

*Event Transcript*

**Navigating Legacies of Partition: Peacebuilding Opportunities and the Future of South Asian Stability**

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*Featuring:*

**Christopher Clary**, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University at Albany, and author of *The Difficult Politics of Peace: Rivalry in Modern South Asia*

**Ayesha Jalal**, Mary Richardson Professor of History, Tufts University, and author of *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide*

**Pallavi Raghavan**, Assistant Professor of International Relations, Ashoka University, and author of *Animosity at Bay: An Alternative History of the India–Pakistan Relationship, 1947–1952*

**Elizabeth Threlkeld** (moderator), Senior Fellow and Director, South Asia Program, Stimson Center

*Event Description*

In this panel discussion, three experts on India-Pakistan relations explore how Partition's legacy continues to shape prospects for peace and security in the subcontinent, and what this means for future efforts to advance stability across the region. This conversation highlights a new book by Stimson South Asia program's Non-Resident Fellow Christopher Clary, which details the history of Islamabad and New Delhi's seven-decade rivalry and offers an explanation for its endurance and evolution over time.

*More information and event video available at:* <https://www.stimson.org/event/navigating-legacies-of-partition-peacebuilding-opportunities-and-the-future-of-south-asian-stability/>

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Good morning to all those joining us in the United States and a very good evening to friends and colleagues in South Asia. My name is Elizabeth Threlkeld, and I'm a Senior Fellow and Director of the South Asia Program at the Stimson Center in Washington DC.

This month marks 75 years since Partition, the violent division of British India into the independent states of India and Pakistan. Millions were displaced in what was one of the largest mass migrations in history, while countless others lost their lives. Decades later, Partition's impact continues to loom large in the two countries'

conceptions of identity, domestic politics, and foreign and security policies – driving their rivalry and fueling new tensions.

Our conversation today will examine the legacies of Partition, how it continues to impact the security, politics, and relations of India and Pakistan and the wider region, and what this means for future efforts to advance stability across the region.

To discuss these issues, I'm delighted to be joined by three experts on India-Pakistan relations, each of whom has written a book, or more, on the subject. We have with us today, Dr. Christopher Clary, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at University at Albany, State University of New York and a Nonresident Fellow here at the Stimson Center's South Asia Program. His research focuses on the sources of cooperation in interstate rivalries, the causes and consequences of nuclear proliferation, U.S. defense policy, and the politics of South Asia. We are especially pleased today to be launching his new book, titled [\*The Difficult Politics of Peace: Rivalry in Modern South Asia\*](#), which was published this summer by Oxford University Press.

Also joining us this morning is Dr. Ayesha Jalal is the Mary Richardson Professor of History at Tufts University. After majoring in history and political science at Wellesley College, she obtained her doctorate in history from the University of Cambridge. Her areas of expertise include the history, politics, and culture of South Asia and she has written several books, including at least two very relevant to our discussion today, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* as well as *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times and Work Across the India Pakistan Divide*.

Last but not least is Dr. Pallavi Raghavan, who is an Assistant Professor and Head of Department of International Relations at Ashoka University as well as a Fulbright Fellow, who was with us at the Stimson Center for the first half of this year. She is interested in developing a broader history of the British Empire's theories of partition in the twentieth century. Her book is titled *Animosity at Bay: An Alternative History of the India-Pakistan Relationship 1947 – 1952* and was published in 2020 by Oxford University Press.

So a few ground rules. This conversation will be **a moderated discussion which will be as interactive as possible. I'll be interspersing questions from the audience** throughout the session, so please do type in your query into the "Q&A" box, list your name

and affiliation, and I'll pass it on to the panel. I ask speakers to please keep their responses brief so we can get to as many questions as possible. We have a lot of ground to cover this morning.

So with that, without further ado, I will turn things over to Chris. And Chris, my first question for you: In your new book *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, you seek to explain, as you put it, "when and why rival states pursue cooperation or conflict with one another," with a focus on the India-Pakistan rivalry. To answer this question, you propose what you term the leader primacy theory. Could you explain for us this theory, and how you see its development from the immediate aftermath of Partition to today?

Christopher Clary:

Thanks Elizabeth and thanks to Stimson for organizing this panel. The book project started in a way when I was a young research assistant with the Stimson Center and had gone with the sadly recently deceased Michael Krepon to India in the midst of the 2001-02 crisis. Both of us left that trip very worried that war might start again in South Asia, a war that thankfully did not end up occurring. And when I went into government a few years later, I was able to watch the so-called back-channel process from a distance and also see that same process fall apart from a distance, eventually leading to the Mumbai crisis in 2008.

