India vs Pakistan

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Why Can't We Just Be Friends?

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juggernaut

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‘We Can Either Be More Than Friends or Become More Than Enemies’

Barely seven months after Pakistan's creation, Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and the US ambassador to the new country, Paul Alling, met for tea at a beach cottage on the shores of the Arabian Sea, a few miles from Karachi. As the two strolled along the sandy beach in the spring sun Jinnah declared that 'nothing was dearer to his heart' than close relations between India and Pakistan. Jinnah said he sincerely wished for India and Pakistan to have 'an association similar to that between the United States and Canada'. Alling informed Washington in a diplomatic telegram that Jinnah spoke of Pakistan's 'defensive understanding with India on a military level' with no time limit. This would resemble American arrangements with Canada,

which allow the two neighbours to have largely unguarded borders, shared defence, free trade and freedom of movement through several crossing points.[1]

Through the remaining months of his life, Jinnah continuously held out the promise of friendly relations between the two dominions carved out of British India. He had not anticipated the violence that accompanied Partition, fed by the rhetoric of the All India Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Akali Dal. Earlier in his career, in 1917, he had been described by Sarojini Naidu as 'the ambassador of Hindu–Muslim unity'.

His decision to form Pakistan had never been communal, at least in his view. As a lawyer and politician, Jinnah was known for the cold, calm and detached manner in which he examined and addressed issues. Once he embraced the two-nation theory – the idea that India's Muslims were a separate nation from Hindus by virtue of their religion, culture and historic experience – Jinnah 'virtually conjured' Pakistan 'into statehood by the force of his indomitable will'.[2] As his biographer Stanley Wolpert observed:

> Few individuals significantly alter the course of history.
>
> Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. Mohammad Ali Jinnah did all three.[3]

Having created Pakistan out of communal friction, Jinnah realized that it could not be a nation mired in religious strife forever. He stressed secularism, as opposed to theocracy, as the ideal for Pakistan.

Jinnah was also keen for India and Pakistan not to be in a state of permanent war. Hence, his avowal of the desire for relations similar to those between Canada and the United States. That Jinnah did not envisage Pakistan's permanent enmity with India is borne out also by his wish to return to his Mumbai home after retirement as Governor-General of Pakistan.

India's Bapu, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, was no less enthusiastic about good ties between the two countries that he believed had been born through an 'agreed separation between brothers'.[4] Unlike Jinnah, Gandhi had been passionately against Partition, arguing that different religions did not create nationality. But once

Partition had been effected, Gandhi cautioned against India and Pakistan becoming 'perpetual enemies'. The two independent countries, he had warned, had to 'live as friends or die as such'.

Sixty-nine years and four wars later, Jinnah and Gandhi's vision seems like a blur. When they are not engaged in direct hostilities, the two countries – both now armed with nuclear weapons – seem embroiled in a cold war. Over the last several years, their leaders have been meeting every now and then, usually on the sidelines of an international summit, and announcing resumption of talks at the level of officials. Within a few days, a terrorist attack in India that is traced to a Pakistan-based jihadi group breaks the momentum for dialogue, or there are allegations of ceasefire violations along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir.

For decades, Pakistan has accused India of supporting ethnic separatism on its soil, even as India charges Pakistan with sponsoring terrorism in India and beyond. India–Pakistan talks get derailed, often only to be resumed with much fanfare until the next round of terrorist attacks, accusations, and cancellation or postponement

of talks. Whether they choose to use the word or not, significant numbers of Indians and Pakistanis view each other as enemies rather than as brothers separated by circumstances.

The two states born out of the Partition of British India might still be able to live amicably with one another, but prospects of that can best be described as distant, at least right now. Seven decades of separation have created issues and bred psychoses that make it difficult for most people to even remember the unities of the preceding centuries. But why this enmity? And who is to blame? In this book I argue that the responsibility for the present state of affairs lies on both sides of the border (and occasionally third parties), but that it has especially been made tangled by Pakistan's near pathological obsession with India.

The tensions between the countries were seeded early. Jinnah's conciliatory approach was not shared by many in the Muslim League nor by Pakistan's civil and military bureaucracy who saw advantage in maintaining the frenzy of Partition while they consolidated control over the new country. The unwillingness of India's government leaders,

notably Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, to be generous to the new state, especially in the division of assets, also made reconciliation difficult.

In his first address to Pakistan's Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, Jinnah said that he saw Partition as a 'mighty revolution' that had resolved 'India's constitutional problem' of one religious community being in majority and another being a minority. His vision had borne fruit. It was now time for 'co-operation, forgetting the past, burying the hatchet'.[5] But that was easier said than done.

