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‘ I T H I N K T H E Y ’ l l T R Y A G A I N ’

A handful of the nuns gathered at the gates to see the buses go by, along with a posse of student nurses and a few other onlookers. The road had been closed to traffic all morning. Sister Elaine Nazareth, the sister superior at St Joseph’s, was at work in the convent. It was a time of prayer—Pope John Paul had died a few days earlier. She heard the sirens. ‘I ran up to the rooms and I saw it pass.’ The date was Thursday, 7 April 2005. The first bus service in almost sixty years between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, the capitals of divided Kashmir, passed by the Baramulla convent hospital. The boundary wall had been spruced up in preparation for the inaugural journey. The army had painted it an unattractive cement colour, and to the dismay of the sisters had done little by way of preparation. ‘They painted over the moss and everything,’ Sister Elaine told me censoriously. The two buses wended their way along the Jhelum Valley road towards Muzaffarabad, a distance of a little over a hundred miles. In the early afternoon, the nineteen Kashmiris travelling from Srinagar dismounted, and made their way by foot across a refurbished and renamed bridge, the Aman Setu or peace bridge, which straddles the line of control and into Pakistan Kashmir. The manner of the crossing was almost a parable on India–Pakistan relations: the peace bridge could not take the weight of fully laden buses.

On the eve of the inaugural journey, armed separatists had staged a spectacular attack on the Tourist Reception Centre in Srinagar, the building where the first busload of passengers had gathered. Live pictures were relayed on India’s TV news channels. It seemed that the bus service had been thrown off course even before the first journey had started. But the militants had miscalculated. Almost all the passengers still boarded the next morning, excited to see relatives they had not embraced for decades. Sonia Gandhi, the latest incarnation of India’s premier political dynasty, flagged off the vehicles. The reopening of a route across Kashmir’s ceasefire line was an enormously popular move, and by seeking



to derail the initiative, the militants set themselves against the weight of Kashmiri opinion.

A bus service linking divided Kashmir, and allowing families separated for generations to meet each other, was a tangible, positive outcome of a thaw in relations between India and Pakistan. But it also gave rise to great expectations—which were not immediately met. In some ways, the tone of the Kashmir dispute has changed substantially in the first few years of the new century. Pakistan has talked about the circumstances in which it might drop its claim to Kashmir, and has moved away from its previous emphasis on implementing old United Nations resolutions and holding a plebiscite. India has held talks with moderate Kashmiri separatists, and has established discrete and indirect channels of communication with some of the hardliners and armed groups. The elected government of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has more legitimacy in the eyes of Kashmiris than any for a generation. Some separatist leaders have said aloud what many Kashmiris believe, that whatever the merits of the cause, the insurgency has done nothing but fill graveyards. The level of violence has abated, and Srinagar—never a poor city when compared to others in north India—appears to be thriving. But for a new generation of Kashmiris, who have no recall of times before the present insurgency started in 1989, this all sounds rather hollow. Kashmir continues to be a base for hundreds of thousands of Indian security forces. It's still rare for more than a day or two to go by in the Valley without a violent death. And Kashmir still feels constrained and hemmed in by a dispute which not only remains unresolved but for which there is no road map pointing towards a solution. The Kashmir Valley is weary of conflict, but can see no early sign of peace.

The contours of the Kashmir conflict have changed markedly since 1947. The insurgency that erupted in 1989 had its roots in the Kashmir Valley, and was nurtured by a profound sense of grievance and powerlessness. Whatever help and involvement the armed separatist movement has secured from outside, it was—and to a considerable extent remains—a Kashmiri cause. In that way, the current conflict is very different from the violence that marked the inception of the Kashmir crisis towards the end of 1947. But so much else remains locked in the past. The competing claims to Kashmir, of course, date from that time, and the intellectual armoury of Indian and Pakistani diplomacy has changed little in the intervening decades. Pakistan's support for irregular armed forces over which it has some influence but far from complete control has been a recurring theme. So has India's deployment of huge numbers



of security forces in the Kashmir Valley, and its reluctance, whatever the official rhetoric, to encourage civil society and to loosen the binds by which it has restrained and secured Kashmir. Pakistan still believes that Kashmiris instinctively yearn to be part of Pakistan. Many in India reckon that the Kashmir conflict has been started and stoked by Pakistan, and that if Islamabad stops encouraging the insurgents then the trouble will end. Part of the problem in achieving a resolution of the Kashmir issue is the need, first, to puncture these misconceptions.

