

## Why Did the British Quit India?

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The 'Quit India Movement' has been covered extensively in the 'official version' of the History of India's freedom and has been given the central place. This position has been established openly by the British Raj and had been accepted by the Congress leaders since it served their interest very well. However, the documents of the then British administration tell it otherwise and show that the impact of the 'Quit India Movement' on the British Indian Armed Forces was marginal and minimal.

Gandhiji and the Congress launched the Movement on 8 August, 1942 and next morning Gandhiji and all other Congress leaders were arrested and put in prison. In June, 1944, Gandhiji was released and during July/August of 1944 Gandhiji withdrew from the Movement. He told the Press that 'mass civil disobedience was never started and I cannot at the present moment start'.<sup>1</sup> In a cable to the *News Chronicle* on 13 July, 1944, he stated: 'What no one can do in the name of the Congress is mass civil disobedience which was never started and which, as I have said, I cannot at the present moment, even in my personal capacity, start.' Again, in a statement to the Press, Sevagram on 5 August, 1944, Gandhi said: 'As an old servant of the country, however, I can advise, and Congressmen are at liberty to treat my advice as instructions. I have already said that mass civil disobedience cannot be offered now.' So, by the end of 1944, the so-called 'Quit India Movement' was non-existent and it could be treated as an unsuccessful chapter in Indian

history. But we all know from official documents that between August 1942 and August 1944, lot of disruptive disturbances of some violent nature took place in the country. That was the period when Gandhiji and Congress leaders were in prison. The question is: Who, then, provided the leadership?

### Netaji's instructions

Subhas Chandra Bose already escaped from India and was then staying in Berlin and was organizing from there. He totally supported Gandhiji and, through his Radio broadcasts, started giving specific instructions to his countrymen to follow. He stated that the aim of the people of India was 'Now or Never—Victory or Death'.<sup>2</sup> In The Quit India Movement broadcast on 17 August 1942, he said:

This is Subhas Chandra Bose speaking to you over the Azad Hind Radio from Berlin. In view of the experience that I have gained from the campaign between 1921 and 1940 and, in the light of the present world situation, I may offer the following advice to you, which I believe will ensure our success in this struggle.

First, develop the struggle gradually and expand it all over the country by stages.

Secondly, in planning any action, avoid doing harm to the public as far as possible. Let your aim be to damage the machinery of administration only.

Thirdly, your campaign should now be converted into a guerilla-war without arms. This guerilla-war should have two aims—to destroy Britain's war-production in India

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and to paralyse the British administration of India.

Fourthly, listen to the broadcasts of Col. Britton in the European service of the B.B.C. and apply Col. Britton's tactics to the Indian situation.

Fifthly, for the general public the following activities are advisable:

- (A) Carry on complete boycott of British goods.
- (B) Hold public meetings in defiance of the official ban.
- (C) All over the country, organise marches to the houses of high Government officials—from the Viceroy downwards. If you happen to meet them, demand that they and their Government should quit India at once.
- (D) Organise processions for entering and occupying Government institutions, like law-courts, secretariat buildings etc, with a view to rendering all work impossible there.
- (E) Disobey all laws, if such disobedience will help to embarrass the administration.
- (F) Carry on a social boycott of such Indian officials as are really pro-British.
- (G) Carry on a social boycott of all Britishers in the country.
- (H) Stop paying taxes, provided such non-payment does not bring too much trouble on yourselves.
- (I) Begin erecting barricades in streets, where there is a likelihood of attack from the police and the military.
- (J) Arrange to punish British police officers and prison-officials who show special zeal in oppressing the people.

Sixthly, workers in factories, specially in war factories, should go on strike. If that is not possible they should carry on a go-slow campaign in the factories. They should also carry on small acts of sabotage, ie removing nuts and bolts, reducing the steam pressure etc, if that would dislocate the work, without bringing too much trouble on the workers themselves.

Seventhly, the peasants should immediately stop paying all taxes and

rates which help the British Government—provided such non-payment does not bring too much trouble on themselves.

Eighthly, students should leave their studies and organise guerilla-bonds for carrying on sabotage. They should, every day, invent new ways of annoying the British authorities and dislocating the administration, e.g. going to members of the Viceroy's Executive Council and demanding their resignation.

Ninthly, women, and specially girl students, should come forward to act as secret messengers and underground workers and to provide shelter for the men who fight.