In India, Jinnah's shiny optimism about Pakistan was not necessarily shared. The Congress had vehemently opposed Partition. Even the All India Congress Committee (AICC) resolution that approved Mountbatten's 3 June 1947 Partition plan described it as only a temporary solution. It expressed the hope that after the subsiding of 'present passions' India's problems would be viewed in their proper perspective and 'the false doctrine of two-nations will be discredited and discarded by all'.[6]

The Congress resolution also reaffirmed the territorial unity of the Indian subcontinent – 'Geography and the

mountains and the seas fashioned India as she is … Economic circumstances and the insistent demands of international affairs make the unity of India still more necessary. The picture of India we have learnt to cherish will remain in our minds and in our hearts.'[7]

Pakistanis have often interpreted the resolution and other similar statements to mean that India wanted to actively undo Partition. From the start, Pakistan's elite started mixing legitimate concerns about security with huge doses of paranoia. It also did not help that the communal riots accompanying Partition resulted in at least half a million deaths and 10–14.5 million refugees, Muslims moving to Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs to India.[8] Every community involved in the mayhem blamed others instead of taking responsibility for its own share in the viciousness. Those affected by the Partition violence in each country became a constituency for anger, bitterness and hostility towards the other. In Pakistan's case that included most of its early political leaders, senior civil servants and many military officers.

But Nehru also did little to allay these fears, often saying contradictory things in the early years after

Independence. On one hand the Indian prime minister seemed to share Jinnah's vision that the two countries could maintain their separate identities and still be close. 'Nothing can overcome the basic urges, historical, cultural and economic, that tend to bring us nearer to each other,' he asserted.

But in Pakistan, such sentiments were understood quite differently. All references to the shared heritage of India and Pakistan were deemed an attack on the very foundation of Pakistan, a scheme to erode Pakistan's identity as a separate nation.

In a speech at Aligarh Muslim University in January 1948, Nehru tried to reassure Pakistan that India did not question Pakistan's right to exist as a separate country. 'If today by any chance I were offered the reunion of India and Pakistan,' he said, 'I would decline it for obvious reasons. I do not want to carry the burden of Pakistan's great problems. I have enough of my own. Any closer association must come out of a normal process and in a friendly way which does not end Pakistan as a State, but makes it an equal part of a larger union in which several countries might be associated.'[9]

None of these assurances really helped calm Pakistan's ruling elite. They continued to believe during this period that India's ultimate strategic objective was to reabsorb Pakistan. Before Partition, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League had a lively political rivalry, constantly trying to outmanoeuvre each other. These politics had spilled over into India–Pakistan relations.

But it wasn't all paranoia and lack of trust on Pakistan's part. Nehru's words did not always translate into action. Gandhi proposed that Pakistan be treated like members of a family who had moved out of a joint family to their own home; Pakistanis needed to be won over, not cut off further from their estranged clan. Nehru and his powerful Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, however, treated Pakistan more with the disdain that Mughal emperors showed towards their renegade provinces, never missing an opportunity to point out the 'error' of dividing the subcontinent, possibly at the behest of the British.

Patel publicly doubted Pakistan's prospects of survival as a separate country, insisting that 'Sooner than later

we shall again be united in common allegiance to our country', an unambiguous reference to undivided India. He also reminded Indians before his death in December 1950, 'Do not forget that important limbs of your Mother India have been cut.'[10]

India's Pakistan policy in those early years was also influenced by political priorities at home, such as reassuring angry Hindus and Sikhs displaced from Pakistan, keeping Hindu (as opposed to Indian) nationalism at bay and winning over India's Muslims to the Congress.

With Muslim-majority provinces separated from the Indian Union, Nehru focused on transforming the Congress from a national independence movement to a ruling political party in the world's most populous democracy. India's Muslim minority, many of whom had supported Jinnah and the Muslim League during the twilight of the British Raj, had been left leaderless after Partition.

The Congress could now tap India's Muslims as a vote bank if it could convince them that they had been abandoned. They did this continually, reminding the community that they would have been better off had

Pakistan not been created. Overseas, India's diplomats rejected the logic of Partition in competition with their Pakistani counterparts, who were struggling to introduce their new nation on the world stage. For most Pakistanis, this attitude deepened their mistrust of India, and reinforced the reasons that had led to the demand for Pakistan in the first place.

Pakistan too was creating its own narratives in these early days of nation-building – some of it fuelling anti-India feeling. The politicians in charge of the new country were migrants from India, and not indigenous to the region that was now Pakistan. This made them highlight an ideological Pakistan with which their association could be more easily established. They emphasized the two-nation theory and the notion of an eternal conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

For example, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, nawabzada of a minor princely state in Haryana, declared repeatedly that Pakistan was to be 'a country where the Islamic principles could be applied, where the Muslims could live according to their own genius'.[11] Similar views were expressed by ministers who had migrated from

India as well as by the head of the civil service, Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, who came from Jalandhar.

Describing Pakistan as a citadel of Islam and defining 'Hindu India' as the 'other' to a 'Muslim Pakistan' were easy diversions from questions about why people who were born in and had spent their entire lives in the United Provinces, Delhi, Bombay or Calcutta were now running a country which did not include those places.