Sheikh Abdullah proved to be much more effective as a nationalist leader, and a mobiliser of Kashmiri opinion, than as a politician or statesman. He was, without question, the dominant figure in Kashmir from the political awakening of the 1930s until his death in 1982. In the early years of his administration, he managed to secure a formal end to the Dogra monarchy. Of still greater importance, he implemented land reforms probably more radical than anywhere else in independent India which broke the economic and political power of Jammu and Kashmir’s (mainly non-Muslim) large landlords. It changed the face of the Kashmir countryside, and earned Sheikh Abdullah the lasting loyalty of a previously impoverished peasantry and rural labour force in the Valley. But while Sheikh Abdullah had come to power on a platform of opposition to feudal privilege, his own style of politics was also in large part based on patronage and personal loyalty. He was a populist more than a democrat. He was increasingly at odds with his old friend, Jawaharlal Nehru, in Delhi, and with some of Nehru’s key ministers. The Indian government became concerned that Sheikh Abdullah was distancing himself from the decision to accede to India, and was talking up the option of self-governance or independence. In August 1953, the youthful Karan Singh, the would-be maharaja who had taken on the role of Jammu and Kashmir’s constitutional head of state, dismissed Sheikh Abdullah from his post as prime minister, and ordered his arrest. The Sher-e-Kashmir was replaced by his one-time deputy, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, and his party, the National Conference, split into feuding factions. Sheikh Abdullah spent most of the next twenty-two years in detention.¹

The politicians who followed in Sheikh Abdullah’s footsteps, a rather undistinguished bunch, depended on Delhi’s support and on dubious elections. So it is hardly surprising that they did little to resist the state’s increasing incorporation into the Indian Union. The special privileges granted to Kashmir in the early 1950s in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution—notably that defence, foreign affairs and communications were the only areas under the jurisdiction of the Indian government—

became eroded. Over time, Jammu and Kashmir's prime minister became a chief minister, as in other states; the role of head of state was downgraded to that of a Delhi-appointed Governor; the Indian government took upon itself powers to dismiss the Jammu and Kashmir state government; and many legal, legislative and other privileges were dismantled. The issue of Kashmir's special status continues to resound in Srinagar, where many politicians want the initial dispensation to be restored, and in Delhi, where Hindu nationalists want the last emblems of such privileges to be revoked, arguing that Muslim-majority Kashmir should have the same status as every other corner of India.

In 1965, taking advantage of political unrest in the Kashmir Valley, Pakistan launched 'Operation Gibraltar'. Several thousand armed men were sent into Kashmir. Few of them were from the Valley, and the local response was tepid. If the Pakistan authorities had hoped to spark off a popular uprising against Indian rule, they were disappointed. The analogies with 1947 are striking. The Pakistan military sent over irregular forces into Kashmir—the local people did not rally to the insurgents' standard—and the outcome was war between India and Pakistan. It was a short war, with India quickly gaining the upper hand, and with little lasting impact on Kashmir. Six years later, the two South Asian neighbours were at war again. Indian troops were deployed in force in support of the secessionist movement in Bengali-speaking East Pakistan, and so acted as midwife for the creation of the new nation of Bangladesh. It was a brutal conflict, with heavy loss of civilian life and appalling atrocities. Pakistan lost more than half its population to the new nation and the argument that Jinnah had rehearsed to achieve Partition, that religion is a sufficient basis for nationhood, was tarnished by the Bangladeshis' fight for a national identity defined by language and culture. Pakistan has not forgotten this humiliation at India's hands.

