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‘ Wild Bearded Beasts ’

Abdullah Muntazer came across as an earnest young man. He sported a full beard and wore the trademark Pathan cap, a loose, beige beret, which folds over like a pile of unleavened bread. He hailed from near Abbottabad in Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province. When I met him in one of the more modest corners of Pakistan’s smart, purpose-built capital Islamabad, he was a little shy, and initially suspicious of a questioning outsider. But it was his job to explain his organisation and what it stood for, and he did it well. Muntazer was at that time an information secretary of one of the most formidable militant groups fighting the Indian army in Kashmir—Lashkar-e-Toiba, the ‘army of the pure’. Lashkar was the most prominent and effective of a fresh wave of armed groups that injected new energy into the Kashmir movement from the mid-to-late 1990s, at a time when India appeared to be getting the upper hand over some of the longer established militant groups.

Lashkar-e-Toiba, along with other armed groups such as Harkat-ul Ansar and Harkat’s successor organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed introduced a religious ideology into the Kashmir conflict, and a much more daring style of military operation. In the early stages of the armed militancy, the Kashmiri cause was seen as political—the right of self-determination—though the religious aspect to the dispute was always apparent. Even Umar Farooq, Srinagar’s Muslim chief priest and a prominent separatist, argued that the Kashmir issue was basically a political question. But groups such as Lashkar and Harkat insisted that their struggle was religious. It was a ‘jihad’ or holy war, a concept that had been rekindled among some strands within South Asian Islam during the 1980s through the American- and Pakistan-sponsored guerrilla campaign against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan.

Many of the operations in the early years of Kashmir’s armed separatist movement had been in the hit-and-run style. Militants would throw a grenade at an Indian security post, and quickly mingle with the



crowd. Or they would detonate a mine under a military vehicle, occasionally indulge in sniper fire or kill an alleged collaborator. Lashkar and Harkat brought some of the lessons of the Afghan conflict to Kashmir. Both organisations—though particularly Harkat-ul Ansar and its later incarnation, Jaish-e-Mohammed—had links with the Taliban and, while Taliban rule persisted, had camps inside Afghanistan. Both were much bolder than the established Kashmiri militant groups, tackling the Indian forces head-on. They staged attacks on military bases, at times getting inside, inflicting heavy casualties and then holding out for as long as they could. They on occasion targeted—and succeeded in infiltrating—the biggest Indian army base in the Kashmir Valley, the sprawling cantonment at Badami Bagh in Srinagar.

There's strong evidence that groups such as Lashkar, Harkat and Jaish were responsible for another new element of the conflict—the massacre of non-Muslim villagers in outlying parts of the Kashmir Valley and adjoining areas. They also took the conflict to the heart of India's power structure. In the weeks after the attacks of 11 September 2001, with the contours of South Asian diplomacy undergoing rapid change, the jihadi groups launched bloody operations against the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly building in Srinagar, and against the Indian Parliament building in Delhi. These head-on assaults were what amounted to suicide attacks—the militants involved clearly had little expectation of surviving. The Parliament attack, the most spectacular operation carried out by Kashmiri militants, brought India and Pakistan close to war. However forceful Islamabad's denial of involvement or prior knowledge, and whatever the uncertainty about which militant organisations had been responsible, the powerful perception in India was that groups based in Pakistan, and enjoying a level of official patronage there, had struck at the core of India's national identity and its secular and democratic form of governance. The furious response of the Indian political establishment, and of Indian public opinion, prompted the Americans to put pressure on Pakistan's military ruler to outlaw the jihadi groups. In January 2002—two years after my meeting with Abdullah Muntazer—President Musharraf proscribed Lashkar, Jaish, and similar-minded organisations. They continued to operate under other names, and managed to claw back some influence by their prominence in relief operations after the devastating earthquake in Pakistan Kashmir in October 2005, but they faced constraints on their fund-raising, recruiting and training.

'Our Islam teaches us to help oppressed nations like the Kashmiris,' Abdullah Muntazer told me. He had received military training in



Afghanistan and talked freely about the Lashkar-e-Toiba camps in the mountains of Azad Kashmir, the part of Kashmir under Pakistan’s control. The Pakistani authorities deny that there are any separatist military camps on their territory, but groups such as Lashkar saw no need to maintain this fiction. Muntazer also spoke about his own active service in Indian Kashmir in 1995. ‘In our guerrilla warfare training, we are taught how we will enter and how we will travel. That was a very difficult job for us. When I crossed the line of control [from Pakistan-controlled territory into the Indian side], it was 1 a.m. in the night, and we walked for [the] whole night. When we reached at the top of a mountain, we were very hungry. There was a Kashmiri man, we got food from him. That was a very delicious food at that time. That was a three-day journey.’ Having made their way through the mountain passes into Indian Kashmir, evading the army patrols aimed at stopping just this sort of infiltration, Muntazer and his colleagues staged a series of ambushes, mine blasts and rocket attacks, using local Kashmiris as their guides. ‘We went to help them. We are their guests there. The people in Kashmir, they have a very big respect for us. We are not Kashmiri. We don’t know the tracks. We don’t [know] the territory. They help us. They tell us how to get to that camp. In Kashmir, Indian forces have aggressed. And we went to stop their aggression. They are killers, and in every part of the world the punishment for killers [is] death.’

Abdullah Muntazer doesn’t come from the Kashmir Valley. He doesn’t speak Kashmiri—his mother tongue is Hindko, which has affinities with both Punjabi and Pashto. A hallmark of the jihadi-style militant groups is that only a minority of their cadres are Kashmiris. Many are Pathans, and probably more are Punjabis, Pakistan’s dominant community. When I asked Muntazer why a non-Kashmiri should choose to fight for someone else’s freedom, I expected the answer I had received from other militant leaders—a few cliches about pan-Islamic sentiment, an injustice to one Muslim is a grievance for all, that sort of thing. Instead, I got a much more intriguing reply. ‘Our family background’, he confided, ‘is a jihadi background. During [the] war of ’48, family members fought in the liberation of Kashmir. So I have a jihadi background. Kashmir is only four hours on [a] walking track from our village. There was a time when our whole village was empty of men in 1948. The whole village went to join the war against Indian forces in 1948. They were in [the] tribal forces. We joined in ’48, and still I am fighting against the Hindu forces in Indian-held Kashmir.’¹ The emphasis Muntazer placed on this family and village history suggested that it provided, or reinforced, a





sense of legitimacy for his own role in fighting the Indian army. The tradition of the lashkar, the tribal army, is an enduring one, powerfully evident in 1947 but dating back much earlier. Lashkar-e-Toiba has positioned itself within this framework of an armed force, sanctioned by custom, and willing and eager to travel and to fight in the cause of Islam.

It was through Abdullah Muntazer that I got the opportunity to visit what was then Lashkar-e-Toiba's headquarters at Muridke on the outskirts of the Pakistani city of Lahore. I was shown round by Muntazer's boss, a burly and convivial man with a bushy, greying beard, who took the nom-de-guerre Yahya Mujahid. Muridke was impressive. It was described to me as an Islamic university, with several thousand male students. And that's what it appeared to be—recently built, in a greenfield site, with departments specialising in Arabic, English, computer studies and other disciplines. A campus shop sold audio cassettes of wailing, echoing songs glorifying the life of a mujahid, a religious freedom fighter. I bought a few. Outside the campus mosque, I met an elderly teacher of English, who told me with pride that many of his former students had been killed fighting in Kashmir. The authorities at Muridke kept a register of all alumni killed on service. At the time of my visit, I was told, more than 600 members of Lashkar had lost their lives, among them about forty Muridke students 'on vacation' in Indian Kashmir.

