

The British Partition Plan for India and Palestine : A Comparative Study

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The 15th August 1947 Independence Day celebrations were overshadowed through the tragedy of partition that accompanied India's midnight' tryst with destiny. Less than a year after India and Pakistan established their dominions, another nation-state - Israel - was formed in 1948 under comparable cataclysmic circumstances, including mass migration and communal conflict. Both of these incidents were motivated via the idea of ethnic homogeneity, the belief that diverse groups - religious, racial, cultural, or otherwise - cannot coexist peacefully. Another recurring theme was the Imperial British's position as both troublemakers and middlemen. This paper does a comparative study of the partition plan of British India and Mandatory Palestine.

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1. Introduction

The country of India was split in two, creating the nations of India and Pakistan. Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are today

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known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan & the People's Republic of Bangladesh, were independent countries in 1950 when the republic was established. The Dominion of Pakistan was re-organized (since 1971). The division resulted in two districts, which are non-Muslim or Muslim, which divided Bengal and Punjab into two provinces. During partition, the United Kingdom's Indian Army and Royal Navy were also divided, as were the Indian Civil Service, railways, and the national treasury. The partition was established through the 1947 Independence Act and effectively ended the British Raj or Crown power in India. It was also established in India. The two sovereign autonomous dominions of India and Pakistan were formally formed at 12 noon on 15 August 1947. In the newly constituted dominions, between 10 and 20 million people were displaced religiously, resulting in enormous refugee crises. There was widespread violence during and before the partition, the estimated deaths were ranging from several hundred thousand to two million. The violent nature of the split promoted an environment of animosity and suspicion that has continued to shape their ties to this day between India and Pakistan.

The British withdrew from the mandate of Palestine on 14 May 1948, and Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, confirmed the fledgling Jewish State's independence. Suddenly the Zionists aim of the Jewish State became reality, and the idea of Israel being allowed to call it their Jewish country was aroused through Jews all over the world. The Arabs, on the other hand, were revolting; they steadfastly rejected the formation of a new state of Israel. Indeed, their expectations for an Arab state had been crushed, and they believed that the foundation of an Israeli state would lead to the displacement of their communities. The Arab-Israeli War of 1948, colloquially referred to as the War of Independence, did not occur concurrently with Israel's declaration of independence. In a confrontation that has continued to this day, the Arab states attacked Israel. Not only have the borders changed over time, but despite the lengthy period of partition endeavour, they have never been legally agreed on.

2. Palestine Partition

The division is obligatory Palestine has a long history of conflict on a variety of fronts and scales, with Jews, Arabs, and foreign powers all competing for independence, interests, and nationhood. Numerous meetings, private agreements, and broken promises all

contributed to the Middle East's escalation of tensions and the escalation of the war. Rather than fostering a comprehensive discourse in which all parties participated, boundary negotiations fostered an environment of disorder and turmoil, impeding each party from achieving its objectives (The conditions, variables, and arguments that influenced the partition concept are discussed, as well as the partition commissioners and the factors that influenced each partition proposal).

2.1 The Story of Palestine

There is a long history of Zionism, which advocates making Palestine a permanent home for Jews in their “promised” land. As a political movement, it gained traction in Europe in the late 1800s as a response to anti-Semitism, which had resulted in widespread persecution of Jews. The fact that not all Jews are Zionists is relevant here; some actively oppose the concept. A large influx of Jewish emigrants began arriving in Palestine in the 1880s, following the Russian pogroms. Problem: the Palestine, which was still part of the Ottoman Empire, wasn't just some barren wasteland waiting to be colonized. Arabs were living there, as well as a few Christians and Jews.

In Palestine history, the First World War was a watershed moment. For the sake of victory, Britain had made numerous agreements with various groups to placate them and gain their support for the war effort. The promise of a “national home for the Jewish people in Palestine” was made to Zionist leaders in London in the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Lord Rothschild, a prominent member of the British Jewish community, was the recipient of a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour in which he made this declaration.¹ Within a short period, British forces had managed to liberate Jerusalem from Ottoman rule. Arabs kept a wary eye on these developments and saw the threat that Zionism posed.