So, when I went back into academia to get a PhD, I wanted to understand these ups and downs in the relationship that I had been following for so long. And I came away convinced that the problem with the relationship, the challenges that lead to the persistence of the rivalry since Partition, aren't the absence of incentives at the interstate level. There's a lot of incentives for more cooperation. Rather, the challenges are very strong domestic veto players, some of whom have a parochial interest in preventing the rivalry from improving.

And so, the presence of these veto players, some of whom are opportunistic and some are ideological, mean that any leader that seeks to improve cooperation between India and Pakistan has to do so by spending considerable amounts of political capital. Leaders that have such capital and are willing to spend it have been rare. And sometimes when they begin that process, as occurred for instance with Musharraf and the back-channel period, they can be brought down, sometimes by issues that are entirely unrelated to India and Pakistan. And they're brought down before any permanent improvement in the relationship can be ratified. So, the book is

really a look at the relationship that these domestic political factors have to the interstate relationship that we have been tracking so long.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Great, thanks so much for that overview, Chris. Professor Jalal, I want to follow up with you. You have written that there is no continuing problem in the South Asian subcontinent, whether political, communitarian, or environmental, that is not rooted, somehow, in Partition. In what ways do you see the legacy of Partition living on today and in which areas is it most entrenched?

Ayesha Jalal:

The persistent problem today is the federal issue. The Partition of India was brought about because of a federal problem and the failure of Indian federalism and Indian nationalism to accommodate different aspirations in the region. This led to the creation of a Pakistan based on the Muslim majority provinces of the Northwest and the Northeast. So, I think that has remained the primary problem.

I think it's important when you're looking at conflicts to realize that Partition itself was a product of a conflict. And the solution of Partition has only perpetuated that conflict. It's morphed from an internal dispute on federalism into an international problem between two nation states, which are now also nuclear states. So, I think that the persistence of the problem is precisely because we are continuing to talk about India and Pakistan as two monolithic elements or as two countries that are defined exclusively either by religion or whatever. And you are ignoring the ongoing problem of the status quo. India is a status quo power, which is something that the rest of the world understands, and Pakistan is an anti-status quo power. So that in itself is cause for conflict. But if you want to ignore the real reasons for Partition and continue to argue that it was Hindu-Muslim or because of Mr. Jinnah's recalcitrance or whatever, there are myriad reasons, I think you don't get the nub of the matter and you persistently ignore the real issues.

And I think that if you look at the domestic politics that Professor Clary has just mentioned, about how the domestic political scene plays a very crucial role in the inability of the powers that be to make any kind of breakthrough, it is precisely because of, in the case of Pakistan, the civil-military question. Not to mention the center-region question. And in India, there's a persistence of that problem, which of course is denied all the time because Pakistan has replaced that problem as an excuse. So, I do think that it's talking around the real causes of Partition, which fuel the conflict, and which fueled the conflict in the first place.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

That's a very helpful intervention. And I think part of what I hope we can do today indeed is to draw out some of those themes that

don't get the attention that they merit in the conversation. Particularly as we're looking forward in hopes of finding a way forward on the peace building front, or at least at better managing the challenges in the relationship. I do want to turn to Professor Raghavan now. The history of Partition and the ensuing India-Pakistan rivalry is commonly understood as kind of an inherent, intractable conflict that is rooted in either religion or society.

These explanations make it very difficult to find any sort of middle ground. But one thing your book highlights is how in the immediate aftermath of Partition, despite the violence that followed, Indian and Pakistani leaders both were able to cooperate on a number of areas, including on minorities, trade, development, and even the potential No-War pact that didn't end up seeing the light of day but was a fascinating example of potential cooperation. And I wonder if you could just give us a sense, in this immediate aftermath when both states were involved in the state-making process, how do you see this alternative history of Partition, and what are its implications for the relationship today as it's developed?