I was given free rein to walk around the site, to peer into rooms, and meander through courtyards. My attention was taken by a group of students, several in camouflage-style military fatigues, attending a lecture outside on the grass. The tone of the address seemed to be excited. Was this military training, I asked? No, no, I was told, they were being taught the skills of open-air religious preaching. Yahya Mujahid insisted that whatever instruction was provided in the camps in Pakistan Kashmir, there was nothing of a military nature at Muridke. Still, the popularity of camouflage jackets and trousers, which were on sale at stalls on the edge of the site, gave the campus something of the appearance of an army instruction centre.

My attempts, on a later visit, to get to a Lashkar-e-Toiba camp in Pakistan Kashmir were not as successful. A friend, one of Islamabad's most senior journalists, had warned me there was no way that the country's powerful military intelligence agency, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), would allow a foreign reporter to visit military facilities in Pakistan Kashmir which did not officially exist. All the militant groups relied on the goodwill of the ISI, and on much more tangible support. Nevertheless, Lashkar seemed keen to show me around their office just outside the



small, sleepy town of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan Kashmir. They said they were happy to discuss taking me to a training camp. We arranged a time when they would come to my Muzaffarabad hotel and escort me to their local headquarters. No one showed up. No one who picked up the phone in the local Lashkar office could explain why the appointment had not been kept, or when the rendezvous could be rearranged.

On our last morning in Muzaffarabad, after several days of unsatisfactory phone exchanges, we decided to head out on the road leading towards their office. It was more of a potholed cart track. But a roadside stall selling camouflage gear, and bedecked with garish stickers and posters graphically depicting the destruction of India, Israel and the United States, confirmed our sense of direction. Even more so did the presence of a young boy, probably in his mid-teens, lolling around by the side of the track, carrying an automatic weapon. We pressed on, but not much further. Our car was overtaken by a man on a motorbike. We were told to stop, and our pursuer—who was wearing a grey, loose-fitting Punjabi tunic rather than any style of uniform—identified himself as from the Special Branch. He told us to turn around right away. His tone did not brook discussion or dissent. We navigated an awkward about turn on the rutted track and retraced our route.

Kashmir is accustomed to outsiders fighting on its soil. The Pathans have taken their turn, along with just about every other dynasty in the region, in ruling the Kashmir Valley. The Durrani, Pathans from the area around Peshawar and stretching into what is now Afghanistan, controlled Kashmir through the second half of the eighteenth century. They were not the gentlest of rulers. ‘Tales of religious persecution, devastation and rapine are still told in every household throughout the Valley of Kashmir,’ one Kashmiri leader, Sardar Ibrahim Khan, averred, with perhaps a measure of licence.² The Kashmiris may not have taken to the Pathans, but the tribesmen certainly took to the Valley. ‘From that time has come down that curious attachment which Pathans still feel today for this loveliest of lands,’ in the judgement of Olaf Caroe, one-time colonial governor of the Frontier Province. The more easterly of the Pathan groups ‘think of Kashmir as a mistress. Those who love her abide half-guiltily in the pleasures of her seduction, but in the very acknowledgement of her beauty their thoughts return to their own and more lawful home.’³ This sentiment is reflected in a Pathan proverb: To every man his own country is Kashmir. Pathans and Kashmiris did not have a great deal in common, apart from Islam. Their languages are mutually unintelligible. Their cultures are very different, and, conspicuously, Valley Kashmiris do not



have a martial tradition. The Pathan tribes are from barren hills, while the Kashmir Valley is so broad and verdant that for many Kashmiris the mountains are a distant vista rather than their natural habitat.

In spite of the considerable distance between the tribal agencies bordering Afghanistan and the Jhelum Valley, the Pathan tribes have continued to feel an affinity with Kashmir. If vestigial memories of ruling Kashmir played a part in propelling the tribesmen towards Kashmir in 1947, a faint echo of that more recent incursion can still be heard in the Valley. 'Since 1948 the tribes have regularly demanded that they be allowed to return to Kashmir,' wrote one sympathetic observer of the Pathans and their culture. That sentiment has faded over time, inevitably. But, two generations after the invasion, it was still apparent—'when asked if the Kashmir struggle was all over, *pukhtunwali* [the Pathan code of conduct and values] came into play. No! They had lost ancestors there; the battle had not been won. They would have to go back.'⁴ And in the years since that observation was written, some, such as Abdullah Muntazer, have indeed gone back.

The Pathans have their admirers among historians, colonial administrators, and experts on South Asia. But by and large, they have had a bad press. They are the majority community in Afghanistan, living in the south and east of the country, where they provided the main body of support for the Taliban movement. They are also the dominant community in Pakistan's NWFP, with its capital in Peshawar, and in the adjoining mountainous tribal agencies. The Pathans—also variously known as Pukhtuns, Pushtuns and Pakhtuns—are united by a language, by a code of honour which emphasises valour, hospitality and vengeance, and by a patriarchal lifestyle forged by living in some of the most rugged and inhospitable terrain in the region. Religion is another binding force. Their style of Islam is not by its nature fundamentalist, but it is deep-rooted, with a tradition of following local clerics, sometimes called pirs, who have often gained great political importance. Pathans are also divided by tribal and clan loyalties, and while at times they have served as a united fighting force, at others they have been pre-occupied with bitter rivalries both among tribes and within the tribe.

The Pathans have not always merited their reputation for violence, vendettas and unruliness. In the 1940s, the Frontier was the home of the khudai khidmatgar, a mass movement of non-violent nationalism.⁵ The real strength of this tradition was among what are described as the 'settled' Pathan communities of the plains. The hill tribes, a minority among the Pathans but the most bellicose of their number, have long had a powerful

tradition of fighting, sometimes out of vendetta or political rivalry, and at other times in the cause of Islam. These tribes—tribe being used in the Frontier as a term of pride, and not at all of derision or contempt—and particularly the Mahsuds and Wazirs, gained a reputation during the colonial period as being the most unruly of Imperial subjects. They were regarded as prone to armed revolt, effective at it, and difficult and expensive to subdue. While the ‘settled’ areas of the Frontier became part of the Raj, the more remote mountain districts to the west were designated as tribal areas, and served as a buffer between British India and Afghanistan. The main affinity there was with the tribe or clan, and administration was through traditional tribal or clan leaders. Customary law, rather than coded law, was in force. And allowances were paid to tribal leaders to deter them from lawlessness. This remarkable autonomy, in essence a series of feudal fiefdoms policing their own social and criminal codes, continued into the independence era. The agencies were no-go areas for Pakistan’s powerful armed forces, a long-standing arrangement that can have had few parallels anywhere in the world.⁶ The Pakistan army withdrew from the tribal areas at independence—and, by and large, stayed away, until in the aftermath of 9/11, the search for remnants of the Taliban, and for the likes of Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar prompted the government to send troops into Waziristan and several other tribal agencies.