Tenthly, clerks in Government offices and in war industries should work slowly and inefficiently and should give as much trouble to their masters as possible.

Eleventhly, businessmen should give up doing business with English firms.

Twelfthly, Government officials who are prepared to secretly help the cause, need not resign now.

Thirteenthly, servants working for Englishmen should be organised to go on strike on some pretext or other—ie demanding double the present wages. They should be instructed to cook bad food or to mix undesirable things with food and drink—so that living in India will be impossible for Englishmen. Similarly, it should be made impossible for Englishmen to appear in public.

Fourteenthly, all visible symbols of British Imperialism should be destroyed wherever possible—e.g. stamps, monuments, British flags, etc.

Fifteenthly, every attempt should be made to interfere with telegraph, telephone and postal services. Similarly, transport—that is, tram, bus or railway services—should be interrupted—specially when troops are transferred or war-materials are conveyed from one place to another. In arranging this type of sabotage, the public should not be unnecessarily inconvenienced.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this campaign should be carried on for weeks and months. Activities should be

shifted from place to place, if necessary, in order to avoid being crushed. If this guerilla-war is continued sufficiently long, then freedom will come, when British Imperialism ultimately is brought down, as the cumulative effect of the defeats on different fronts in different parts of the world. **Before dawn comes the darkest hour. Therefore, muster all your strength and courage in this fateful hour. Sisters and brothers! Be brave and continue the struggle, for freedom is at hand. Let your slogans be—‘Now or Never’—‘Victory or Death!’**

The people of India understood it very well and the words spread out all across India. Leaders like J. P. Narain of Bihar, Aruna Asaf Ali of Delhi and others (who went underground) picked up those messages from Subhasji’s radio broadcasts from Berlin and took it to different parts of India. The process continued until Netaji undertook the long journey to South-East Asia by submarine to assume the leadership from the ailing veteran revolutionary leader, Sri Rashbehari Bose, and take the full responsibilities for the ‘Armed Struggle for India’s Liberation’ on 4 July, 1943.<sup>3</sup>

So Subhas Chandra Bose also played a very significant role in conducting the ‘Quit India Movement’. His detailed instructions from the Berlin Radio created a revolutionary atmosphere throughout India. As a result, numerous violent and disruptive incidents took place in different parts of the country. But these were basically law-and-order situations and they were contained within fairly short times. These incidents hardly made any impact on the British Indian Armed Forces. So the British Administration in India had no reason to be alarmed. Some of their reports are reproduced here<sup>4</sup> to substantiate our conclusion.

#### **Linlithgow’s dispatches**

(A) The Marquess of Linlithgow,

Governor General of India, in his report to Mr Amery, Secretary of State, London on 13 August, 1942, states:

Following is my appreciation of position midday, 13th August. Reports received from Governors suggest further improvement in position. Bombay situation easier; Delhi situation is also in hand; no incident of any seriousness reported from provinces save attack by mob on station at Tenali in Madras which cut communications, looted goods-sheds and burnt two trains. Otherwise Madras Presidency is quiet, and though students continue to give trouble in various places, and there are still evidences of strain in industrial areas such as Lucknow, Cawnpore, Bombay, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, due partly to local hooligans and partly to presence of large numbers of mill-hands, &c. on strike, situation is throughout the country well in hand. No signs as yet of any developments of importance in rural areas. There are indications that troubles to date have been spontaneous reactions to arrest of Gandhi & Co. and that Congress may be planning a more formal opening of the civil disobedience movement throughout the country. We have dealt satisfactorily with immediate reactions to arrests, and I doubt if anything that has happened in the process will have helped Congress in securing their wider objectives. It remains to be seen how situation will develop, but present outlook may be taken on the whole as encouraging.

(B) Again he reports to Mr Amery, the next day. He writes from New Delhi:

1. Bombay situation very much easier and 59 mills working wholly or partially. No fresh serious incidents throughout the country though in Allahabad there has been rioting necessitating firing. In Calcutta there have been more minor disturbances than there had been, and there has been fairly serious rioting in Nagpur, while a goods train was derailed without casualties by sabotage at Cawnpore. Position is now quiet in

Madras but it appears that wrecking of Tenali station (which was accompanied by wrecking of four small stations adjoining) was organized sabotage.

