A Tale of Two Partitions: The First Indo-Pakistani War and the Palestine War

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Partition is a contemporary phenomenon that has shaped our modern world. The decades following World War II saw the age of empire finally come to an end as ideas of self-determination were finally realized for many in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and more. In some of these increasingly unstable environments, colonial powers such as Britain found that leaving the fate of their former holdings in the hands of their indigenous populations was a quick and easy solution. Two examples of such areas come to mind: India and Palestine. In India, partition was realized; in Palestine it was recommended but never actually implemented. In both cases, however, there were two main competing groups bidding for what their nation could be – Hindus and Muslims in India, and Jews and Palestinian Arabs in Palestine. Also in both cases, war followed partition.

Therein lies the question: Comparatively, to what extent and by what means did India's implemented partition and Palestine's proposed partition impact the subsequent wars? Can certain commonalities be drawn or are there only stark differences? By exploring theories behind partition and the histories of these two areas before and after partition, a well-informed conclusion can be made. Ultimately, it seems that the first Indo-Pakistani War and the 1948 War were both greatly impacted by partition in similar ways but by different means. Partition added international dimensions to each conflict and, for the first time in each area, created an attainable notion for nationhood for all groups involved, which in turn created a greater willingness for violent action that would culminate in all-out war in both regions.

Before delving into the histories of both areas, it is first important to explore theories on the partition processes to fully understand what factors can be used to analyze the impact of partition on the wars that followed it in India and Palestine. Simply used to describe political division[1], "partition" is a term that attained a political meaning by the eighteenth century. In the cases under examination, "partition" would refer to the separation of the Indian subcontinent into a predominantly Hindu India and a predominantly Muslim Pakistan, and the separation of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, though in Palestine this was never actually implemented. It is here that theorists seem to find the roots of conflict within partition.

Partition, and the notion of statehood that it entails, brings groups into competition with each other as each looks to realize their idea of a nation into an official state[2]. This was certainly the case in both India and Palestine, as the majority groups in each conflict wanted a single state – the Hindus and Palestinian Arabs, respectively, whilst the minority groups desired a separate state from the majority – the Muslims and Palestinian Jews, respectively[3]. It is within these circumstances that theorists identify the international aspects of partition.

Contemporary partition – that is, partition since the 1850s – has always been at the behest of more powerful states. Groups thus often compete against each other in their efforts to shape the "dominant geopolitical will" to their favor[4]. In both cases, Britain and the United Nations (UN) can be attributed to this role. There seem to be certain tenets by which contemporary partitions abide; these are the notion of nationhood, the competition that it brings and the unavoidable international dimension of partition. These aspects are exemplified in the cases of India and Palestine, and, furthermore, some of these aspects seem to have impacted the wars that followed partition in both cases. As such, it may be useful to first analyze the notion of nationhood that partition brings and its impact on the

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wars under examination.

As the post-World War II world order made the final move from empire to state, many groups who were victims of imperialism began to envision their own state. In India and Palestine, partition provided a legitimate opportunity to attain the goal of statehood. It was this notion of statehood, provided by partition, that catalyzed hostilities between Hindus and Muslims and Arabs and Jews into full out war.

For India, even before partition, there were varying ideas on what an Indian nation would look like. The main split was between the Indian National Congress, which envisioned a united, secular India and the All-India Muslim League, which desired a separate Muslim entity apart from a Hindu-dominated India[5]. However, the notion of partition was the first time these ideas were given real viability. Congress and the Muslim League saw partition as an opportunity to officially implement their ideas of a state – but they would have to fight each other for it. When India and Pakistan were created in August 1947 by the Partition Resolution implemented by the British, lands in India that were never colonized by the British, such as the princely states, were legally still independent and thus free to join either India or Pakistan[6]. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, where a Muslim majority was ruled by an elite Hindu minority[7], was one of these states that would initiate much violence surrounding partition.

Both India and Pakistan, in building their respective visions of their states in the face of partition, wanted Jammu and Kashmir to join them. When a Muslim rebellion against the Hindu Kashmiri ruler, Hari Singh, broke out following partition, Pakistan opted to support the rebels[8]. When Singh realized he was losing, he was given Indian military assistance in exchange for the promise of Jammu and Kashmir's accession into India. When the Pakistani military intervened against the Indians, the first Indo-Pakistani War officially began and would last until 1949[9].