The capacity of the hill tribes to inflict heavy casualties and heavier humiliation on western-led armies stretches back almost two centuries. Initial British military adventures in Afghanistan from the late 1830s led to disgrace and defeat at the hands of the Afghans (and Pathans in particular). Several British men and women were captured, and in the captivity stories they wrote after their release established a tone of describing Afghans as barbarians who were wild, savage, cruel, primitive and treacherous.⁷ The language had not changed much by the time of the Kashmir invasion a century later. *The Scarlet Sword*, H.E. Bates’s novel based on the attack on the Baramulla convent, is in its way a latter-day captivity story, an account of how Europeans fared at the hands of Pathan attackers and hostage-takers. In its pages, the tribesmen are described as ‘fanatics, terrific and ruthless fellows’, perpetrators of rape and massacre. The first-hand accounts of the attack in the *Daily Express* variously described the attackers as ‘loot-mad Pathans’ and ‘husky thugs’ who were ‘crazed with fighting’. The senior missionary priest, Fr Shanks—the newspaper reported—had denounced the tribesmen as ‘great, wild, black beasts’. Among other western journalists who saw something of the raid or its aftermath, Robert Trumbull described a ‘looting, murdering army



of fierce Pathan tribesmen' which 'swept through Kashmir like a plague', while Margaret Bourke-White wrote of 'wild Muslim nomads'. Canon Tyndale-Biscoe, Kashmir's most prominent Protestant missionary, unpiously referred to them as 'devils'.⁸ 'Wild' was the word repeatedly used by survivors of the raid on the convent, among them Tom Dykes and Angela Aranha, both of whom lost parents in the attack.

Yet throughout all these stories of British captives of the Pathans, another strand is evident. Early captivity stories sometimes paid tribute to the Pathans' courage. The *Daily Express* reported with respect how injured Pathans endured surgery without anaesthetic and without complaint. Taking his cue from such journalism, H.E. Bates also found aspects of the Pathans' conduct worthy of admiration. And most arrestingly, both Tom Dykes and Angela Aranha recalled acts of personal kindness by the tribesmen. 'They were very kind to us. They loved little children,' Angela Aranha asserted of the men who had murdered her father. 'They wouldn't harm us in any way. And they knew that we were starving. And we had nothing to eat. And some of them even gave us apples to eat—I don't know where they got them from, but I remember that—that they were trying to be very friendly with the children.' These contrasting memories of the tribesmen from those who suffered most at their hands, on the one hand wild and terrorising and on the other kind and generous, are a reminder of the need to understand actions and behaviour and place them in context rather than simply to judge or castigate.

The Pathan lashkar proved a nuisance to the British from the time colonial India sought to absorb the hill tribes in the 1890s. Tens of thousands of soldiers in the British Indian army were preoccupied with keeping the rebellious tribes under loose control. The British colonial policy was, by and large, to curb the marauding tendencies of the hill tribes rather than to conquer and pacify them. But as late as the mid-1930s, Pathan tribes staged what amounted to the most serious armed revolt in India since the rebellion of 1857, pinning down tens of thousands of imperial troops.⁹ The lashkar had always been most skilled at hill fighting. It usually relied on ambush and surprise attack, and avoided either set-piece battles or exposed positions on the plains. Although both tactics and strategy were often well-considered, the execution was frequently haphazard. And groups of fighters, often resistant to anything other than local command by people of authority within their community, at times decided to turn round when they had sufficient booty, or when they considered that the raid was running into trouble. 'The typical clash,' according to a Pakistani official who spent many years in Waziristan in

the heart of the tribal belt, ‘is the short raid, usually at sunrise or sunset, culminating in the capture of the village or booty, like cattle.’ The glory of taking part in the raid was much greater motivation than territorial conquest, with the result that ‘all the major raids in the last hundred years from Waziristan, whether to Kabul or Kashmir, have been characterized by their blitzkrieg nature, by their swift irresistible penetration and by the rapid inevitable disintegration of the lashkar (war party).’¹⁰ Often fighters would simply head home without any attempt at coordination within the lashkar. This tribal democracy or indiscipline, as you will, in time of conflict meant that while the lashkar could be enormously effective in fighting a guerrilla war in home territory, it was less adept at fighting for any length of time away from home. The call of jihad could unite and motivate tribes, but generally not for all that long.

The weaknesses as well as the strengths of the lashkar were evident in the Frontier revolt just ten years before the Kashmir invasion. The tribesmen, mainly Wazirs, were fighting largely on home territory. Their locally produced rifles were effective. So too were their ambushes. But their military organisation was indifferent. According to a recent historian of the revolt, discipline and supply were perennial problems. ‘Due to the voluntary nature of tribal warfare, the lashkars lost their best men first, providing the army with a stiff test at the start of a campaign, with disastrous consequences in the medium term. Tribal sub-units in a big lashkar did not trust each other to the same extent as troops in a regular force.’¹¹ As a result, it was difficult for the various different contingents within a lashkar to cooperate in a large-scale tactical movement.

This organisational weakness of the lashkar explains some of the traits evident in the Kashmir operation—the irregular ebb and flow of forces, the failure to advance rapidly, the sense of uncertainty about how to proceed once the tribesmen had made their way through the mountains to the broad Kashmir Valley, and the extraordinarily swift collapse of the lashkar after its encounters with well-dug-in Indian troops on the outskirts of Srinagar. On the other hand, the institution of the lashkar—and the similarly venerated concept of jihad—illustrates that no overarching conspiracy theory is required to explain why thousands of armed Pathans wished to descend on Kashmir. The tribes were quite able to stir themselves without instruction from government or politicians. All the same, it is necessary to enquire what prompted the Pathans to invade Kashmir in October 1947. And given that they were operating well beyond the Pathan homelands (for Abdullah Muntazer’s forbears, Kashmir may have been just a few hours trek away, but most tribesmen



travelled upwards of 200 miles to reach Kashmir), the extent of Pakistan's support for the raiders needs to be assessed.

The late summer and autumn of 1947 was an enormously turbulent time across South Asia. The communal violence was most intense in Punjab, but it extended into the Frontier as well. Many Hindus and Sikhs in the city of Peshawar were killed or forced to leave. There was a similar, though much smaller, exodus from towns close to the tribal agencies, such as Tank. The reports of the killing of many tens of thousands of Muslims in Punjab circulated widely and quickly. The accounts of massacres, rapes, the ambush of caravans of refugees and slaughter of trainloads of migrants inevitably aroused powerful emotions. The maharaja of Kashmir had a poor reputation for the treatment of his Muslim subjects. The state's armed forces were alleged to have been involved in atrocities against Muslims in Jammu province. On top of that was the suspicion, intensified by the maharaja's delay in deciding which new dominion to join, that Kashmir was edging towards becoming part of India, even though its geography and Muslim majority pointed strongly towards accession to Pakistan.

The initial rising against the maharaja was indigenous and owed very little to tribal involvement. Poonch, part of the maharaja's state north-west of Jammu but outside the Kashmir Valley, had its own grievances, particularly about the erosion of local autonomy and the imposition of taxes. It also had, unusually in Jammu and Kashmir, a strong military tradition. The number of Poonchis, as the local residents were known, who had returned to the area having seen military service in the Second World War, has been put as high as 60,000—and it was one of the main recruiting areas for Kashmir's own armed forces.¹² An insurgency against the maharaja took root towards the end of August 1947. 'We started being on the ground from February 1947, as far back as that,' recalled Sardar Abdul Qayum Khan, one of the instigators of the Poonch revolt who went on to become the grand old man of Kashmiri politics in Pakistan. 'By August 1947, we had started mobilising ourselves and confining, trying to confine, the Dogra troops to certain pockets. In August, we started this armed revolt. On 23rd August, we declared an armed revolt. On 26th, we went into an exchange of fire with Dogra troops stationed there. And then it triggered off. By the end of September, we had quite a big chunk of territory, thus linking it with Punjab. I was the man who was managing the whole movement at that time from my own home district, from Poonch. At that time, it was the state army fighting the state people. There were no men from the Frontier at that time.' Richard Symonds, a relief worker who knew the Poonch area, reported that the revolt started when

a ‘young zamindar [landowner], Abdul Qayyum [sic], with 4 companions and three rifles fled into the mountains and harrassed Dogra patrols . . . Qayyum owed his subsequent victories not so much to the brilliance of his military operations but to the indiscriminate reprisals of the Dogras.’ Writing in December 1947, Symonds described the ‘Azad Army’ in Poonch as ‘cheerful, though ill clad and ill armed, Probably 75% are ex-servicemen . . . Every day’s march is preceded by prayers and discipline appears very fair for an unpaid guerilla [sic] army.’ The fighters’ motivation, he recorded, was not so much to join Pakistan as to get rid of the Dogra monarchy.¹³