2. General impression left on me is that main elements now concerned in causing difficulty (probably more now under Congress direction than was the case earlier) are: (a) students; (b) hooligans. Mill element is dropping out. In Nagpur for instance Governor reports that organised ruffians are the main trouble and not mill-hands.
- 3 There is a certain amount of cutting of telegraph and telephone wires throughout the country, and indications are that Congress is definitely interested in interruption of communications.
4. On the whole, however, and on a broad view, situation remains generally satisfactory. It is of particular importance that the Bombay situation should have eased as much as it has. Delhi is now quiet, and while I repeat the warning contained in my appreciation of yesterday that it may deteriorate again, I am not dissatisfied with the present position which is well in hand.

(C) Linlithgow's report to the Secretary of State, London, on 15 August is the following:

1. Bombay and Delhi are both now quiet. Nagpur city also quiet, though there has been a serious riot in Ramtek, a town outside. Slight deterioration in the United Provinces, where Allahabad situation has passed beyond student stage and become a hooligan case, and also in Calcutta and Dacca, where there have been disturbances necessitating firing. Only new and serious feature is a large-scale attempt to interrupt communication on railway on either side of Patna (a district notorious for its train-wrecking history even in peacetime) by large-scale removal of rails, burning of rail sleepers on bridges, &c. and cutting of telegraph wires. Full details are still awaited.

2. As previously reported the main elements in these disturbances seem to be students and riff-raff, and while minor incidents (and the one or two more serious incidents referred to above) are reported from widely scattered points throughout the country; and while the strain on police and security organisations remain very heavy, I am not disturbed by the situation. Most embarrassing developments are signs of extension of endeavours to interrupt railways, telegraph and telephonic communication. This may develop still further and is of course very difficult to dispose of effectively in a country of the size of India.

#### I. N. A. Officers' Trial

The 'Armed Struggle' launched by Netaji Subhas did not succeed militarily on the battlefield. But even though the I. N. A. could not enter deep into India as a victorious army, the 'I. N. A. Officers' Trial' changed everything. For the first time the whole of India came to know the activities of Netaji and his I. N. A. in South-East Asia. For the first time since the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the trial of the I. N. A.-leadership at Delhi's Red Fort created an explosive situation throughout India that shook up the mighty British Raj at its core. The impact of the trial on the British Indian Armed Forces was so extensive that the British Raj's trust and confidence in them was rudely shaken. The British Raj could no longer depend on their loyalty that was necessary to rule India and the rest of the British Empire throughout the world. This situation was completely new. So, the Raj had to take a MILITARY DECISION depending on the report from the Supreme Commander in India, Gen. Auchinleck.

General Auchinleck's reports to Chiefs of Staff Committee, Dated 24 November, 1945<sup>5</sup> record the impacts on the British

Indian Armed Forces because of the Trial Process in the following manner:

1. We must be prepared to deal with well-organised revolution next Spring, and the possibility of a serious, but less well-organized rising at any time during the coming Winter. We must also be ready to deal with widespread and bitter inter-communal strife which might put a severe strain on the reliability of the Indian Armed Forces should they be called on to act against their own coreligionists.
2. The reliability and spirit of the Indian Forces including the police will best be secured by a firm and explicit declaration by His Majesty's Government to the effect that, while they maintain their intention to grant self-government to India by constitutional methods:
  - (i) Any armed insurrection will be put down, by force if necessary and the leaders punished.
  - (ii) Government servants will be supported to the full.
  - (iii) The police and troops acting in the execution of their duty will be protected at the time and thereafter.

It is realized that (iii) is open to the criticism that, in view of the declared intention of His Majesty's Government to grant self-government to India, the promise of protection cannot be guaranteed. But if the present situation develops into a general armed rebellion which has to be suppressed by force, the chances of Congress extremists gaining political power in India will inevitably be postponed for a number of years.
3. In the absence of a firm declaration, the loyalty of the Indian Forces is likely progressively to deteriorate as time passes and Congress and other bodies intensify their anti-British campaign.
4. Provided the Indian Forces, including the police, remain loyal, India has sufficient British and Indian Forces available to deal with widespread

internal disturbance unless this coincides with Afghan aggression or a major rising of the tribes of the North West Frontier.