Although Kashmir was neither the cause nor the main theatre of the 1971 conflict, the scale of the Indian victory had important consequences there. The Shimla accord negotiated the following year saw a defeated Pakistan accept that Kashmir was a bilateral issue to be settled between India and Pakistan. The old ceasefire line was redesignated the line of control. And ever since, India has insisted that the United Nations and the international community have no business seeking to interfere in Kashmir. Indian officials have stated that at the Shimla talks, India's prime minister, Indira Gandhi, secured a private assurance from Pakistan's Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that he would in time



accept the line of control as the international border, so abandoning Pakistan’s claim to the Kashmir Valley.² This ‘stay as we are’ solution has been advocated privately by India from 1948 onwards. The Shimla deal was probably the best chance to secure Pakistan’s acceptance. Whatever Bhutto may have said, it never happened.

A few years later, an ageing and prison-weary Sheikh Abdullah did a deal with Mrs Gandhi. He dropped talk of self-government or a plebiscite and signed up to an understanding which promised little in the way of autonomy. In return, he was brought back in from the cold and appointed the state’s chief minister. In 1977, by this time no longer in favour with Mrs Gandhi and her Congress party, he won an emphatic victory in state elections. Of all Kashmir’s exercises in state elections in India’s first thirty years of independence, the 1977 polls were by far the most untainted. Five years later the Sher-e-Kashmir died, and crowds beyond number thronged Srinagar for his funeral. But his elder son and political successor, Farooq Abdullah, who had little tutelage in Kashmir’s politics, lacked his father’s following and authority. He was dismissed from office by Delhi, then two years later concluded a humbling deal with a new Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi—another uncomfortable coming together of political dynasties—which put him back in office as chief minister. This perceived kowtowing to Delhi was not popular in the Valley. In 1987 state elections, a hastily assembled anti-Delhi alliance, the Muslim United Front, appeared poised to make a big dent in the support for Farooq Abdullah and his National Conference. Popular sentiment was so strong that the voting could not be rigged. But the counting was, it seems, and so too was the declaration of results. In the eyes of its critics, the National Conference achieved a victory for which Kashmir is still paying the price. If there was any spur to the start of the separatist insurgency in 1989, it was the anger over the flawed elections staged two years earlier.

Kashmiris had no martial tradition, and popular politics in the Valley only stretched back to the 1930s. They were novices at insurrection. But encouraged by the changing world map—everything from the unravelling of Moscow’s empire, the nearby new nations of former Soviet Central Asia, and the Palestinian ‘intifada’, to the tenacious insurgencies in Sri Lanka and Indian Punjab—aspirations for self-determination seemed achievable. And best achievable through armed struggle. Pakistan, or at least key sections of the establishment, was keen to encourage armed separatism across the line of control. The trickle of young Kashmiris

crossing over to seek military training coincided with the crowning achievement of Pakistan's intelligence service in working with Islamic radicals to evict the Soviet Union from Afghanistan.

The instigators of the insurgency in Kashmir were members of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, which sought independence for the former princely state. Some of their leading activists returned from training camps and, in the second half of 1989, conducted sabotage attacks and assassinations of those they regarded as agents of Indian rule and their collaborators. Like a spark among kindling, the JKLF set Srinagar alight—and the Indian response fanned the flames. Huge anti-India street protests often ended in rioting, and in a heavy-handed military response, in which sometimes dozens of demonstrators were killed. The fury of the Indian attempts to repress the insurgency, the resort to torture and to vicious security crackdowns prompted more young Kashmiri men to slip silently across the line of control and join the armed groups.

The JKLF lost hundreds of its leading activists and fighters in the first few years of the insurgency. It suffered another blow. Pakistan increasingly directed its resources and support to another group, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, which—unlike the secular-minded JKLF—espoused an explicitly Islamic identity, and sought Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. Several times over the years, Pakistan has put its hand on the scales and shifted the balance among armed Kashmiri groups. By 1994, the JKLF had moved away from armed activity, and in the next few years, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen faced a serious challenge from 'renegade' groups, armed separatists who were persuaded or coerced by the Indian authorities to change sides and fight their former allies. The creation of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference in 1993 gave an institutional face to the moderate separatist groups. India made little use of this opportunity, as it pursued a military solution to separatism and then, after several years of ruling Jammu and Kashmir directly from Delhi, sought to reinstate Farooq Abdullah, the Sher-e-Kashmir's son, as a pro-India state chief minister.