Sardar Qayum has been one of the more interesting Kashmiri politicians in Pakistan. Azad Kashmir enjoys a lot of nominal autonomy, but is in fact closely controlled by the Pakistan government. Few Kashmir-based politicians have made much of a mark at national level. Sardar Qayum Khan, thoughtful and innovative, has proved an exception. He has served both as president and prime minister of Pakistan Kashmir. He has been willing to talk about possible solutions to the Kashmir issue other than simple accession to Pakistan, and his views have extended beyond demonising India and its armed forces. Indeed, he has acknowledged shortcomings in Pakistan’s Kashmir policy dating back to 1947, and has mused publicly that the rule of maharaja, against which he took up arms, was a lesser evil than the violence that has gripped the Valley in recent years.¹⁴

As the Poonch insurgency developed, links were established with some politicians in Pakistan. This did not—Sardar Qayum Khan insisted—extend to military support from Pakistan. ‘We had no contact with the government of Pakistan whatsoever, and it was the people along the border who helped us, purchasing the country-made rifles. And then, of course, soon after that we started relying on the captured arms and ammunition of the enemy troops.’

There are other claimants to the title of architect of the Poonch revolt, and instigator of the Azad Kashmir (Free Kashmir) movement. Sardar Mohammed Ibrahim Khan was a young lawyer from Rawalkot near Poonch who was working in Srinagar, where he was an influential figure in the more pro-Pakistan of the two main parties, the Muslim Conference. He slipped out of the state, based himself in Murree just across the border in Pakistan, and there—along with some officers who had deserted from the maharaja’s army—claims to have made the decision ‘to resort to arms’, apparently in September 1947. He has described how basic arms and ammunition were collected, and sent over the Jhelum river into Kashmir in ‘shinas’, rafts built round inflated goat skins. Soldiers,



mainly war veterans, were recruited village by village, and became an effective force—though plagued by the lack of automatic weapons and acute communications difficulties.¹⁵ Sardar Ibrahim Khan was named president of a provisional government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (curiously, the second such proclamation of a provisional government) in late October.

While the two Khans may have disagreed about who should get the credit for launching the insurgency against the maharaja, and who was in initial control, they were of one mind about the limitations of the tribesmen's involvement. Sardar Qayum Khan has been the more damning in his assessment. 'The movement suffered a great setback,' he told me, 'because they were uncontrollable people':

What I did was, when they came to my sector, some of them, they were slightly more disciplined. I evacuated a whole village and asked them to stay there, and then put a guard round that village. I did not allow them to join the fight. But in the rest of the state, they did a lot of damage.

The looting created a very bad impression among the Muslim community. They made no distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. And even if the non-Muslims were looted, that was not the pattern we were following. Because of that indiscipline, no command from behind, no control—they went on looting. And when they were full, they went back. Nobody was commanding them. They moved on their own, absolutely on their own. Every tribe was being commanded by a tribal chief. The Mahsuds had their own command. The Wazirs had their own command. The Khattaks had their own command.

Particularly the Wazirs and the Mahsuds were absolutely uncontrollable. I came into an exchange of fire with them at Muzaffarabad.

They made an absolute blunder allowing a thing like this.

Displaying a touch more generosity, Sardar Ibrahim Khan conceded that the tribesmen were good fighters, but emphasised that their involvement had neither been sought nor expected by the Azad Kashmir leadership. 'When tribesmen did come to our aid their management became a difficult problem . . . One could not expect them to fight and conquer, and then hold ground. This is where we made a terrific mistake. Tribesmen are a fluid element. They must have a professionally trained

force with them so that the ground covered may be held by such a force. When the tribal *Lashkar* retreated from Srinagar, we had no other troops to hold the territory evacuated by them.’¹⁶

One common feature in the recollections of those in positions of influence in Kashmir in 1947 is the offsetting of blame. ‘If only they had listened,’ is the common refrain—as much among Indian army commanders as among prominent pro-Pakistan Kashmiris. After all, the Kashmir crisis of 1947–48 ended in a way that few could relish. India failed to claim the entire princely state; Pakistan failed to gain control of any part of the Kashmir Valley; Kashmiri Muslims saw the banishment of their unpopular maharaja without gaining the full self-determination to which so many had aspired. Yet it is telling that two pioneering leaders of the armed pro-Pakistan movement in 1947 have chosen such outspoken epithets as ‘absolute blunder’ and ‘terrific mistake’ to describe the Pathan tribes’ involvement in the insurgency against the maharaja.

From Pakistan’s strategic point of view, the rebellion in Poonch served a useful purpose. It put military pressure on the maharaja, and in as much as the insurgents supported accession to Pakistan, which was generally the case, it was a useful reflection of the disenchantment of the maharaja’s Muslim subjects and a warning of the possible consequences should he opt for India. It was not, however, the seed from which could germinate a fully-fledged revolt capable of capturing the princely state for Pakistan. While the armed movement spread beyond Poonch to neighbouring areas such as Mirpur, it had little potential to extend much further. The city of Jammu and surrounding areas, which was Dogra and Hindu-majority, was the maharaja’s heartland and largely immune to rebellion. And the Kashmir Valley was both remote from Poonch—not in terms of distance, but certainly of access—and culturally distinct. The people in and around Poonch largely spoke not Kashmiri but Puncchi or Pahari, sometimes described as hill dialects of Punjabi. And while the insurgency was formidable and deprived the Dogra dynasty of a great deal of territory, it certainly did not carry all before it. In the town of Poonch, which had a considerable Hindu population, a besieged garrison of the maharaja’s forces, along with 20,000–40,000 refugees, held out until relieved finally by Indian troops in November 1948. The town today lies on India’s side of the line of control.

Any considerable military threat to the Kashmir Valley would, given the quiescence of the Valley population, have to come from outside, and from along the Jhelum Valley road. Some of the tribesmen, keen to go on a jihad, were ready and willing to take on that role. There were acute



divisions between leaders of the hill Pathans. The Fakir of Ipi, the religious leader among the Wazirs who had led the 1936–37 revolt and who was regarded by the British as a formidable and almost demonic adversary, was not reconciled to the formation of Pakistan. He advised his followers not to go on jihad to Kashmir.¹⁷ He had rivals among the Wazirs who took a different view. The Pir of Wana, ‘a little-known spiritual leader until 1945 among the South Waziristan tribes but who has since gained prominence rivalling that of the Fakir of Ipi’, offered the services of his followers ‘for action jointly with Pakistan in this extremely critical hour in the history of Islam’. And he came to Peshawar to discuss with the provincial chief minister what form this action should take.¹⁸ While in the provincial capital, the holy man—colloquially known as the Baghdadi Pir—gave an interview to Margaret Parton of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Wearing dark glasses, a red fez, and a bandolier over his grey Pathan pyjamas, the forty-year-old pir insisted that should Kashmir join India, ‘he would lead an army of 1,000,000 tribesmen into Kashmir on a holy war’:

If we cannot march through Pakistan, we will march through the mountains of Chitral to the north,’ he said. ‘We will march with our rifles and our guns, and we will save our Moslem brothers from the whims of the Hindu maharaja.’