5. Transport aircraft now available will not suffice in an extreme emergency.
6. If the Indian Forces as a whole cease to be reliable, the British Armed Forces now available are not likely to be able to control the internal situation or to protect essential communications, nor would any piecemeal reinforcement of these forces be of much avail. To regain control of the situation and to restore essential communications within the country, nothing sort of an organized campaign for the reconquest of India is likely to suffice. It is not possible now to compute the air and land forces required for such a campaign, but they would inevitably be very large as, if the Indian Armed Forces are not prepared to support Government, they will almost inevitably actively oppose it. Further, such active opposition is not likely to be confined to India alone. Disaffection will inevitably spread to Indian troops now being employed by His Majesty's Government in overseas theatres such as Burma, Malaya, Java and the Middle East with serious repercussions on the attitude of the peoples of those countries. Afghanistan also may well throw in her lot with the Frontier tribes and the Mussalmans of North Western India.
7. The situation in India is, therefore, extremely delicate. If there is a widespread revolt against the Government, everything will depend upon the reliability of the Indian Armed Forces. This depends upon political more than upon military factors and it is essential that our political action both in India and in the neighbouring countries where Indian troops are employed, should in no way give opportunities for political agitation to subvert the loyalty to Government of the Indian Armed Forces.

Our action in Java and French Indo-China is already being represented

as European repression of national risings of Eastern people. If this is made a major political issue as is likely, it may have a serious effect upon the loyalty of the Indian Armed Forces. It is certainly very undesirable that any further Indian troops should be sent to these or other similar countries.

The reliability of the Indian Armed Forces is also likely to deteriorate if Government shows any lack of confidence in them. While, therefore, the despatch of further British troops to India may at first sight appear attractive, I consider that reinforcement in small numbers is likely to be ineffective in the event of widespread revolt whilst the despatch now to India of large British formations may do more harm than good in that it would show lack of confidence in the Indian Armed Forces and might well precipitate a crisis which we must do everything to avoid. For the moment the most important thing is to maintain at adequate strength the cadre of experienced British officers in Indian units. The number of such officers is already being steadily reduced by repatriation and release.

Should the situation so deteriorate that we cannot rely upon the Indian Armed Forces, I may have to ask His Majesty's Government to send to India as many British formations as can be made available. In these circumstances very early despatch would be essential, as, to be effective, these reinforcements would have to arrive before the forces of violence gain control.

I request, therefore, that plans may be prepared for the despatch to India of such British Formations as could be made available in the event of a serious emergency, and that I may be informed of the possible strength of these reinforcements and of the approximate period which would elapse between the request for their despatch and their arrival in Indian ports.

It is essential that any preparations or actual moves in this connection should be made under the guise of a plan to replace Indian Formations in the South East Asian Command by British Formations, using India as a staging base in order to complete their organisation and equipment. Too much importance cannot be paid to this aspect of the situation as it is absolutely essential to do or say nothing which might aggravate the present extremely delicate situation, and I trust that this will be firmly impressed on all authorities concerned, both military and civilian.

After these assessments of Gen. Auchinleck, the Mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy [R. I. N.] took place at several ports in India. These events ultimately convinced the British Raj in London to 'Transfer Power' to Grant India's Independence, and leave India with honour.

The contributions of Subhas Chandra Bose and his I. N. A. for ultimately forcing the British Raj to leave India have been appraised by the highest authorities in London. Some of these appraisals are given below:

Professor Madhu Dandavate (Formerly Deputy-Chairman, Planning Commission of India) had written in his article<sup>6</sup> the following:

The most appropriate assessment of the role of the leaders of the freedom struggle like Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose came not only from patriotic Indians but also from the former Prime Minister of Britain, Clement R. Attlee, during whose tenure India became free. Winston Churchill made a devastating attack on the British Labour Government and Prime Minister Attlee. He derisively said that the Labour Government had liquidated the British Empire in India, whose glory was laboriously built for 150 long years. He ridiculed the Labour Prime Minister for surrendering the armed

might of the British empire to the ‘Naked Fakir of India’, Gandhi, who was equipped only with the weapon of non-violence of no consequence.