A new factor in the conflict came with Pakistan's increasing support for jihadi groups with links to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Their fighters were mainly non-Kashmiris who brought to the Valley a single-mindedness, a ruthlessness and an advocacy of what many would see as Islamic fundamentalism which had hitherto been largely absent. Armed groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen became the main standard-bearers of the armed Kashmiri cause. Many in the Valley had become wearied by the violence, and the



cycle of intimidation and extortion involving both sides in the conflict. Among those who supported 'azaadi' or Kashmiri freedom, a certain gratitude to the 'guest militants', as they were known, for supporting the Kashmiri cause was often counterbalanced by a distaste for their ideology and for their style of operation. But a series of high profile suicide-style attacks by these jihadi groups demonstrated the considerable threat they posed to the Indian security forces, and their ability both to bludgeon other strands of Kashmiri opinion and to unsettle any diplomatic moves towards a settlement.

The perpetually troubled relations between India and Pakistan appeared to take a marked turn for the better in February 1999, when India's first Hindu nationalist prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, took his seat on the inaugural journey of a bus service between Delhi and Lahore. While in Pakistan, he visited the Minar-e-Pakistan, the monument in Lahore at the site of the meeting of Jinnah's Muslim League at which its famous 'Pakistan' resolution was adopted seven years before Partition. It was seen as a hugely symbolic act of acceptance and reconciliation. The two prime ministers gave an impetus to what has been called 'back channel' diplomacy, contacts between informal emissaries of the two governments, to seek to inject new thinking into the search for a settlement in Kashmir. Yet at the time Vajpayee was talking to Pakistan's prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's army was already planning a new military campaign against India. Later that year, Pakistani troops and armed jihadi groups crossed the line of control in a barren area near Kargil, just east of the Valley in Ladakh, and took up mountain-top positions. The Indian army didn't notice for quite a while. When they did, fighting erupted between the two armies in what amounted to an undeclared war. The surreptitious nature of the incursion, and the involvement of jihadi groups which regarded themselves as in the tradition of the lashkar, harked back strongly to the events of 1947.³ Whatever the intended purpose of the Kargil incursion, it did not succeed. Both sides suffered several hundred fatalities before, under intense American pressure, Nawaz Sharif pulled back Pakistan's forces. The army and its allies in Pakistan's intelligence service did not like losing face in this way, and within months Nawaz Sharif had been overthrown by General Pervez Musharraf, the army chief most commentators believe was responsible for the Kargil operation.

The incursion in Kargil propelled Indian public opinion, and sentiment among its normally politically quiescent army officer corps, towards a hawkish response. There was a lot of talk of teaching Pakistan



a lesson. In the months after Kargil, the Indian government came under intense pressure—which again President Clinton did much to restrain—to authorise an attack on what the armed services believed to be militant camps in Pakistan Kashmir. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attack in New York, tension again soared between Delhi and Islamabad. Jihadi groups fighting in Kashmir staged daring attacks first on the state Assembly building in Srinagar, and then on India's Parliament building in the heart of Delhi. Once again, American pressure was exerted to dissuade the Indian government from a military response. And Pakistan's President Musharraf outlawed some of the Islamic radical groups held responsible for the attacks. The assassination attempts and vitriolic criticism which jihadi groups directed at President Musharraf indicated that his measures had real impact. But many in India's corridors of power were not entirely convinced, expressing concern that the more hardline wing of Pakistan's army and intelligence service would find ways of sustaining the armed separatists. Musharraf's willingness to voice new thoughts and approaches to the Kashmir issue helped to reduce tension, and paved the way for the trans-Kashmir bus service. But the violence has not ended, and neither an internal settlement, nor an understanding between India and Pakistan on Kashmir, has been achieved, or indeed attempted with any sustained zeal. As ever, much of the real diplomacy has been conducted away from public view, and there has been some preparing of the ground for the compromises that all sides will have to make to achieve peace and political stability in Kashmir, but the process has been haphazard and slow.