Scaling down Pir’s claims by 90 per cent, officials here [in Peshawar] are nevertheless worried. Most of them admit that on the slightest provocation the Pir of Wana or any other strong personality in the tribal areas of the Northwest Frontier Province could gather an army of 100,000 sharp-shooting tribesmen, well equipped by their own tribal gun factories.

If Kashmir does elect to join India, officials here feel that provocation to the deeply religious tribesmen will be more than slight.¹⁹

There were plenty of strong personalities among tribal leaders with a similar viewpoint. The Pir of Manki Sharif was particularly influential in advocating jihad in Kashmir. He came to prominence as a young, local figurehead of Jinnah’s Muslim League. In 1946–47, during which the League blossomed dramatically in the Frontier region from an almost marginal force to be the dominant local party, the pir was one of its outstanding provincial leaders. He played a conspicuous part in winning the Frontier for Pakistan in the referendum held shortly before

independence. The pir was known disparagingly to British officials as ‘the Manki mullah’, and had a religious following put at 200,000. But of all the tribal chiefs and religious leaders who urged the sending of a lashkar to Kashmir, he was the most influential, with a following that transcended tribal boundaries.²⁰

Much of the lashkar was recruited through tribal leaders and local clerics of influence appealing to tribal loyalties, and the time-honoured customs of the lashkar and of jihad. The Pakistani authorities thus found themselves, within a few weeks of independence, with an uprising just across their border in a princely state that they aspired to control. It was being coordinated from their territory, and with a large number of their nationals, armed and strongly motivated, determined to assist in capturing Kashmir. The new nation’s leaders were constrained in the support they could offer by the acute disarray in their armed forces, as both men and equipment from the old British Indian army were divided up between the two countries. The commander-in-chief of Pakistan’s armed forces was a British general answerable not only to the government of Pakistan but also initially to the Supreme Commander, Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, in Delhi. British officers were also prominent at senior levels in the Pakistan army, particularly as staff officers. So the natural caution of a new government not to trigger open conflict with a larger neighbour was compounded by the near impossibility of making any plans for deploying troops in or near Kashmir without that being immediately apparent to all. The option of turning the martial mood of the Pathan hill tribes to Pakistan’s best interests in Kashmir was an obvious one to pursue. The Pakistani authorities have persistently denied that they gave substantial material help to the tribal invasion, and indeed have insisted that they did what they could to frustrate the incursion, but the evidence of published memoirs and in the archives points in the other direction.

Brigadier Akbar Khan was a graduate of the Royal Military College at Sandhurst outside London, where his time as a cadet overlapped with that of Tom Dykes. Both went on to serve in the Indian army, and both fought in Burma against the Japanese during the Second World War. In the autumn of 1947, Tom Dykes and his wife were killed at Baramulla by tribesmen owing allegiance to Akbar Khan. The journalist Andy Roth knew Akbar Khan at around this time—‘a confident veteran’ of the Indian army who ‘detested the “brown Englishman” who was Pakistan’s first P[rime] M[inister] and tamely accepted the terms of partition and took matters into his own hands’.²¹ In the course of September 1947, Brigadier Akbar Khan, who was then director of weapons and equipment at the



headquarters of the Pakistan army, linked up with Sardar Ibrahim Khan and others in Murree. Akbar Khan appears to have taken it upon himself to assist the pro-Pakistan insurgency in Poonch. By his own account, Akbar Khan helped to secure 4,000 military rifles sanctioned for issue to the Punjab police (though it seems that many of these were siphoned off and replaced with inferior locally produced rifles before they reached the front line). He also retrieved a large consignment of old ammunition that had been condemned as unfit and was to be dumped at sea. Prompted by a senior figure in Jinnah's Muslim League, he drew up an ambitious plan for a three-pronged military operation—continuing the insurgency in Poonch, but also striking at the road leading south from Jammu towards India, and at the landing strip in Srinagar in the so far peaceful if tense Kashmir Valley.²² He recalled being summoned to Lahore—to meet the man he apparently despised, Pakistan's prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, and one of Punjab's leading political figures, Sirdar Shaukat Hyat Khan. The latter had apparently devised his own military plan for Kashmir, using two commanders, Zaman Kiani, who had served during the war in the Japan-allied Indian National Army, and more particularly Major Khurshid Anwar, who had held an army rank and had also been a commander in the Muslim League's own militia. This was informally endorsed at a meeting chaired by the prime minister and also attended by the country's finance minister—though the military strategy to be pursued was opaque. Shaukat Hyat Khan has been described by his nephew as an 'effete and vain-glorious figure, easily swayed by flattery . . . a chocolate-cream soldier', though he apparently had the sense to argue against the use of irregular forces in Kashmir.²³

'The unpleasant truth, as I now see it,' Akbar Khan wrote many years later, during which he had risen to the rank of general and been jailed for four years in Pakistan's first big treason trial, 'was that there was complete ignorance about the business of anything in the nature of military operations.' And his misgivings intensified when it became clear that Khurshid Anwar on the military wing, and Shaukat Hyat Khan on the political side deeply distrusted each other.²⁴ Indeed, there was an element of the absurd about some aspects of the planning of the incursion. Shaukat Hyat Khan, perhaps not the most dispassionate of sources, related how the organisers of the invasion 'fixed a day in September as the "D" day but found Khurashid [sic] Anwar was missing. He had got married to a Muslim League worker in Peshawar and had disappeared on his honeymoon. This delayed the attack.' Such fiascos prompted one of Pakistan's

most eminent historians Hasan Zaheer to castigate the ringleaders of the incursion for ‘incompetent and divided command’ and ‘ignorance of the logistics and operational requirements The politicians, unable to concentrate on essential details and impatient of professional advice, did not realize the seriousness of the undertaking that practically amounted to an invasion of a foreign land.’²⁵

Whatever the auguries, Pakistan’s political establishment was now deeply implicated in assisting the rising against the maharaja. At the same time—according to Shaukat Hyat Khan—it was ordered that this should remain ‘an unofficial uprising’. The most obvious unofficial force at hand at that time was the tribal lashkar, but no decision appears to have been made at this stage to involve the Pathan tribes in an invasion of Kashmir. Indeed, several of those who attended the Lahore meeting later insisted that they were both taken by surprise by the lashkar that descended on Kashmir and disapproved of the idea. Shaukat Hyat Khan knew the tribesmen well. In the 1930s, he had fought against the Faqir of Ipi in Waziristan (so too had Akbar Khan, indeed one of the most remarkable features of the invasion force was that the Pakistanis most closely involved had first got to know the capability of tribal lashkars by fighting them). He intended to use only a small and select group of armed tribesmen in Kashmir, to maintain surprise and secrecy. He recalled that Khurshid Anwar had been ‘banned’ from enlisting Frontier tribesmen, but had disobeyed. ‘Suddenly we got the news at Rawalpindi Headquarters [of the Pakistan army] that Khurshid Anwar had flouted my orders and worked up the Mahsud tribesmen of Waziristan to come to take part in an Islamic Jihad He also disobeyed the other order to keep away from the Pakistan Army This again did more damage than all the Indian army could have done.’²⁶

The prospect of a tribal incursion had already alarmed Major-General Scott, who stood down as Maharaja Hari Singh’s chief of staff at the end of September 1947. He briefed the British High Commission in Pakistan, with prophetic accuracy, that an ‘invasion’ by ‘the fanatical tribes of Hazara and the Black Mountain²⁷ and the Muslims of Jhelum and Rawalpindi’ was possible and that the Kashmir state forces ‘could not effectively cope’ with such an eventuality. At about the same time, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan’s founder and governor-general, was telling Robert Trumbull of the *New York Times* ‘that he was doing his utmost to hold back Moslem tribesmen, who were demanding a holy war against the Hindus and Sikhs. He admitted that he was not sure he could restrain them overlong.’²⁸