After the war, decisions had to be made about German and Turkish colonies that had lost. Since the annexation of the territory went against stated war objectives, the victorious allied nations couldn't take them over directly. The Mandate System was developed as a means of compromise. The system entrusted the administration of these territories to the allies until the allied nations could exercise full self-determination over them. Versailles' Treaty stated that these regions were “inhabited by peoples not yet capable of standing alone

under the strenuous conditions of today's world" and that "tutelage should be entrusted to advanced nations who can best undertake this responsibility because of their resources, experience, or geographical position."² It was the conclusion reached at the end of World War I. Imperialism was being continued under cover of enlightened guidance for the benefit of the British and French governments.

The British were granted a mandate or authorization over Palestine, a part of the now-defunct Ottoman Empire. The League of Nations approved this transfer in 1922. Now that the Jewish national home had been established and self-governing institutions had been developed, Britain was in charge of ensuring that all Palestinians, regardless of race or religion, had civil and religious rights.³ The British now had to deal with competing national demands from Jewish and Arab communities with this system.

About ten percent of Palestine's 700,000 residents were Jews in 1920, with the majority having arrived in the country within the previous 40 years. The rise of anti-Semitic sentiment in Europe, particularly in Germany and Poland, coupled with British support for Zionism under the Balfour Promises, resulted in a 30% increase in the percentage of Jews by 1936.⁴ The well-organized Jewish community in Palestine, which was constantly expanding, was a formidable force. Jewish National Fund purchased fertile land and leased it solely to Jews.

The Federation of Jewish Labor was established to help Jewish workers find jobs, and it also built a military to help them defend themselves. They had support from the British government throughout this entire ordeal.

These changes stoked Arab nationalism, which sought to exert control over Zionist immigration and land purchases as a reaction. Palestine did not belong to the British, who was considered an enemy of the Palestinians? Because the Arab population in Palestine felt increasingly threatened, the Western Wall Riots of 1929 broke out. In Jerusalem's Old City, this structure served as a holy site for Jews and Muslims. As a result of tensions over the Wall's accessibility, there was no hope for Arab-Jewish harmony in Palestine.⁵

Palestine was decades away from self-rule when other mandate neighbors, such as Iraq, Egypt, and Syria, had achieved various levels of self-government and formal independence by the 1930s. It lacked even the most basic form of representative government : a

legislature. Because of this, Arab nationalist sentiments grew more radical and intertwined with religion in 1936, resulting in large-scale protests across the country. The British government used a carrot-and-stick strategy to quell the uprising, first sending in the armed forces and then appointing Lord Peel, a former Secretary of State for India, to head a commission. It had to figure out a way to accommodate two distinct national movements within the same geographical area.

According to the report, Palestine should be divided into two states: one Arab and one Jewish. Peel called for a population exchange because the Jewish state he envisioned would still have a sizable Arab minority living within its borders, making the division “clean and final.” This required the relocation of nearly 200,000 Arabs to make room for the establishment of a Jewish state. The Arabs didn’t like the idea of having to leave the land of their forefathers, which sparked a series of anti-colonial uprisings in 1939.⁶ In this period, the traditional Palestinian headdress known as the keffiyeh became a symbol of resistance among the Palestinian people.⁷ The imperial authorities brutally put down the uprising once more.

