



INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S ACTION – FROM NEGOTIATION TO OPERATION POLO: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The Hyderabad accession crisis of 1947–48 represents one of the most critical challenges faced by the Indian Government in the immediate aftermath of independence. This study examines the transformation of Indian policy from diplomatic negotiation to military intervention, culminating in Operation Polo. Initially, the Government of India adopted a conciliatory approach, engaging in negotiations with the Nizam of Hyderabad to secure accession while ensuring internal autonomy and protection of political rights. However, the persistence of the Nizam's refusal to accede, combined with the rise of the Razakars and increasing internal repression, altered the political landscape significantly.

Drawing upon archival records, official correspondence, and contemporary accounts, this study traces the stages of negotiation, including the Standstill Agreement, its breakdown, and the escalation of tensions. It further analyzes the strategic, political, and humanitarian considerations that led to the decision to undertake military action. Operation Polo is examined not merely as a military campaign but as a calculated response to internal instability and national security concerns.

The study argues that the shift from negotiation to military intervention was neither abrupt nor arbitrary but a necessary outcome of evolving circumstances. It highlights the complex interplay between diplomacy, coercion, and state-building in postcolonial India.

Keywords: *Operation Polo, Hyderabad Accession, Nizam, Razakars, Indian Policy, Negotiation, National Security*

1. Introduction

The integration of princely states into the Indian Union was one of the most formidable tasks faced by independent India in 1947. Among the 562 princely states, Hyderabad stood out as the most complex and sensitive case due to its size, strategic location, and political ambitions. Governed by the Nizam, Hyderabad sought to remain independent rather than accede to India or Pakistan, thereby posing a serious challenge to the territorial integrity of the newly formed nation.

The Indian Government, led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and supported by V.P. Menon, initially pursued a policy of negotiation and persuasion. This approach was rooted in the desire to avoid military confrontation and ensure a peaceful transition. The Standstill Agreement of November 1947 was a key step in this direction, intended to maintain the status quo while discussions continued.

However, the situation in Hyderabad rapidly deteriorated. The rise of the Razakars, a paramilitary force supporting the Nizam, led to widespread violence and repression. The Nizam's refusal to sign the Instrument of Accession further complicated matters. Diplomatic efforts began to fail as internal instability and external threats grew.

In this context, the Indian Government gradually shifted its policy from negotiation to coercion, ultimately leading to the launch of Operation Polo in September 1948. This study examines this transition in detail, highlighting the political, strategic, and humanitarian factors that influenced decision-making.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the initial diplomatic approach of the Indian Government towards Hyderabad.
2. To examine the causes behind the failure of negotiations with the Nizam.
3. To study the role of Razakars in escalating the crisis.
4. To evaluate the transition from negotiation to military action.
5. To analyze Operation Polo in terms of strategy, execution, and outcomes.
6. To understand the broader implications of this transition for Indian state-building.

3. Review of Literature

The Hyderabad accession crisis has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with different interpretations of India's policy shift.

V.P. Menon's *Integration of the Indian States* provides a detailed insider account of the negotiations and administrative processes involved. Menon emphasizes the importance of diplomacy but also justifies the eventual use of force as necessary.

K.M. Munshi's *End of an Era* offers a perspective from the Indian Government's representative in Hyderabad. Munshi portrays the police action as a justified response to lawlessness and political instability.

Conversely, Omar Khalidi's work presents a more critical view, highlighting the violence and humanitarian consequences of the integration. He argues that the narrative of a "bloodless operation" overlooks the suffering experienced by civilians.

The Sunderlal Committee Report (1949) remains a crucial document, providing evidence of communal violence during and after Operation Polo. It challenges official accounts and offers a more nuanced understanding of the event.

Recent scholars have also examined the crisis in the context of postcolonial state formation, emphasizing the tension between democratic ideals and coercive practices.