The war's genesis' link to partition is evident – partition presented India and Pakistan with the official creation of their national visions, but it also left many areas in the subcontinent unallocated for. Thus, due the national building fervor partition created, India and Pakistan raced to have Jammu and Kashmir join them, and as their interests in the region conflicted, the only viable means to absorb the state was via military force. Essentially, partition created a domino effect in Indian and Pakistani nation building, which climaxed in war.

These effects are similarly evident in the case of the Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Partition in Palestine, though never implemented, also brought notions of a legitimately viable state to the competing populations – the Arabs and Jews – and would thus again be the epicentre of civil conflict that followed in late 1947 that would then culminate into full-scale warfare in 1948. Like India, even before partition, the Arabs and Jews of Palestine had two conflicting national visions. The Arab Revolt of 1936 and discontent after World War II made it clear that Arabs in Palestine wanted to be free of British control, but rivalries within Palestinian Arab leadership made it incredibly complicated to discern what exactly their national vision was[10]. The Jews on the other hand were in Palestine for exactly that: a Jewish state. Ever since the late nineteenth century, when the ideology of Zionism was solidified, Jews around the world worked to establish an eventual Jewish homeland in Palestine, no matter what groups were already present there[11]. When the notion of a final partition (as this had not been the first) was recommended and put to vote by the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP) from the British in 1947, both groups, like in India, saw the chance to materialize their ideas of statehood. However, the notion of partition in Palestine differs from India in the sense that the Jews supported it whilst the Arabs opposed it[12]. In this sense, the notion of partition gave the Jews an opportunity to pursue the implementation of an actual Jewish state, whilst it gave Palestinian and non-Palestinian Arabs the task of fighting against partition in the hopes that instead, a unitary state would be established.

Partition presented both the notion of state creation, for the Jews, and the resistance of said creation, for the Arabs. Even before partition was actually implemented, the notion of partition saw both the Jews and Arabs prepare militarily for a war both believed to be coming[13]. When partition was passed by the UN on November 29th 1947, the Arabs in Palestine violently rose up against the Jews, and when David Ben-Gurion declared the state of Israel in May 1948, five other Arab countries made good on their threats and joined in the bloodshed, and thus the international element of the war began[14]. Like in the subcontinent of India, partition in Palestine had a direct role in the catalyzing Arab-Jewish hostilities into full-scale war. The notion of statehood that partition presented was accepted by one group and not the other, and the Jews and Arabs were willing to turn to military action in defending their stance on the

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implementation of partition and the national visions that it held – and the 1948 War was the end result.

Partition evidently has had similar impacts on the development of both the first Indo-Pakistani War and the 1948 War. Both cases of partition and war fall in line with theories on partition in similar ways. The potentiality of statehood provided by partition filled the nation building fervor of Hindus, Muslims, Arabs, and Jews. Furthermore, all groups deemed force as an acceptable measure to defend their nation building interests based in partition. The only difference between the two groups is that partition in India ended up creating India and Pakistan, and both fought each other to build up their existing nations, whereas partition in Palestine was never implemented, so the Jews were fighting for the outright existence of their state against the Arabs, who were fighting to prevent the creation of a Jewish state. Again though, in both cases partition was a key factor in escalating conflict between groups into all-out war. The international implications partition brought in both areas also impacted the intensification of hostilities into military warfare.

Violence during partition in India started at a communal level, but with partition and the creation of India and Pakistan violence escalated into an international conflict, and this along with the emergence of the bipolar Cold War system only heightened the Indo-Pakistani War. As partition was rooted in the genesis of the conflict, it also had its roots in the internationalization of the conflict. Partition extended communal violence that began in 1946 and early 1947[15] into an international struggle between the two nations it had created – India and Pakistan. The internationalization of war caused by partition heightened the intensity of the war on the Pakistani side, as it grew ever more concerned with security and drew closer to the United States' camp. The conflict in Kashmir put Pakistan on the defensive; it began to see itself in a struggle for survival against the monster that was India, and thus fought ever harder in the war in Jammu and Kashmir[16]. This intensification was no doubt polarized by the fact that partition had developed communal violence into an international conflict, which was now subject to Cold War geopolitics, which most likely further polarized the war. On the other side, India remained non-aligned though it definitely was a bit cozier with the USSR[17], and as such it seems one can only speculate whether India intensified its involvement in the war due to the internationalizing effects of partition. However, it may be fair to say that internationalization indirectly intensified India's military action because of the fact that it intensified Pakistan's military endeavors, which thus may have brought escalating retaliation between the two sides. In any case, the violence culminating into the first Indo-Pakistani War in general was indeed galvanized by the international implications brought about by partition. The international nature of partition and its effects on the 1948 War in Palestine is much more visible.