The nuclear tests which both India and Pakistan conducted in 1998 emphasised the danger to both regional and global security of allowing the Kashmir dispute to fester. Even so, the Kashmir crisis, the issues that lie behind the conflict, and the parameters of a possible solution have never attracted the diplomatic and public attention that has been accorded to the other key flashpoints concerning radical Islam: Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq. That's partly because India, the status quo power in the Kashmir Valley, has discouraged and deflected international attention. And partly because Kashmir itself has seemed remote and isolated, complex and cut off, and has never in recent years produced a leader who has captured global (or indeed regional) attention.

The prism through which the international community sees the Kashmir issue is also, by and large, not the Kashmiri vantage point. The news reporting comes from Kashmir, the analysis usually from elsewhere. It is still difficult to find any authoritative book on contemporary Kashmir written by a Kashmiri Muslim.⁴ Amid the hundreds of titles in English



written about Kashmir—scholarly, journalistic, polemical, partisan—the outside perspective prevails. And even among Kashmiri writers, the Muslim majority voice is sometimes barely audible. Kashmiris often complain that they have no agency over their own affairs. Certainly they have had little direct agency in how the Kashmir conflict is described to the world.

The town of Baramulla has never recovered from 1947. The buildings were rebuilt but not its economy. The conspicuous Sikh minority, and the even more conspicuous gurdwara, bestow an air of pluralism absent in any other Kashmiri town outside Srinagar. But its wealth depended on markets in what became Pakistan Punjab and its position astride what was then the only all-weather road into Kashmir and on a river which also served as a commercial artery. 'A prosperous town of about sixteen thousand souls,' in the description of one of Baramulla's most famous sons, Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, 'it was the biggest town in the Valley—apart from Srinagar city. Centre of fruit and timber industry, it boasted of the only factories outside Srinagar. Since late thirties, it was fast developing as a tourist resort.'⁵ Ever since 1947, the road that once gave Baramulla its purpose and much of its prosperity has led nowhere. 'Baramulla was a trade centre,' a retired local schoolteacher told me wistfully, 'and now it is a poor town.' If the buses are joined by trucks taking apples, walnuts and wood to market in Rawalpindi and beyond, that could change. But at the moment, perhaps the best business opportunities in Baramulla are contracts for supplies and services to the Indian army.

Tom Dykes junior hoped and planned to go back to Baramulla one day to pay homage at his parents' graves. Neither he nor his brothers have ever returned. But the battle for Kashmir that claimed the lives of his parents also frustrated their eldest son's desire to visit their resting place. After 1989, only the intrepid or the ill-informed among foreign travellers made their way to Srinagar. The Kashmir Valley had become too dangerous a place for a personal pilgrimage. Tom simply wanted to see where his Mum and Dad died and to pay the respects he was too young to offer at the time. He died in October 2003 with his wish unfulfilled.

The events of 1947 do not explain the current conflict, nor do they even begin to offer a solution. Both India and Pakistan have been too insistent on harking back to events of sixty years ago, as if an assertion that they were in the right at that time justifies their subsequent actions. A necessary step to resolving any crisis, however, is gaining an understanding of how it started. Not to indulge in recriminations, but to appreciate the sequence of actions, and the jumble of claims and grievances, that tangle





and snag moves towards compromise. If ever there could be an agreed narrative of Kashmir's modern history, other forms of accord should not be far away.

The main purpose of this study has been to illuminate the origins of the Kashmir crisis by retrieving the personal stories of those who lived through the events of October and November 1947. The facts and perspectives unravelled through this research challenge the official narratives of both India and Pakistan about the genesis of the Kashmir conflict. In particular, they question Pakistan's often-stated denial of instigating or organising the lashkar's invasion of the Kashmir Valley, and they cast doubt on the Indian account of Kashmir's accession.

Pakistan's new government took a decision in its first few weeks to support military intervention in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in an attempt to prise territory away from the maharaja, and from India. There were two aspects to Pakistan's somewhat confused initiative. Sections within the government and the armed forces decided to provide support to the insurgency already under way against the maharaja in and around Poonch. This, in Pakistan's terms, worked well. The insurgents managed to take control of a significant swathe of territory along the left bank of the Jhelum river, to the east of Pakistan's Punjab province, which neither the maharaja nor the Indian army was able to reclaim. This now forms the most populous area of Azad Kashmir, Pakistan's part of the former princely state. The other aspect, Pakistan's support for an invasion of the Kashmir Valley, was nothing like as successful. The insurgency here was not local, so the Pakistan authorities had to make much greater use of fighters from the Frontier, either from the neighbouring Hazara region or tribesmen from the mountains bordering Afghanistan. There was limited local support for the invaders, and the looting and indiscipline of the tribal fighters ensured that whatever goodwill there was among Valley Kashmiris for the attackers quickly faded away.