Pallavi Raghavan:

Thank you so much, first of all, for having me on this platform. I think the meaning of Partition for the nature of the India-Pakistan relationship has also been evolving over the decades. And one of the interesting things about the present moment is that the event of Partition is viewed in an entirely different way than what it involved at the time itself. And in my book I talk about how what was interesting about the Partition time actors was that despite the assumption of all the things that had gone deeply wrong in the politics of the subcontinent and the horrifying nature of the violence that ensued over 1946 and 47, what was surprising was that there was also quite a deeply ingrained sense of cooperation that propelled a lot of the actors in India and Pakistan in 1948 and in the decade that followed Partition. And the reason for this was to do with this kind of urge that bureaucrats and statesmen felt of trying to somehow create statehood, a finalized, defined sovereign statehood in South Asia. And part of the effort of reaching for that was trying to enmesh the reality of Partition and to give it meaning and finality and shape. And it's that kind of imperative that informed a lot of the actions of statesmen in the decade that followed Partition.

And the reason that this is surprising is because the kind of significance that Partition acquires now is that it's like a justification for the actions of hostility toward the other. Why do you have to have a bad relationship with Pakistan? It's because, well, look at the enormity of Partition and the bitterness it created and the violence it led to, where we want to avenge those wrongs by the kind of policies we adopt on Pakistan today. And I think in light of this kind of present-day justification of Partition, it's also important to look

carefully at the actions that the people of that time actually followed and realize that they didn't necessarily align very neatly with the kind of knee-jerk sense of opposition to the other.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Thank you so much for that. I think it is important and surprising, as I was reading through your book, the extent to which that cooperation was there, and grateful for your scholarship and bringing those sources to life.

Professor Jalal, if I could turn to you now. You mentioned the book that I was going to ask about next, *The Sole Spokesman*. I wonder if we can dive a little bit deeper on one question that you highlight in the book. My understanding of your argument is that the role of religion in shaping the Pakistani state, particularly in the early years, is overstated. And that from Jinnah's perspective, the category of 'Muslim' was more political rather than religious in some ways. Similarly, in *The Struggle for Pakistan*, you find that Pakistan struggled with its identity formation in the early years between the elected and non-elected institutions, between the narratives of Islamic and modern ideologies, and that in some ways, this contributed to the outsized role of the military and the challenges of Pakistan's democracy.

And I wonder, taking a view of contemporary Pakistan and what's happening today, how do you think what we're seeing play out in the news headlines, the rivalries that are playing out within Pakistan, are tied perhaps to those early years that you work on in your books? And how does that process of identity formation impact Pakistan's view of its neighborhood?

Ayesha Jalal:

Enormously. I think the early decades are important and, of course, the first 10 years of Pakistan were not necessarily outright military dominated. It's the first military intervention of 1958 that is a major turning point. Because once the military comes to dominate the state and takes over, the possibility of any kind of change of direction of the kind that Pallavi writes about in just the first five years, where there was a civilian leadership that was able to not just rely on the recent past but continue that...But once the military comes in, Pakistan has never had the opportunity, with the help of its people, to update its perceptions of the neighborhood and the security perceptions as well.

So, I think there the military dominates the foreign policy and the defense aspects of Pakistan, making it very difficult to bring about any kind of change. Most civilian leaders who are acceptable to the military, because you cannot have a civilian leadership that is unacceptable to the military, tend to toe the line.

So, I think there's a rather stagnant discourse on India, and one that has only become worse because of changes in India's own domestic politics and the stances that they have been taking, certainly of late, which makes it impossible for Pakistan to really bring about a change.

So, I do think that the absence of democracy in Pakistan, which I think those on the Indian side tend to blame either the military or the Pakistanis themselves, not realizing their own critical role. I think it's not unusual in the world, as we know from the United States, that to remain democratic many other countries must remain undemocratic. And I think in the case of the subcontinent, that's one of them.

So, the absence of democracy is really a product of Partition and what followed as a result. You just cannot deny the links between them. So that makes it very difficult to change the narrative where those early years are seen merely through the lens of religious differences. I think the real reason for the creation of Pakistan was, as I said, a failure of Indian nationalism and Indian federalism. It was meant to be a power-sharing arrangement which was not workable. So those problems have persisted in the post-Independence period with India replacing the primary focus on internal politics in terms of give and take, state-center relations. It's become easy for the military to craft a narrative where a monolithic Pakistan joined together with religion seems to explain everything, when in fact, the religious discourse has been more divisive than unifying.

