The Bengal crisis had a significant impact on the Kashmir dispute. Sheikh Abdullah, as Girja Bajpai observed, was “profoundly affected” by the attacks on Muslims in India. This strengthened his belief that independence might be the best option for Kashmir, a development that not only led to misgivings in Delhi but also to differences with his colleagues in Kashmir. “Bakshi [Ghulam Mohammad] and . . . a majority of the members of the State Cabinet do not believe in Sheikh Saheb’s idea.” Nehru went to Kashmir and dissuaded Abdullah from taking this line. But, in time, these differences—internal and with India—would widen into an unbridgeable chasm; for the Sheikh continued quietly to canvass this option. The refugee crisis also had an impact on Delhi’s stance vis-à-vis Kashmir: an overall plebiscite was now deemed thoroughly undesirable. As Vallabhbhai Patel wrote, “once the talk [of plebiscite] starts the non-Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir would start feeling uneasy and we might be faced with an exodus to India.” Partition-cum-plebiscite now seemed the most practical option. The idea of electing a constituent assembly was also open.

The UN mediator, Owen Dixon, reached the subcontinent on 27 May 1950. In initial meetings with him both Nehru and Maulana

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1 Bajpai to Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 17 May 1950, subject files 5–6, Vijayalakshmi Pandit Papers, NMML.
2 Patel to Nehru, 3 July 1950, SPC, 1: 317.
3 This paragraph draws on William Reid, “Sir Owen Dixon’s Mediation of the Kashmir Dispute,” BA Honours thesis, Deakin University (2000). But my conclusions are different from his.
Azad (minister for education) raised the option of elections to a constituent assembly. Dixon insisted, however, that the people’s wishes had to be ascertained by a plebiscite. After a four-day meeting in Delhi with the Indian and Pakistani prime ministers Dixon announced that a state-wide plebiscite was impossible. Thereafter, Nehru proposed a plan for partition-cum-plebiscite: in Jammu the ceasefire line would become the boundary; Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas would go to Pakistan, and Ladakh to India; the plebiscite would be confined solely to the valley. This would minimize refugee movement while simplifying demilitarization and administrative arrangements. When the Pakistanis opposed the plan Dixon offered to throw in “much of Jammu west of the Chenab river.” He also assured Liaquat that the voting would be fair: in the plebiscite area, government functionaries would be replaced by UN appointees. Dixon should have known better; for Nehru had explicitly ruled this out during their discussions on an overall plebiscite. Unsurprisingly, Nehru rejected the idea yet again. As he explained to Dixon, if Abdullah’s government was superseded the people would see it as an expression by the UN that the government was “not favoured” and would vote accordingly. This was, of course, the reason for Nehru’s consistent opposition to any attempt at removing Abdullah. Owen Dixon’s impatience and pessimism got the better of him and he refused to mediate further.

Following Dixon’s abortive mission, Britain and America grew fretful about the Kashmir problem. Until now, they had tried to avoid overtly supporting either country. Yet they also believed that a solution to the Kashmir dispute was imperative to their interests in a stable and Western-oriented South Asia. More so, since they felt that lack of progress on Kashmir could destabilize the Pakistan government. In March 1951, after a failed attempt at mediation by the Commonwealth, the US and the UK co-sponsored a Security Council resolution calling for arbitration to settle the dispute, should demilitarization fail to take place within three months. Pakistan accepted the resolution; India rejected it. The Security Council nonetheless appointed Frank Graham as the next UN representative.4

Meantime, the idea of a constituent assembly ceased to be an alternative to a plebiscite. In July 1950 Sheikh Abdullah had sought to