

THE DICKIE BIRD PLAN (1947)

The Dickie Bird Plan, also known as the Plan Balkan or the Ismay Plan, was an early-1947 proposal aimed at transferring authority from Britain to India. Created by Lord Louis Mountbatten with advisors Hastings Ismay and George Abell, it was never put into action. Nevertheless, it is historically important as the first major proposal preceding the final Mountbatten Plan on June 3, 1947, which led to the partition and the establishment of India and Pakistan.

Background

After WWII, the British government recognised it could no longer control India. This realisation stemmed from several factors: the widespread Indian independence movement, the failure of the 1946 cabinet mission plan, rising Hindu-Muslim communal tensions, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah's campaign for Pakistan. Calls for immediate independence from leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi heightened the urgency. Consequently, Prime Minister Clement Attlee dispatched Mountbatten to India in March 1947 to accelerate the transfer of power. Mountbatten and his team later developed the Dickie Bird Plan as a potential solution.

Concept Proposal

Dickie was a nickname for Lord Mountbatten, so the plan was informally called the Dickie Bird Plan. It is also known as the Plan Balkan, as it suggested dividing India into smaller regions, similar to Europe's Balkanization.

The main concept was that rather than creating one unified India or two distinct countries (India and Pakistan), each province would initially become independent. Later on, each province could decide whether to join India, join Pakistan, or remain independent. This strategy allowed India to break into multiple states instead of just two nations.

- Provinces such as Bengal, Punjab, Bombay, Madras, United Provinces, and NWFP- originally British Indian provinces- would initially become independent entities. Each province could choose to join the Indian Constituent Assembly, establish a separate Muslim state (Pakistan), or remain independent.
- About 565 princely states, including Hyderabad, Kashmir, Mysore, and others, would also have the option to join a union or stay autonomous.

- Unlike earlier proposals, this plan initially emphasises a weak central government with no strong authority. Provinces could later decide to form unions or federations, enabling the swift transfer of power without waiting for a full constitution.

Opposition to the Plan

Many Indian leaders were strongly against the plan. Jawaharlal Nehru argued it would divide India into many small states, leading to political chaos and increased separatism. He described it as the "Balkanisation of India." Major criticisms focused on over-fragmentation—suggesting India could break into numerous smaller countries—weak national unity due to the absence of a strong central government, and the risk of civil wars if provinces clashed over borders. The plan was also seen as potentially encouraging separatist movements.

Mountbatten acknowledged that the plan could cause significant instability. Following talks with Congress leaders, the proposal was dropped, leading Mountbatten to develop a new plan.

The Alternative Plan

The Dickie Bird Plan was replaced by the 3 June Plan, which proposed dividing India into two separate dominions: India and Pakistan. This plan involved partitioning Punjab and Bengal, conducting a referendum in NWFP, and declaring independence in August 1947. These measures laid the groundwork for the Indian Independence Act (1947).

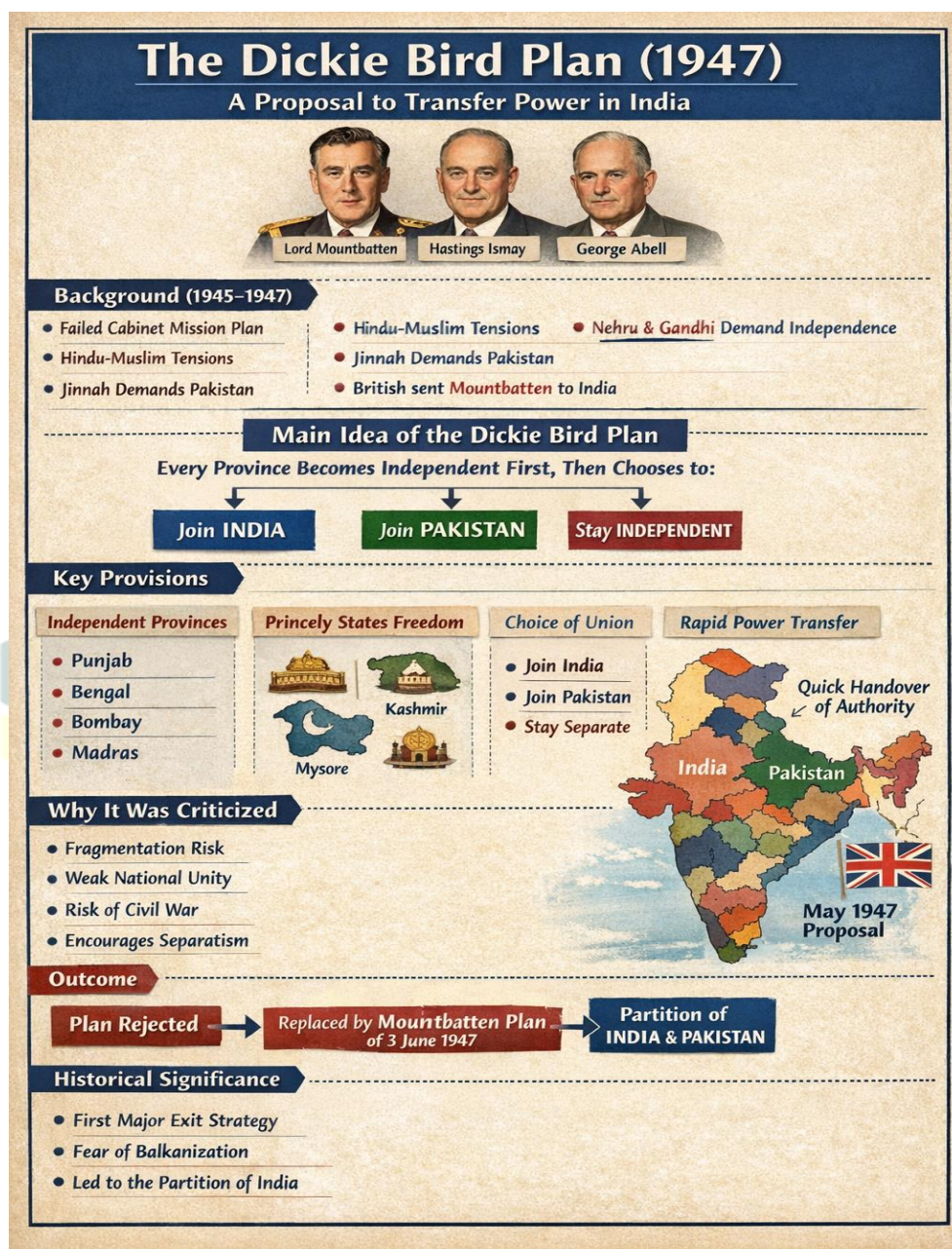
Significance

Although rejected, the Dickie Bird Plan remains significant as it represents the first British attempt to resolve colonial rule. It raised concerns about India dividing into multiple states and directly influenced the development of the Mountbatten Plan, which resulted in the creation of India and Pakistan.

In Brief

The Dickie Bird Plan (May 1947) proposed that each province in British India should first gain independence and then decide whether to join India, Pakistan, or stay independent. However, concerns that this method could fragment India into multiple small states led

to its rejection. It was replaced by the Mountbatten Plan, which ultimately resulted in India's partition in 1947.



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