There is no doubt that the proposed partition in Palestine escalated tensions in the 1948 War due to the fact that in nature, the proposed UN partition in Palestine was an international affair, and thus other Arab states outside of Palestine were dragged into the civil conflict between the Jews and Arabs there. The proposed UN partition had delegates produce two proposals to be voted on: the majority proposal recommended partition but with economic union between a Jewish and Arab state, and areas including Jerusalem were to be under international control. The minority proposal called for a single federal Palestinian state but with autonomous Jewish and Arab areas[18]. Even before the proposals went to a vote, Arab public opinion across the Middle East denounced the proposals. Fawzi al-Qawuqji, the head of the Arab League's Arab Liberation Army in Palestine is quoted saying, in the event that the majority report was accepted, "we will murder, wreck and ruin everything standing in our way"[19]. When the civil war broke out in Palestine after the majority proposal was accepted by the UN, surrounding Arab nations knew that they had to intervene. The ideology of Arab brotherhood in Arab public opinion and the internationalization of the partition process had essentially made other Arab states representatives of the Palestinians, whether they liked it or not. By December of 1947 the Arab states held a meeting to decide whether they should intervene militarily, and by May of 1948 Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria invaded Palestine, and Lebanon would even see action by June[20]. As a result, a civil war escalated into an international war that would not end with a UN ceasefire until 1949. Essentially, the international nature of partition accentuated the history of Arab unity which caused a civil war to escalate into an international war. As such, it seems evident that the international nature of partition directly impacted the course of the 1948 War in Palestine. Indeed, the internationalizing process of partition did much to impact and invigorate both the Indo-Pakistani and 1948 War.

As stated earlier, theories on partition processes state that they are often done by more powerful states whilst the peoples actually being partitioned have little actual power in the process. This is true in both the partitions of India

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and Palestine, where Britain and the UN held all the power; however, in assessing partitions' impact in the wars that followed, it seems that Britain and the UN, in the context of partition, did relatively little to escalate these conflicts; in both cases, it was more the notion of partition itself and its internationalizing effects that impacted both wars rather than the parties behind implementing partition. The fact that partition in India created two nations on already uneasy terms made communal conflict escalate into international warfare. In Palestine, the international character of partition in the UN exacerbated historical notions of Arab unity, and when a Jewish state was declared, the Arab states had little choice but to militarily defend their Palestinian "brothers," thus evolving a civil war into an international war. Though it happened differently in both cases, both the Indo-Pakistani War and the 1948 War were aggrandized from local to international conflicts due to the internationalizing effects and implications of partition. Indeed, both the wars that took place in India and Palestine after their respective partitions owe direct links to said process.

In comparing and assessing partition's impact on the Indo-Pakistani and the 1948 War, it seems evidenced that in both cases partition had an impact in escalating both wars, but in different ways. Theoretical points of partition, such as the notion of nationhood that it presents, seem to be viable in this conclusion; in both India and Palestine, groups saw an opportunity for their national visions to materialize, and all groups were willing to use violence in defending their visions against their counterparts. In the Indo-Pakistani War it was more a matter of nation building whilst in the 1948 War it was a matter of state survival – but either way it is evident, as stated by theorists, that the nation building notions of partition impacted and escalated both conflicts. Partition theorists also outline international implications of partition, but more so in the context of what bodies are implementing partition. In the context of the wars under examination, international factors of partition did indeed affect these conflicts. However, this was not due to the powers involved, but rather due to the international implications of partition itself. Partition created two states in India and Pakistan, thus catalyzing international war. In Palestine, the notion of partition angered other Arab states, thus bearing international war from communal conflict. In any case, it is undeniable that partition, due to the notions of nationhood and internationalizing qualities, greatly impacted both the Indo-Pakistani and 1948 War by escalating the conflicts beyond their original small-scale scopes. Indeed, conflicts between Indians and Pakistanis and Israelis and Arabs have perpetuated throughout the century, and at the root of them all lies the partitions of 1947.

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[17] Ibid., 164.

[18] Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, 48.

[19] Ibid., 61.

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