The Pashtun leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known as the 'Frontier Gandhi', had supported the Congress and led it in 1946 to secure more Muslim votes than the Muslim League in the Northwest Frontier Province (now known as Khyber-Pashtunkhwa). After Independence, Ghaffar Khan complained that Pakistan's rulers, most of whom were not sons of the soil, sought to keep the Pakistani people under control by making them live in a nightmare of riots, assaults, and '"holy" war'.[12] Ghulam Murtaza Syed, a prominent Sindhi, criticized the 'planned colonization' of his province through the 'heavy influx of alien people in Sindh', a reference to Punjabis and Urdu-speaking Muhajirs who moved in after Partition.[13]

The emphasis on a religion-based 'ideology of Pakistan'

did not dampen the ethnic differences within Pakistan. It did, however, fuel hatred and animosity, which has made normal relations with India difficult.

To complicate matters further, Pakistan's share out of Partition comprised 21 per cent of British India's population[14] and 17 per cent of its revenue but as much as one-third of the large armed forces that had been raised by the British during the Second World War.

The British policy of considering certain ethnic groups and communities in India as 'martial races' had favoured recruitment of Pashtun and Punjabi Muslims whose homeland was now part of Pakistan. Under the terms of Partition, Pakistan received 30 per cent of British India's army, 40 per cent of its navy and 20 per cent of its air force.[15] Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was forced in 1948 to allocate 75 per cent of Pakistan's first budget to cover the salaries and maintenance costs of this huge force.[16]

Thus, Pakistan was not like other countries that raise an army to deal with threats they face; it had inherited a large army that needed a threat if it was to be maintained. Although India's army was twice the size of Pakistan's,

the country's size and revenue base was larger and India could cite several potential sources of threat to justify its armed forces. In Pakistan's case, the only threat that could be invoked to retain the legions inherited from the Raj was India.

The Pakistan army's first two commanders-in-chief were British generals. When the first Muslim commander-in-chief, General Ayub Khan, assumed the military's leadership he spoke of how 'Brahmin chauvinism and arrogance' had led to Pakistan's creation.[17] Ayub and other generals argued that Pakistan needed a large military to protect itself against Hindu India.

They claimed the Hindus wanted to avenge seven centuries of Muslim rule over the subcontinent by menacing Muslim Pakistan. Ayub even declared that India had 'a deep pathological hatred for Muslims' and that its hostility to Pakistan stemmed from its 'refusal to see a Muslim power developing next door'.[18]

Ironically, the real threats to Pakistan at the time of its inception stemmed from economic and political factors, not military ones. The Partition plan of 3 June 1947 had given only seventy-two days for transition to

Independence. But Pakistan, unlike India, did not have a functioning capital, central government or financial resources. The Muslim League leaders had done little homework to prepare for running the country they had demanded.

Within days of Independence, Pakistan was concerned about its share of India's assets, both financial and military. It was also caught without a concrete plan to deal with negotiating the accession of princely states, fourteen of whom (out of 562) had Muslim-majority populations and were contiguous to or located within the territory of Pakistan.

The Muslim League's lack of preparation meant that on the day of Pakistan's independence, only one of these states, Swat, had joined the new Muslim dominion. This contrasted with India's ability to integrate by Independence Day all but six of the 548 princely states that became part of the Indian Union. Thus, Pakistan's territory remained undefined for several months after Independence. The princely states in Pakistan eventually fell in line while one – Kalat, in Balochistan – was coerced through military action in March 1948.

Moreover, at inception, Pakistan comprised two wings separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory. Creating a system of governance that would satisfy the Bengalis of East Pakistan and Punjabi-dominated West Pakistan was a tall order. Getting the new state on its feet economically was another major challenge. Pakistan had virtually no industry and the major markets for its agricultural products were in India. Pakistan produced 75 per cent of the world's jute supply but did not have a single jute-processing mill. All the mills were in India. Although one-third of undivided India's cotton was grown in Pakistan, it had only one-thirtieth of the cotton mills.[19]

The non-Muslim entrepreneurial class, which had dominated commerce in the areas now constituting Pakistan, had either fled or transferred its capital across the new border. Uncertainties about Pakistan's survival may have partly been the reason for flight of capital, but for the new country's leaders it was a 'Hindu conspiracy' to economically strangulate Pakistan. The country's revenue base had shrunk even further than the 17 per cent it would have been if the Partition had proceeded smoothly and

Pakistan had received everything it was allocated under the terms of the division.

Pakistan's economic crisis was made worse by the threat of political chaos. The larger idea that had united diverse Muslim supporters of Pakistan's creation could no longer be maintained now that the country had come into being. While Jinnah was concerned about containing the communal violence already stoked during Partition, his successors (he died in September 1948, barely a year after Pakistan came into being) decided that the religious passions could also be used for consolidating Pakistan's nationhood and their own power.

One of the major arguments advanced for an independent Pakistan had been the notion that, irrespective of population, Hindus and Muslims should be treated as two separate and equal nations. The Muslim League referred to this demand as the doctrine of parity. Now that Pakistan had come into existence, its economic and military disparity with India was obvious. Pakistan was India's sovereign equal in terms of international law but the two countries could not be uniform in terms of their military strength or international stature.