985–6), 1–20.

¹¹ See, for example, Corelli Barnett, *The Verdict of Peace: Britain between Her Yesterday and the Future* (London: Macmillan, 2001); Saki Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Empire and the World?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972); Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (London: Little Brown, 2000); and John W. Young, *The Labour Governments 1964–1970*, vol. 2: *International Policy* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

¹² Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p. 280.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Introduction

and that the dependence of India and Pakistan on Western economic and military aid would deter those countries from turning to the Soviet Union and PRC for support. In the process, having started from a position of considerable strength in 1947, by the end of 1965, British and American relations with India and Pakistan were in tatters. Moscow and Beijing, meanwhile, stood poised in the wings to assume the roles of New Delhi's and Islamabad's best friends.

This study is not the first to focus attention upon the ebb and flow of superpower rivalry in the developing world in the latter half of the twentieth century. Over the past decade, military, diplomatic, social, economic and cultural historians have diligently probed the complex factors that helped to define the exchange between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' during the Cold War.¹³ An extensive and growing body of literature has documented American, British, Soviet and Chinese interventions in greater Asia after 1945. Notable recent accounts, the focus of which has centred primarily on East and South East Asia, have shed new light on the causes, contours and consequences of the Cold War outside Europe.¹⁴ In a South Asian context, Chen Jian's *Mao's China and the Cold War* and articles by Mikhail Y. Prozumenshchikov and Vojtech Mastny, have offered up valuable insights into previously obscure aspects of Eastern bloc policy in the subcontinent.¹⁵ Earlier works, chiefly by American scholars, have directly addressed the United States' interaction with post-independent South Asia. As early as 1972, William J. Barnds, in *India, Pakistan and the Great Powers*, highlighted the difficulties that successive US administrations, from Truman to Johnson, had encountered in attempting to navigate the turbulent waters of South

¹³ An outstanding example of which is the Bancroft prize-winning study by Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ For example, Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (eds.), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann (eds.), *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945–1962* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009); Zheng Yangwen, Hong Liu and Michael Szonyi (eds.), *The Cold War in Asia: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Anthony Day and Maya H. T. Liem (eds.), *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Mikhail Y. Prozumenshchikov, 'The Sino-Indian Conflict, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Sino-Soviet Split, October 1962: New Evidence from the Russian Archives', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 8–9 (1996–7), 251–7; and Vojtech Mastny, 'The Soviet Union's Partnership with India', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12, 3 (2010), 50–90.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Asian politics. In the 1990s, Robert J. McMahon's thought-provoking survey of the United States' relationship with India and Pakistan, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan*, Andrew J. Rotter's *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964* and Dennis Merrill's *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947–1963*, amongst others, broke new ground by exploring the diplomatic, cultural and economic aspects of America's relationship with the Indian subcontinent.¹⁶ Remarkably given the importance that British policymakers continued to attach to South Asia after 1947, Anita Inder Singh's 1993 monograph, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship 1947–56*, remains one of the only studies to have given sustained attention to post-war British policy in the subcontinent.¹⁷

Nonetheless, despite the important contributions made by these authors, it has only recently become possible to interrogate the broad history of Cold War in South Asia from a transnational perspective. Existing studies of superpower intervention in India and Pakistan were written at a time when the pertinent official records on South Asia were only just becoming available on both sides of the Atlantic, and when no comparable Eastern European, Chinese, Indian or Pakistani documentation had yet seen the light of day. Since the mid-1990s, significant new archival material has become available to researchers. In the United Kingdom, William Waldegrave, Minister for Open Government in John Major's administration, oversaw the declassification and release of previously embargoed files from the Cabinet Office, the Home Office, the Foreign Office, Ministry of Defence and the Intelligence Services. Likewise, in archives across Eastern Europe, the PRC and India, although it has hardly been a case of open sesame, a substantial amount of new government documentation has begun to emerge. This, in turn, has helped to transform scholarly understanding of previously opaque

¹⁶ William J. Barnds, *India, Pakistan and the Great Powers* (London: Pall Mall, 1972); Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947–1963* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000). See also Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941–1991* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1993), and *The United States and Pakistan, 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Anita Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence: South Asia and the Anglo-American Relationship, 1947–56* (London: Pinter, 1993).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Introduction

aspects of the Sino-Indian conflict, and challenged conventional interpretations of how and why the Sino-Soviet split influenced Moscow's and Beijing's relations with South Asia.¹⁸

This study is based on recently released documents in the British National Archives; the India Office collections of the British Library; the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford; Churchill College Archives at the University of Cambridge; the US National Archives; the US Library of Congress; the Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon Presidential Libraries; the Butler Library at Columbia University; the Indian National Archives; and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, as well as other archival sources and published primary and secondary material. One of the key contributions this study makes is to bring to the fore new documentary evidence that gives lie to the fallacy that the Cold War, in a South Asian context at least, was conducted in a Free World versus Communist binary. In doing so, it emphasises the power of local agency and the extent to which foreign interventions in the region were beholden to potent political, ethnic, communal, religious and cultural forces. Moreover, it questions prevailing conceptions, not only of the nature and impact of superpower initiatives in South Asia, but also of how and why the Cold War played out across the developing world as it did. In recent years, India's emergence as a global economic force, a revival in rhetoric surrounding Sino-Indian rivalry and the advent of the so-called 'War on Terror' have brought South Asia to the forefront of global attention once again. This book is intended, above all, to stimulate debate on the evolution of modern South Asia and to act as a spur to further research in the field. Engaging meaningfully with the history of India's and Pakistan's relations with the broader international community, I would contend, is more relevant and important today than ever, as we head into what many commentators have characterised as the 'Asian century'.