Word of this was also reaching Sir George Cunningham, a retired colonial official recently returned to Peshawar—at Jinnah’s insistence—to resume his old job as governor of the North West Frontier Province. Cunningham’s exceptionally revealing typescript diary in the British Library gives a powerful sense of the growing awareness that a lashkar was starting to gather, and to advance on Kashmir. On 23 September, he wrote: ‘I have had offers from practically every tribe along the Frontier to be allowed to go and kill Sikhs in Eastern Punjab, and I think I would only have to hold up my little finger to get a *lashkar* of 40,000 or 50,000.’ Two weeks later he recorded how the Pakistan government appeared ‘to wink at very dangerous activities on the Kashmir border, allowing small parties of Muslims to infiltrate into Kashmir from this side’. A few days on, and there was hard evidence of a movement of armed tribesmen:

October 13th.—GRACE[Y] told me just before lunch that there is a real move in HAZARA for *Jehad* against KASHMIR. They have been collecting rifles, and have made a definite plan of campaign, apparently for seizing the part of the main Jhelum Valley above DOMEL. I have warned everyone I could, including the Afridis and Mohmands, of the danger of taking part in anything like this, in case it leads to war between INDIA AND PAKISTAN.²⁹

Cunningham’s warning had little effect, for two days later he wrote: ‘The Kashmir affair is boiling up. A Punjabi called KHURSHID ANWAR, something in the Muslim National Guard, is on the Hazara border organising what they call a three-pronged drive on Kashmir.’ More than that, he discovered that the Muslim League provincial government was sending truckloads of petrol and flour to assist any lashkar, and the provincial chief minister Khan Abdul Qayum Khan—the man with whom the Pir of Wana had discussed the desirability of a jihad for Kashmir—privately declared that he was supportive towards armed Muslims going to Kashmir, though he agreed that the police and other arms of authority should not be embroiled in the operation.

The chief minister’s public pronouncements varied from the restrained to little short of incitement. On the 23 October, with the lashkar well on its way, he declared: ‘My people should refrain from entering that State. We have given strict orders to our officers to prevent any attempt at infiltration of men or arms from the NWFP into territories ruled by the Maharaja of Kashmir.’ At the same time, his provincial government was

issuing statements about Muslim refugees from Kashmir ‘bringing harrowing stories of the atrocities committed on them by the Kashmir State forces’, which read as if preparing a case to justify intervention. And less than a week later, with Indian troops committed in Kashmir, his tone had changed: ‘The Pathans are determined to die to the last man rather than allow the invasion of Kashmir [by India], which is a State with a Muslim majority and belongs to Pakistan as a matter of right.’³⁰

There appears to be little doubt that the chief minister was centrally involved in encouraging the tribesmen to fight in Kashmir and in facilitating their journey. Many years later, Akbar Khan testified, somewhat sourly, to the political involvement in the inception of the invasion: ‘In September 1947, when the Prime Minister launched the movement of the Kashmir struggle Khurshid Anwar was appointed Commander of the Northern Sector. Khurshid Anwar then went to Peshawar and with the apparent help of Khan Qayyum Khan [chief minister of the Frontier Province] raised the lashkar which assembled at Abbottabad and with which he entered Muzaffarabad.’³¹ Khurshid Anwar knew the Frontier well. He had worked alongside the Pir of Manki Sharif in promoting the Muslim League’s civil disobedience campaign in and around Peshawar in the spring and summer of 1947. There are suggestions that he was involved in encouraging the use of explosive for sabotage attacks. He also apparently organised a small underground movement, complete with a cyclostyled newspaper and clandestine wireless transmitter. ‘I am told that the man is a complete adventurer,’ was the verdict of a British diplomat in a memo written in the aftermath of the invasion. ‘He is said to have got away with a good deal of loot during the brief disturbances in Peshawar City last September, and to have sent several lorry-loads home for himself from Kashmir.’³² Perhaps not surprisingly, a man held by the British in low esteem had considerable appeal among the restless and disenchanted in the Frontier. Anwar ‘was possessed of remarkable ingenuity and surrounded himself with an aura of mystique’, in the view of one historian of the nationalist movement in the Frontier. ‘Many youths were captivated by this romantic figure.’³³ Khurshid Anwar clearly had the contacts, the experience and the temperament to enlist a tribal lashkar that was already straining to embark on the Kashmir jihad.

One way or another, provincial authorities in the Frontier contrived to give the signal that they were supportive of an attack on Kashmir. And indeed without official assistance in the securing of fuel, trucks and buses—all of which were in short supply—it’s difficult to see how



the tribesmen could have embarked on such a long journey. Frank Leeson, a British army officer who was commanding khassadars, the locally raised Frontier scouts in Waziristan, witnessed the exodus:

The tribesmen of the North-west Frontier had been waiting for some such call, and here at last was the chance of a lifetime. For some it was a crusade; for others a chance for a scrap; for many, it must be admitted, an opportunity to pillage and loot with a clear conscience.

They streamed down in busloads; Mohmands and Mahsuds, Afridis and Afghans; from Buner and Bajaur, Swat and South Waziristan, Khyber and Khost; the light of battle in their eyes, half-forgotten war-cries on their lips. The Wazirs for the most part held aloof, sore tempted though they were; the Faqir of Ipi forbade them to interfere. But from Bannu the lorries streamed north and east to Abbottabad and Rawalpindi loaded with Bannuchis, Afghans and renegade Wazirs.³⁴

By early October 1947, Leeson and his colleagues were being kept busy trying to restrain marauding tribesmen. 'We were intercepting Mahsuds who were coming down through North Waziristan with the intention of sacking and pillaging in the plains generally. Quite a number of those Mahsuds were intending to go on to Kashmir. They felt there was a cause, I'm sure, but loot was also very much to the front of their minds.' He described to me the participants in the lashkar as 'typical tribesmen in these baggy trousers and shirts hanging outside with waistcoats, very roughly tied turbans or pugris as we called them, and their weapons were mainly the standard type of army rifle of that period, the Enfield or imitations of them'. It was only towards the end of October, travelling out at the end of his posting, that he realised the extent of the lashkar. 'We encountered huge crowds of people waiting for a tribal convoy which was expected, carrying tribesmen into Kashmir. And as we had the crescent and stars on the sides of our trucks, Scout trucks, they obviously thought that we were something to do with this, and they were throwing flowers at us . . . They were carrying on pouring into Kashmir for weeks after the initial invasion, and of course they were not only going in up the Muzaffarabad road, but also directly across into the Poonch area.'³⁵

A British diplomat based in Lahore also came across evidence of preparations for a tribal invasion. C.B. Duke, the acting deputy high commissioner in Lahore, reported to London that he had seen twenty burnt-down villages in the plains west of Jammu, along the river Chenab. He had no doubt that the local Muslim population had been targeted.



