

Peshawar and west of the Indus, there had existed since the early part of the nineteenth century a curious colony of Muhammadan fanatics known as the Wahabis. They possessed a kind of recruiting dépôt or agency at Patna in Bengal, and their influence spread far and wide by secret channels throughout India. They formed a rallying point for all fugitives from justice, turbulent Pathans, Afridis, and every wild spirit with a grudge against British rule. They were raided by punitive expeditions in 1853 and 1858, and in the latter year were driven from Sitana, but re-established themselves at Malka in 1861, and again menaced the Punjab in 1863. In that year Sir Neville Chamberlain was sent to coerce them with a force of 6,000, but at the Ambela Pass he was confronted by an army of 15,000. For three weeks the advance was checked and the British force kept on the defensive. The Calcutta Council in alarm was contemplating the fatal course of recalling the expedition, but Sir William Denison, Governor of Madras and acting Viceroy, hastened to Calcutta and, on the advice of Sir Hugh Rose, the Commander-in-Chief, insisted on operations being continued. In December the Wahabis were defeated, and their stronghold Malka was destroyed—three weeks before Sir John Lawrence assumed office in India, in January 1864.

Since his retirement from the Punjab in February 1859, Sir John Lawrence had served as member of the Secretary of State's Council in the India Office, bearing modestly the honours and compliments lavished upon him as the 'saviour of India' and the 'organizer of victory'. In 1860 he had declined the governorship of Bombay. He was a strong, determined, and sagacious man, with a certain noble ruggedness and simplicity of soul, though his character, as Lord Dalhousie noticed, was not without the spur of an honourable ambition. He possessed less genius, culture, personal charm and distinction than his elder brother Henry, who was, in the judgement of Sir Richard Temple, 'one of the most