The decision to involve large numbers of jihad-minded tribal fighters from Waziristan was not so much a matter of policy as an extempore initiative. The tribesmen were keen to fight. The authorities in the North West Frontier Province, along with key figures such as Khurshid Anwar, made much greater use of the tribal lashkar than other Pakistani instigators of the Kashmir policy had envisaged. The disorganisation to which the lashkar was prone diminished the tribal fighters' effectiveness as an invading force. Attempts to instil greater military purpose and the acute divisions within the invading force, delayed their advance on Srinagar. If they had pressed on quickly from Baramulla, the Pakistani forces would



very probably have been able to capture the airstrip outside Srinagar and so choke off the Indian airlift of troops into the Kashmir Valley. Many army veterans and commentators, Indian and Pakistani, have argued that in this event, the lashkar would have captured Srinagar, and the Kashmir Valley would today be part of Pakistan. That's a bold assumption. Indian troops could still have been airlifted into Jammu, and while they would then have faced an arduous road journey across the Banihal pass into the Valley—an almost impossible journey during winter—India would still have been in a position to put up a fight for Kashmir. And the entry of the lashkar into Srinagar would probably have been resisted strongly by local people, not least the National Conference's volunteer militia. If the tribal fighters had treated the civilian population in Srinagar with the brutality witnessed in Baramulla, both Indian and international opinion may well have demanded redressal. It is probable that the only way that Srinagar could have been held by Pakistan is if an initial advance by the lashkar had then been consolidated by the deployment of thousands of Pakistani troops.

Whatever misgivings some of Pakistan's leaders may have had about the tribal invasion of the Kashmir Valley, once the Indian airlift had begun they had little option but to provide support to the tribal fighters. That was the only way other than a full-scale army mobilisation to challenge India's entry into Kashmir. Pakistan's founder and leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah acquiesced in increased financial and logistical assistance to the lashkar and the deployment of more Pakistan army officers in their support. That succeeded in limiting India's advance in the final weeks of 1947. And when, the following summer, it seemed that Indian forces in the former princely state were poised to push further west towards Pakistan Punjab, the government in Karachi opted to send in its army. The result was close to stalemate. The war ended with Kashmir partitioned, as it has been ever since.

India's claim to Kashmir rests on two foundations: that the key representatives of old and new Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, both (at the time) supported Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India; and that Indian troops were sent to Srinagar only after Kashmir had become part of India. The latter point is clouded by the indications that the most detailed official account of Kashmir's accession, by the Indian civil servant who secured the maharaja's signature, V.P. Menon, is misleading. Although there can be no certainty, the likelihood is that the maharaja only signed the instrument of accession a few hours after Indian troops started arriving at the Srinagar airfield.



This is to dwell on the geopolitics of the Kashmir dispute. One of the aims of this study has been to redress the heavy emphasis on Kashmir as territory disputed between India and Pakistan, and to describe the violence of late 1947 as it was experienced by those who lived through it. Kashmiris and outsiders; fighters and civilians; politicians and citizens. The book revolves around one date: 27 October 1947. The day that Lord Mountbatten accepted Kashmir's accession to India—the day that the Indian army began its airlift into Kashmir—and the day that Pakistani tribesmen ransacked St Joseph's convent and hospital at Baramulla. It is a date privileged by the high politics of the Kashmir dispute but explored and discussed through the stories of those who were caught up in the events more than those who were directing them.

Social history is about people. So too is good reporting. And the most obvious lasting answer to the Kashmir dispute is to heed the voices of the people of Kashmir, and to allow them to decide their own destiny. The national interests of India and Pakistan—and particularly of India, the nation in power in the Kashmir Valley—will determine whether, when and how this is done.