‘This is a dangerous game for the Maharaja to play,’ he averred, ‘and is likely to lead to large scale disturbances in Kashmir and incursion by neighbouring Muslim tribesmen. There are said to be considerable numbers of these people already gathering on the borders of the State to the North and North West and even tribes as far off as the Afridis and Mahsuds from the North West Frontier are reported to be moving towards Kashmir, although the Government of the North West Frontier Province are doing their best to restrain them. It will be difficult to do so, however, if there is general disorder in Kashmir as that country has always been regarded by the lean and hungry tribesmen of the North West Frontier as a land flowing with milk and honey, and if to the temptation of loot is added the merit of assisting the oppressed Muslims the attraction will be well nigh irresistible.’³⁶

Duke’s misgivings were shared by Sir George Cunningham, who confided in his diary his increasing concern about the movement of armed tribesmen. On 20 October, he wrote: ‘I am afraid the Kashmir situation is going to be a serious crisis. Heard this morning that 900 Mahsuds had left TANK in lorries for the Kashmir front. We tried to stop them at Kohat, but they had got through to the Punjab via Khushalgarh. About 200 Mohmands are also reported to have gone.’ He reported the news by phone to Pakistan’s prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan. In the following days, he had other exchanges—directly and indirectly—with Liaquat Ali Khan that throw light on the Pakistan government’s attitude towards the invasion of Kashmir. On 23 October, with the lashkar causing devastation in the town of Muzaffarabad, Cunningham heard a radio broadcast by the prime minister in which he declared that Pakistan was strictly neutral over Kashmir:

This was a pleasant little bit of comedy to start the day with! When my Chief Secretary telephoned late in the day to LIAQUAT’s Secretary at Lahore to tell him of the incursion of our people into Kashmir, he only asked 2 questions: ‘How many men have we there?’ and ‘Are they getting supplies all right?’

One of the most intriguing entries in Cunningham’s diary came three days later when a key figure in Pakistan’s leadership, Colonel Iskander Mirza—later his country’s president—called on him at Peshawar, and revealed the extent of official complicity in the tribal attack:

He told me all the underground history of the present campaign against KASHMIR, and brought apologies from [the prime minister]



LIAQUAT ALI for not letting me know anything about it sooner. LIAQUAT had meant to come here last week and tell me about it personally but was prevented by his illness, which seems to be fairly serious heart trouble. Apparently JINNAH himself first heard of what was going on about 15 days ago, but said 'Don't tell me anything about it. My conscience must be clear.' ISKANDAR is positive that [Maharaja] HARI SINGH means to join INDIA as soon as his new road from Pathankot is made, which might be within 3 months. He had got a lot of Sikhs and Dogras into POONCH and JAMMU, and has been trying to shove Muslims into PAKISTAN in accordance with the general Indian strategy. It was decided apparently about a month ago that the POONCHIS should revolt and should be helped. ABDUL QAYUM [the Frontier chief minister] was in it from the beginning. B[ritish] O[fficer]s were kept out simply not to embarrass them.

Cunningham was well disposed towards the Pakistan government, which was after all his master. He is not a hostile source. His diary entry resolves any lingering doubt over the extent of the Pakistan government's involvement in the Poonch revolt and the tribal invasion of the Kashmir Valley. Both may have originated independently of the Pakistan authorities. But there was an actively pursued policy to promote and assist, first, an insurgency beyond Pakistan's boundaries, and then an invasion of a neighbouring state, in which the prime minister and a provincial chief minister were key figures, and of which the Governor General was aware. Pakistan was up to its eyeballs in the military challenge to Kashmir's maharaja, though unwilling openly to deploy its armed forces in the fight. In the telling words of one of the best recent histories of Pakistan, 'Liaquat Ali Khan thereby formulated a policy that has continued for fifty years: that Pakistan fights for Kashmir by proxy.'³⁷

The incursion was well under way by the end of October when the *Observer* journalist Alan Moorehead (who had been in Srinagar a few days earlier), drove from Rawalpindi up to Peshawar and the Khyber Pass, to see how the tribesmen were being organized and deployed. 'Everywhere recruiting is going on,' he reported, 'and there is much excitement and enthusiasm at the success of the Moslems.'

Each village regards it as a point of honour that they should be represented at the front. This is happening not only in tribal territory where Pakistan has no control but inside Pakistan itself.

I went into one village factory where the men were not only making rifles by hand but artillery as well. In that same village they were preparing to receive the bodies of two of their young men who had fallen in Kashmir and who had been brought by lorry so that they could be buried in their native rocks of the Khyber Pass.

This recovery of their dead is a strong emotional point with the tribesmen: and it inflames them further. These were Afridis. I am told that the Hazaras and several of the other tribes are equally roused.³⁸

Moorehead confided to a British diplomat that he had gathered the impression that the tribesmen had been preparing for the incursion into Kashmir for quite a while, ‘and had been organising among themselves in a series of tribal meetings. His impression was that they were completely out of control of everybody, with a sort of Council of War of tribal leaders established in Abbotabad’ in Pakistan. Among senior members of the Kashmir government, the deputy prime minister R.L. Batra initially also held that the invaders had been impossible to restrain. ‘The raiders are tribesmen who are out of the control of the Pakistan Government . . .’ he declared—a telling comment from a politician whose sympathies lay with India.

Indian military sources have sometimes alleged that the tribal invasion of Kashmir was planned in detail by Pakistan more than two months in advance, with the knowledge and approval of the British officers commanding the Pakistan army. The most substantial supporting evidence is the memoirs of an Indian general, O.S. Kalkat, who in August 1947 was serving as a brigade major in the Frontier. He recounted opening a letter on 20 August addressed to his British commanding officer marked ‘Top Secret’. It was a note from Pakistan’s commander-in-chief, Frank Messervy, detailing plans for ‘Operation Gulmarg’—‘the plan for the invasion and capture of Kashmir. The “D” day for Operation Gulmarg was fixed as 22nd October [1947] on which date the various tribal Lashkars were to cross into Jammu and Kashmir territory.’³⁹ He went on to relate how he and his family were then put under informal house arrest in Pakistan, managed to escape, reached Delhi, and on 19 October informed senior Indian military officers about the planned invasion. ‘They thought I was fibbing in a big way,’ he recorded, but they were forced to reconsider when the invasion occurred just as planned. His memoirs include a reconstitution of the Operation Gulmarg memo from memory. This



account has been recycled in several Indian military histories, but with very little further supporting evidence.⁴⁰ It seems highly improbable. At this stage in the operation, not even Akbar Khan's initial, flimsy plans for an invasion had been consigned to paper. The raising of the tribal lashkar was too far in the future to permit the drawing up of any sort of timetable. And it is very difficult to imagine any senior British officer in Pakistan putting his name to a plan for the invasion of a neighbouring state, when that was clearly in contravention of British government policy and prejudicial to Britain's desire for a peaceful and orderly transfer of power.

A close to impenetrable fog of conflicting dates and detail continues to envelop the October 1947 invasion of Kashmir. The basic sequence of events can be pieced together and the broad contours of the lashkar's progress and subsequent retreat are clear. But much else remains opaque. Most of those who wrote first-hand about the Kashmir invasion had an axe to grind, and a fair amount of the writing by historians and political scientists has been to some extent partisan. When the battle for Kashmir is still being waged so bitterly, it is hardly surprising that a whiff of grapeshot can be detected in much of the scholarship about the subject.

Khurshid Anwar, the man who can best be described as the military commander of the invasion of the Kashmir Valley, said that D-day had been fixed for Tuesday, 21 October, but had to be delayed until the following morning. He later told the Muslim League daily *Dawn* that he had 4,000 men at his disposal, and faced no stiff opposition until well inside Kashmiri territory.⁴¹ This tallies with the account of Sir George Cunningham at the governor's residence in Peshawar. He recorded his first intimation that the tribal force had crossed the border into Kashmir in his diary entry for 22 October:

Heard this morning that several thousand armed people, tribesmen and otherwise, had gone over from Hazara into Kashmir and had seized Muzaffarabad and Domel. We shall soon see what the reaction of Kashmir and India is going to be to this. I fear it may be very serious. My own position is not too easy: if I give my support to the movement, thousands more will flock to it, and there may be a big invasion; if I resist it, I have to bear the brunt if the movement fails through lack of support.