¹⁸ For example, Vladislav Zubok, 'The Khrushchev–Mao Conversations, 31 July–3 August 1958 and 2 October 1959', *Cold War International History Project, Bulletin* 12–13 (Fall/Winter 2001); and Surjit Mansingh, 'Indo-Soviet Relations in the Nehru Years: The View from New Delhi', *Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security* (February 2009).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 India, Pakistan and the early Cold War, 1947–1956

On 15 August 1947, having dominated the political and economic landscape of South Asia for two centuries, Britain quit the Indian subcontinent and transferred power to the newly constituted sovereign states of India and Pakistan. The decision taken by Clement Attlee's Labour government to relinquish Britain's Indian Empire, the jewel in the imperial crown and the most potent symbol of the nation's global status, had an immediate and lasting impact on the United Kingdom's international standing. Two years earlier, as Attlee's administration set about the task of rebuilding an imperial superpower exhausted and impoverished by six years of enervating global conflict, Britain's grip on India had begun to fracture. In New Delhi, the Viceroy of India, Archibald Wavell, confided to his diary that an erosion in British authority in the subcontinent had left him, 'still legally and morally responsible for what happens in India ... [but without] nearly all power to control events; we are simply running on the momentum of our previous prestige'.¹

Although publicly committed to a policy of early independence for India, the Attlee administration's failure to advance a schedule for self-government produced rumblings of discontent in South Asia. The Labour Party had a long tradition of anti-imperialism. Nonetheless, Attlee, whose personal association with India dated from his service on the Simon Commission in 1927, along with other senior members of the British cabinet, retained a sentimental attachment to the allure of empire. Wavell considered both Ernest Bevin, Britain's Foreign Secretary, and Albert Alexander, Labour's minister of defence, to be 'in reality imperialists ... [who] dislike any idea of leaving India'.² The

¹ Entry for 31 December 1946, in Pendrel Moon (ed.), *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 402. See also R. J. Moore, *Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the Indian Problem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 338.

² Entry 24 December 1946, Moon (ed.), *Viceroy's Journal*, p. 399; *The Times*, 12 January 1946. See also Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 193–4.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00815-1 - The Cold War in South Asia: Britain, the United States and the Indian Subcontinent 1945–1965

Paul M. McGarr

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 India, Pakistan and the early Cold War, 1947–1956

Labour Party's manifesto for the 1945 general election, *Let's Face the Future*, made no reference to colonial issues. The British electorate, Labour's leadership judged, were more concerned with the advent of a new welfare state, a return to full employment and social equality, than imperial reform.³ In a national opinion poll conducted in Britain in early 1947, three-quarters of respondents were unable to differentiate between a dominion and a colony, and over half of those interviewed failed to name a single British imperial territory.⁴ In addition, as World War turned to Cold War after 1945, British civil and military leaders became anxious that without access to India's strategic, economic and martial resources, Britain's future as a global power would be compromised.⁵ Moreover, the Attlee government's India policy faced intense scrutiny from a Conservative opposition, led by Winston Churchill, which insisted that relinquishing the Indian Empire was as unnecessary, as it was undesirable.⁶

A lack of political impetus in London on the India question allowed nationalist forces in the subcontinent to drive the pace of change in South Asia. In February 1946, the Royal Indian Navy mutinied in Bombay. The following month, as nationalist agitation in India threatened to spiral out of control, Attlee dispatched a Cabinet Mission to New Delhi to negotiate terms for a British withdrawal.⁷ By September, a transitional Indian government was in place, and the talismanic Congress Party leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, was installed as its de facto premier and foreign minister. With the genie of political devolution out of the bottle in the subcontinent, in February 1947, Attlee produced a timetable for the end of British rule in India. Before a sombre House of Commons, the Labour premier confirmed that the Raj would be brought to an end by 31 March 1948, if not before.⁸ Somewhat belatedly, Attlee's government recognised that by accelerating India's independence Britain stood a much better chance of retaining close economic and security links with the subcontinent. This, in turn, would go a long way to sustain British influence elsewhere in Asia. As it turned out, grandiose British plans for

³ Partha Sarathi Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914–1964* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1975), pp. 282–4.

⁴ David Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945–1961: From 'Colonial Development' to 'Winds of Change'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 399.

⁵ 'Strategic Position of the British Commonwealth', 2 April 1946, CAB 131/2, DO (46) 47, The United Kingdom National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter TNA).

⁶ Entry for 31 August 1945, Moon (ed.), *Viceroy's Journal*, p. 168; Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible: The Memoirs of Lord Butler* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), p. 141.

⁷ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*, vol. 1: 1889–1947 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 311.

⁸ Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 380.