The severity of the uprising and the high cost of putting an end to it forced the British to alter their plans for Palestine on a diplomatic level. Additionally, war clouds were gathering over Europe, necessitating the British government’s secure communications and supply routes in preparation for a potential conflict. This led to an official announcement in 1939 that the idea of partition had been abandoned. It also placed restrictions on Zionist authorities’ ability to continue purchasing land. It set a cap on Jewish immigration of 75,000 people over five years, after which the process would end. It also envisioned the creation of a Palestinian state with equal representation for Arabs and Jews. Rejecting the Balfour Declaration and reversing British policy in Palestine for the next two decades were the main points of this paper.⁸

It looked like this policy would undergo a significant revision soon. After the Second World War, Britain was utterly drained of its will and ability to decide the future of Palestine. Several western countries, notably the United States, declared their unwavering support for a Jewish state independent of the Nazis as a refuge for Jewish survivors of the Shoah. Sympathies were overwhelmingly expressed for the Jewish population, and British immigration

restrictions were roundly criticized in light of these sentiments. Britain turned to the United Nations in these circumstances, handing over the Palestinian issue as if it were an impossible mess that it had created.⁹

The UN created a Palestinian-specific committee, which resurrected the Peel Commission's proposal to partition Palestine ten years earlier. Over half of Palestine's land was earmarked for a Jewish state, with Jewish settlements and Arab villages coexisting side by side. This infuriated the Arab population, which rejected the award and sparked a civil war, which in turn sparked a regional conflict between the newly formed state of Israel and its Arab neighbors.

The fighting left Israel with 78% control over mandated Palestine, forcing tens of thousands of Palestinians to flee or be expelled. Meanwhile, the British had made good their exit, and the rest is history. Over the years, there have been numerous Arab-Israeli wars, and a resolution is still elusive.

The British attempt to establish a European population among native peoples with whom they couldn't live in harmony was difficult. In addition, the lack of any prudent long-term policy exacerbated an already hopeless situation. Plans were announced and then changed according to changing geopolitical conditions in the United Kingdom.

2.2 The Story of India

The Radcliffe Boundary has been in place for seven decades, separating modern-day India and Pakistan. While the region has seen its share of border violence and political upheaval, India and Pakistan have maintained their sovereignty as two sovereign states, each with its own government, the army, economy, and international recognition. Since 1947, the Radcliffe Boundary has remained distinct cartographically and generally stable, despite the enmity between the two states that has persisted since.

People often wonder, especially those born after the horrors of partition and communal violence, why India was split up in the first place. What made the Indian subcontinent break up? "There have been three rather different answers on offer," writes Ramchandra Guha in *India After Gandhi*, a seminal work. The first accuses the members of Congress of having a distorted view of Jinnah and Muslims. The second accuses Jinnah of ignoring human suffering in

pursuit of a separate country. The third blame the British for creating a rift between Hindus and Muslims to keep their power.¹⁰ That depends on how you combine three pieces in your head.

Muslim South Asia's need for a nation had been simmering for some time. After WWII ended and it became clear that the British would soon be handing over their empire to Indians, the idea of Pakistan had taken on an urgent position. Pakistan was born.

All political parties used religion as a political tool in the lead-up to the 1946 elections, which were held to form provincial governments and establish a central body to draft the country's constitution. For political purposes, Muslim League seized on the concept of Pakistan. In their campaign, they claimed that voting for the League meant voting for Pakistan. Even so, there was some ambiguity about what Pakistan meant.¹¹

Although we have grown accustomed to Pakistan's fixed borders, many people did not think of Pakistan in such territorial terms before. What about a federation made up of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' parts? Is it possible that there will be "Pakistan pockets" in India that include Muslim majority areas? What about a nation-state with its borders? What about cities like Delhi, Aligarh, and Hyderabad? Do they fit this description? No one had an answer, and it was abundantly clear that no one was considering a mass exodus.

Following the establishment of provincial administrations, an attempt was made to reach a compromise and adopt a single constitutional plan for a united India. A Cabinet Mission was dispatched to this end. It proposed a three-tiered federation with a central authority responsible for defense and international affairs and three autonomous provinces. The idea was ultimately rejected because it did not satisfy those who desired a strong centralized India on the one hand and those who favored division on the other. Following the League's August 1946 call for a 'Direct Action Day', communal violence erupted in Calcutta. It extended to Bihar, the United Provinces, and eventually to Punjab, which erupted into civil war in March 1947, with unparalleled murder, rioting, and mayhem. In these times of fear and concern, partitioning or dividing Punjab and Bengal appeared viable. The price of a stable central government seemed to be the country's division-Pakistan as an ideology united with Pakistan as a state.