Domel was the first town of any consequence that the tribesmen came to as they advanced into Kashmir along the main road leading from Punjab. In it is located an important bridge across the Jhelum river. Immediately

adjoining it, at the confluence of the Jhelum and Neelum rivers, was the larger town of Muzaffarabad which, while Muslim-majority, had at that time a large and prosperous Sikh community and a sizeable Hindu population—both of which have since disappeared almost without trace. Many Hindus and Sikhs fled before the tribesmen entered the town. Some who remained were prepared to put up a fight. A British diplomat who travelled on what he believed to be the last bus to get through from Rawalpindi to Srinagar before the invasion, just a few hours before the tribesmen moved in, saw in the Muzaffarabad area ‘many groups of middle-aged Sikhs, many of them carrying rifles of various kinds’. He reported hearing that the Kashmir state government has sought to organise and arm local Sikhs while prohibiting Muslims from carrying any sort of weapons, ‘even small knives’.⁴²

The invasion started in the hours of darkness. Krishna Mehta was the Hindu wife of Muzaffarabad’s newly appointed district commissioner. ‘I woke up with a start at about five in the morning [of 22 October] and heard loud reports of firing reverberate against the hills,’ she wrote in a powerful personal memoir of the attack and its aftermath. ‘With my children I went out to the verandah and looked in the direction from which the bullets came. I could see no one but the firing continued uninterrupted. Some bullets tore through the planks of the fence and fell inside the bungalow . . . The enemy had already crossed the Krishna Ganga bridge and was now approaching the city.’⁴³ The looting was evident from the start. Akbar Khan, one of the architects of the invasion, reminisced many years later with startling candour that the tribesmen had been promised booty as their reward for fighting in Kashmir. ‘It was part of their agreement with Major Khurshid Anwar of the Muslim League National Guards who was their leader that they would loot non-Muslims. They had no other remuneration.’⁴⁴

The Kashmir state forces put up limited resistance—hampered by the desertion of a large proportion of the Muslims in their ranks, many of them from Poonch. Sikhs and Hindus were killed in large numbers. A number of women were raped and abducted. And Krishna Mehta recorded that several Hindu women threw themselves and their children into the river to escape assault, asserting that on one occasion she witnessed such suicides. Some British nationals, including two off-duty army officers, were caught up in the initial violence. A subsequent report by a British diplomat stated that the tribal raiders ‘were said to be operating in gangs under leaders who were not tribesmen and who in fact had no control over the tribesmen. It was suggested and has since been corroborated



that these leaders were in many cases Muslim League volunteers from the North West Frontier Province and parts of West Punjab.⁴⁵

Sir George Cunningham tracked the rapid advance of the lashkar in his diary with almost proprietorial interest. 'The invasion of Kashmir seems to progress,' reads his entry for 24 October. 'Some of our tribesmen were reported at GARHI yesterday, and seem to be moving up in the Srinagar direction. I think we have about 2000 trans-border tribesmen, a mixed lot (who have gone through surreptitiously by night in small parties) and probably 2000 Hazarawals. There are many thousands more from West Punjab, but probably not so well armed.' The following day he recorded hearing that the tribesmen had reached Uri, and later in the day that they were closing in on Baramulla. 'I am greatly surprised at the absence of opposition against them so far.' The invaders faced some resistance from the maharaja's forces, but it wasn't a spirited fight. The tribesmen must initially have thought that they might be able to achieve what some had apparently set as their goal—to celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid in the Kashmir capital, Srinagar. The city was about one hundred miles distant from Muzaffarabad, and Eid fell on 26 October, so that would have required a remarkably speedy advance along the gorge part of the Jhelum Valley road where, because of the mountain terrain, even modest opposition could cause long delays.

According to Indian accounts, the new chief of staff of the Kashmir state forces, Brigadier Rajinder Singh, headed out from Srinagar with some 200 men as soon as he heard of the incursion. At Uri, a mountain town on the Jhelum Valley road roughly equidistant from Baramulla and Muzaffarabad, he prepared to blow up a key bridge. And as the raiders advanced in force on 23 October, that's what he did.⁴⁶ Tagging on with the state troops was the ever resourceful Sydney Smith of the *Daily Express*, apparently the first journalist to get to the scene of the fighting. He sent a vivid report back to his news desk:

With Sir Hari's Chief of Staff, Brigadier Rajendra [sic] Singh, I looked across the crumpled wreckage of Urie's [sic] iron bridge while mountain troops blazed away at the raiders storming a 4,500 ft. pass to capture the town.

The tribesmen covered the last three miles to the town in one hour of non-stop gunfire, which rolled away then came rumbling back from 10,000 ft. snow-capped peaks.

Houses on the route of their advance went up in flames, and thick black smoke blanketed the Valley. The raiders mopped



up any Sikhs and Hindus who stayed behind in a desperate attempt to shoot it out.

Then the firing died as looting began. Through field-glasses I watched mobs of black-turbaned and blanketed figures rushing through Urie’s bazaar street. Brigadier Rajendra Singh sent his men back in five lorries.

The raiders went on shooting up the town for three hours. When darkness came they sent out pickets and snipers on the flanking hills around the town. The little force of troops found cover difficult.

Driving without headlights and with guns blazing wildly, roughly in the direction of the enemy, they tore away down the narrow, moonlit, mountain road.

All the road back to Srinagar is now littered with refugees, Moslems as well as Sikhs and Hindus. Most villages are abandoned. Police and officials have quit two towns between Urie and Srinagar.⁴⁷

The blowing up of the bridge slowed the advance of the tribal lashkar. The Kashmiri troops managed to impede the invaders through a series of staged withdrawals. But this was nothing more than a delaying action. The tribesmen pressed on beyond Uri, and on 25 October reached Mahura, the site of the hydroelectric plant which supplied Srinagar’s power. The Kashmir capital was plunged into darkness, prompting the maharaja and many of his retainers to abandon the city and head south to Jammu.

Just as the civil administration of the princely state was beginning to disintegrate, so too were the last front-line remnants of its army. Brigadier Rajinder Singh, whose rearguard action had slowed the lashkar’s advance, was killed in the aftermath of the capture of Mahura. The maharaja’s army had already suffered defections, and a large part of its fighting force was deployed in and around Poonch tackling the initial insurgency (the *Statesman*, one of India’s better-informed newspapers, commented of the Poonch rebellion that ‘there could have been no better plan for securing a dispersal of the State’s forces’). The loss of its new chief of staff, compounding the low morale of officers and troops, just about marked the end of the maharaja’s army as an effective fighting force.

The raiders had the Kashmir Valley in front of them. As they approached Baramulla, they were on the threshold of the largest and most prosperous Kashmiri town they had so far reached. The prospect for loot was considerable. They were also on the doorstep of the first sizeable community of Europeans they had come across—the nuns and priests at St Joseph’s convent, college and mission hospital, and a small





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expatriate community. As at Muzaffarabad, they were to encounter a considerable local Sikh and Hindu community. Above all, the road to Srinagar lay open ahead of them. As the Valley moved from gorge to something more like a plain, they were no longer battling along a mountain road. They could move much more freely. But the change of terrain brought problems as well as opportunities for the tribal lashkar. They were leaving the protection of the hills, the landscape they understood and that favoured their ambush-based style of attack, and entering a much more exposed military environment.