4. Methodology

This study is based on qualitative analysis using secondary sources, including:

- Government reports and archival documents
- Scholarly books and journal articles
- Memoirs and contemporary accounts
- Digital archives and historical databases

A chronological and analytical approach has been adopted to trace the evolution of Indian policy. Comparative analysis has been used to evaluate differing interpretations of the events.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The Initial Policy of Negotiation: In the immediate aftermath of independence, the Indian Government adopted a policy of persuasion and negotiation towards princely states. This approach was based on the principle of voluntary accession, aiming to integrate states without coercion. In the case of Hyderabad, India offered assurances to the Nizam regarding internal autonomy and protection of political rights. The objective was to build trust and avoid conflict. The Standstill Agreement signed in November 1947 was a reflection of this approach, intended to maintain existing arrangements while negotiations continued. However, this agreement also allowed Hyderabad to retain its administrative independence, which created space for political maneuvering and resistance.

5.2 Breakdown of Negotiations: Despite initial efforts, negotiations between Hyderabad and the Indian Government failed. The Nizam remained committed to independence and sought international support. The Standstill Agreement began to break down as Hyderabad violated its terms. There were reports of arms procurement, strengthening of military forces, and increasing hostility towards pro-India elements within the state. The failure of negotiations highlighted the limitations of diplomatic engagement in resolving the crisis.

5.3 Rise of the Razakars and Internal Crisis: The emergence of the Razakars under the leadership of Qasim Razvi significantly escalated the situation. The Razakars acted as a paramilitary force, enforcing the Nizam's authority and suppressing opposition. Their activities included violence against civilians, intimidation, and communal attacks. This created widespread fear and instability within Hyderabad. The internal crisis transformed the issue from a political dispute into a humanitarian concern, compelling the Indian Government to reconsider its approach.

5.4 Strategic and Security Concerns: Hyderabad's geographical location in the heart of India made its independence a serious security concern. There were fears that an independent Hyderabad could become a center of instability or align with external powers. The possibility of Pakistan's involvement further heightened these concerns. The Indian Government viewed the situation as a threat to national integrity and security. These strategic considerations played a crucial role in the decision to shift towards military action.

5.5 Transition to Military Policy: As negotiations failed and the situation deteriorated, the Indian Government gradually moved towards a policy of coercion. This transition was not sudden but evolved over time in response to changing circumstances. Sardar Patel played a key role in advocating decisive action. He argued that prolonged instability would weaken the nation and that integration was essential for unity. The decision to undertake military action was thus a calculated step rather than an impulsive one.

5.6 Operation Polo: Strategy and Execution: Operation Polo, launched on 13 September 1948, was a swift and well-planned military operation. It involved coordinated action by the Indian Army from multiple directions. The operation lasted only five days, culminating in the surrender of Hyderabad on 17 September 1948. The speed and efficiency of the operation demonstrated the preparedness of the Indian forces. Officially termed a "police action," the operation was designed to restore law and order and facilitate integration.

5.7 Humanitarian and Political Implications: While Operation Polo achieved its immediate objectives, it also had significant humanitarian consequences. Reports of violence and civilian casualties raised questions about the cost of integration. At the same time, the operation brought political stability and ended feudal rule. It paved the way for democratic governance and administrative reforms. This dual impact highlights the complexity of the event, combining both positive and negative outcomes.

5.8 Long-Term Impact on Indian State Formation: The Hyderabad case set an important precedent for Indian state-building. It demonstrated that while diplomacy was preferred, the state was willing to use force when necessary. The integration strengthened the authority of the central government and reinforced the idea

of a unified nation. At the same time, it also raised important questions about the balance between coercion and consent in democratic governance.

6. Conclusion

The transition of Indian Government policy from negotiation to military intervention in the Hyderabad crisis represents a critical moment in the history of modern India. It reflects the complexities of nation-building in a diverse and newly independent country.

Initially, the Government of India pursued a policy of diplomacy, emphasizing negotiation and voluntary accession. However, the failure of these efforts, combined with internal instability and security concerns, necessitated a shift towards military action.

Operation Polo was not merely a military campaign but a strategic decision shaped by political, humanitarian, and security considerations. It successfully integrated Hyderabad into the Indian Union, ensuring territorial unity.

However, the process also revealed the challenges of balancing democratic ideals with practical realities. The use of force, while effective, raised ethical and political questions that continue to be debated.

Ultimately, the Hyderabad crisis underscores the importance of adaptability in policy-making and the need to balance negotiation with decisive action in the face of evolving challenges.

7. References

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