In his effective reply to Churchill, Prime Minister Attlee pointed out that if the British empire had survived in India for 150 years, it was, not because of the Indian people’s support to the British. He emphasised that the British rule in India was sustained by the Force of Army, Navy and Air Force. In particular, Attlee hinted at the Indian National Army founded by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose outside India during the Second World War and the revolt of the Royal Indian Navy in Bombay, Calcutta and Karachi in January 1946. Characterising these revolts in the Army and Navy as a signal that in future, the British could not rely on the defence forces for the preservation and protection of the British regime in India. Attlee pleaded that under these conditions it was advisable and desirable for the British to withdraw from India with grace. Thus, the assessment of the glorious role of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was appropriately gauged by the highest executive authority of the British Government.

Sri Surya Kumar Bose (Grandnephew of Subhas Chandra Bose) has also written in his article in the same:

In November 1976, my father Barrister Amiya Nath Bose and I had a meeting with the former Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, at his Kennington Street residence in London. I quite clearly remember my father asking him the reason for Britain’s decision to leave India in 1947. Lord Mountbatten had replied that the war of the INA and the consequent trials of the INA officers at the Red Fort totally undermined the morale of the British Indian Army and Britain could not depend on the Army any more to rule the country. That was the main reason for their leaving India in 1947.<sup>6</sup>

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enlisted the secret communications between the highest Government Officials in India and London, which document the impacts of the I. N. A. Trials at Red Ford on the Indian Armed Forces<sup>5, 5A, 5B</sup>.

When asked in 1956 by the acting Governor of West Bengal about the impact of the ‘Quit India Movement’ the Prime Minister of Britain, Clement Attlee, replied the impact was ‘minimal’. This has been documented by historian Dr Ramesh Chandra Majumdar in his memoir<sup>7</sup>. Attlee repeated this statement again in 1960 at Oxford to Barun De and Kamal Hossain. Barun De has documented it in his article. ‘Attlee himself told an acting Governor in Calcutta’s Raj Bhavan in 1956 that, compared to the role of Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army as a force to make the British quit, Gandhiji’s role had been “minimal”. He repeated this to my friend Kamal Hossain, and myself in 1960, one morning in the Nuffield College, Oxford<sup>8,9</sup>.

### Some vital issues to be considered

In the light of these historical records and documents, which were formerly secret and published in the seventies, the people and the Central Government of India need to address the following vital issues of India’s Freedom. In the first place, while it is evident that India’s Freedom did not come through Gandhiji’s ‘Quit India Movement’, but it was achieved through the veteran revolutionary leader Rashbehari Bose (who escaped from India and settled in Japan and started to organize in Japan to fight for India’s Freedom by establishing Indian Independence League, I. I. L., throughout South-East Asia and merged with Gen. Mohan Singh’s Army), Gen. Mohan Singh (who was leading the vast military forces surrendered to the Japanese Military in Singapore and throughout South-East Asia and formed Indian National Army, I. N. A.,

and joined Rashbehari Bose with the object to fight for India's Freedom), Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (who arrived in Japan in May 1943 and on 4 July 1943, assumed the full leadership of I. I. L. and I. N. A. as the Supreme Commander of the forces to fight for India's Freedom through 'Armed Struggle' against the British), and eventually the glorious role played by the British Indian Armed Forces in India, India's history of independence needs to be re-written.

Secondly, Mahatma Gandhi should be honoured as the 'Spiritual Father of the Nation' (Netaji Subhas first addressed Gandhiji as 'Father of the Nation' from Singapore in his 'Message to Mahatma Gandhi' broadcast on 6 July 1944)<sup>10</sup> for pioneering the process of India's Freedom and arousing the masses on several occasions throughout the country of India, Netaji Subhas Chandra should be honoured as the 'Liberating Father of the Nation' for

ultimately driving the British Raj out of the Indian Subcontinent.

Thirdly, the Central Government of India should install a proper statue of Netaji at a proper location (either in front of the Parliament House or at India Gate) and a proper 'I. N. A. Memorial and Monument' in New Delhi also at proper location (in front of Red Fort) honouring appropriately the memories of thousands of I. N. A. soldiers who sacrificed their lives to liberate the country.

Fourthly, Gandhiji and Subhasji's birthdays should be observed throughout the country as 'National Holidays' as Deshaprem Days.

Fifthly, 'Rajpath' in New Delhi should be renamed 'I. N. A. Path'.

Sixthly, in all Government offices and all Indian Embassies and Consulates around the world, Netaji's pictures should be installed next to Gandhiji's pictures. ■

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