Now, London sought to exit India as quickly as possible, whether unified or divided. In February 1947, Prime Minister Attlee indicated that Britain would withdraw from the subcontinent no later than June 1948. Mountbatten was appointed as the new monarch to ensure the transition of authority was completed. A paper plan was devised to partition Punjab and Bengal based on territorial and statistical maps and with no regard for human safety or popular protection. This strategy, also known as the Mountbatten Plan, was announced to a worried and anticipatory populace on 3 June. It became obvious that the country would be partitioned, but would residents be relocated? Where would the lines be drawn? These critical issues remained unresolved. Along with this sense of shock and bewilderment, the liberation date was advanced to 15 August 1947. The most surprised and fearful replies came from Punjab, where territories surrounding Lahore, Multan, and Rawalpindi were numerically dominated through Muslims yet home to over 500,000 Sikhs and their holiest pilgrimage sites.

On 30 June, the Punjab and Bengal border commission was established under the chairmanship of Cyril Radcliffe. The commission met in secret and was tasked with the challenging task of splitting land, assets, and the army based on out-of-date statistics. It received several petitions and notes from various parties with complex requests, and more than half of Punjab's districts were challenged. Radcliffe had an unappreciative job.

Meanwhile, violence persisted outside, and the stream of migrants had begun amid whispers and educated estimates about the location of the border. By 12 August, the partition designs had been completed but were purposefully withheld for five days. On 17 August, the same day that the first regiment of British forces left Bombay, the Radcliffe line was finally unveiled to the public.¹² The British-commanded Indian border force, designed to quell sectarian unrest in Punjab, was ill-prepared and far too small to deal with what was about to happen.

The bloodshed that preceded the division was severe, but it took on a new ferocity and cruelty after 15 August 1947. Ethnic cleansing occurred concurrently with a significant population exchange. Provincial administrations in their infancy - understaffed and under-resourced - were woefully unprepared to assume new tasks. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost as a result. The split plan's

fundamental fault was obscure reasoning. There was an immediate need to reassure minority groups and ensure citizenship, property, and security rights to all religious groups, regardless of their location. The colonial overlords should have retained trained troops and officials for an additional few months to maintain law and order and supervise the population transfer peacefully. Regrettably, this was not accomplished. The colonial overlords' duty to protect the lives of south Asians had already expired in their haste to depart India. The crown jewel had devolved into a severe annoyance and was hurriedly discarded.

The war-weary British withdrew from India permanently in 1947 and agreed to surrender their mandate over Palestine the following year. Their appalling failure in both instances is in stark contrast to their apparent white man's burden of spreading civilization. There are far too many moving variables in every decolonization-related violence incidence to lay responsibility on anyone solely. However, it is apparent that the departing colonists, whether intentionally or unintentionally, left a trail of devastation and generated issues that linger to the current day - disputed borders and disaffected people. This story may be told about any decolonized region, whether in Southeast Asia, South America, or Africa. While partitions, redrawing of borders, and mass movement were unavoidable in certain circumstances, the rape, murder, and looting that followed were not. The white man must also bear some of the blame.

3. Conclusion

The division of both the regions{ British India and Palestine} share some common factors. Both these geographical conflicts were centered on religious disagreements. Both areas were ruled by British and these two newly established states achieved independence approximately during the same period, Despite the similarities the partition of British India resulted in two states that remained stable despite the outbreak of violence in contrast to the Middle East where borders were constantly changing.

Notes

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5. Ibid., 95.
6. Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, New York : Henry Holt and Co., 2020, 85.
7. Martin Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, New York : Oxford University Press, 2013, 115.
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