I think 1971 is a case in point where the religious unity that was there fell through the cracks. I do think that we need to understand that the narratives that have been generated as a result of Pakistan coming under military dominance have remained rather rigid and are continuing to become more rigidified, especially after Pakistan becomes a nuclear armed state, and the continuing clashes that we are witnessing today. I hope that answers your question.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Thanks very much. I think this sets us up for an interesting follow up conversation. I want to turn now, if I can, to Chris because in terms of your research and your book on this question of civilian versus military leaders ... I wonder Chris, if you could give us a sense of, from your scholarship, how those differences have played out in response to some of what professor Jalal was just laying out with that change with the original coup. In your view, is that something that set Pakistan on a path, or were you able to in looking at leader primacy theory and in the behavior of civilian and military leaders over time, did you come to a different conclusion?

Christopher Clary:

Yeah, I mean, if we were to say: okay, what are the best periods of India-Pakistan relations bilaterally? You'll probably have on that list a period from 1958 to 1960 when most of the non-Kashmir border disputes are resolved both in the east and the west, except for the Rann of Kutch and Kashmir itself. Probably from 1973 to 77, when Bhutto is overthrown. And then, I think, in the Musharaff years, from 2003 to 2007 during the back-channel process. And it's not just the back-channel because there's a very meaningful ceasefire process that brings violence in Kashmir down to levels without incredible Indian repression, right? The Indians actually pull back troops from Kashmir in this period.

And you know, what you see is that when the military is at the top, that doesn't necessarily imply that there's high levels of animosity in the relationship. Now it may be true, and I agree with Professor Jalal that the military has reasons to create narratives in the Pakistani state that link Pakistan with this rivalry with India, but when the military is responsible for the state, it has often decided that the state's interests are in bringing the temperature down. So, this tie to revisionism in the military is a little looser.

And then Bhutto was this great, weird case where he is really a civilian that comes to power under the patronage of the military, but he is so talented that he's able to briefly escape its grasp. And despite having rhetorically never really abandoned animosity with India, behind the scenes he does forge a period of time when the relationship is pretty good. Now, obviously this is in the aftermath of a great defeat, but the loss of East Pakistan actually makes the defense of West Pakistan more rational in a way. It was always impossible to defend East Pakistan from real Indian aggression because of how vulnerable it was. So, I think this military story is complicated, even as there's no doubt that the dynamic has been horrible for the democratic aspirations of the Pakistani people and has never permitted that process to really get under way.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Thanks so much, Chris. I wonder now if we can turn to Professor Raghavan. Pallavi, you have written about how Partition was founded on the idea of demarcation between the two sides. As part of that conversation, India deemed itself to be a secular state with a Hindu majority while Pakistan was this Muslim state with equal rights for non-Muslims, as you lay out in terms of the minority protections that were agreed on. But I wonder if we can shift our lens to today and the ongoing shift in both countries towards a more hardened religious identity in many ways, so a Hindu one in India and a more Islamic one in Pakistan (though that process has been unfolding for several years now).



How do you see that original kind of post-Partition delineation process as a driver of conflict between the two countries? Even though we've just discussed that in some ways, you know, religion has been embedded in these conversations and perhaps overemphasized in some ways? I wonder how you see the current shift in both countries in this context, and are there ways that, given the historical work that you've done and your scholarship, that you could see that we may be able to mitigate some of these challenges?

Pallavi Raghavan:

Yeah, I think religion has been overemphasized as a kind of causal driver of the India-Pakistan relationship. Which is not to say that it's not there. But the real harm of that explanation is that, as Professor Jalal was saying, this is really a story about how federalism is not working, that basically this is a collection of provinces that were not able to hold together. It was provincial identities jostling for recognition and not religious identities. And the India-Pakistan story is to be understood as a product of that kind of struggle rather than a more accessible but too simplified kind of narrative of Hindu versus Muslim. The problem of that explanation is that it takes away from a better understanding of what the India-Pakistan relationship is about.

One of the things I talk about in my book is the signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Pact on minorities, signed between the two prime ministers for the minorities of Bengal. What I say in the book is that this really was quite an extraordinary pact because what it provided for, in writing, was that the two governments were accountable to one another over the welfare of their minority populations in East Bengal, and West Bengal and Assam and Tripura. Theoretically, what this pact enabled was that representatives of either government had the legal basis to be able to go to their opposite government and ask for redressal...[unclear].

The reason that this was done is because both Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan's governments were dangerously destabilized by the provincial pressures of chief ministers of the eastern provinces complaining over the state of refugee rehabilitation in the aftermath of 1948-49. And they were saying that the central government had not given them enough resources to be able to rehabilitate the millions of refugees who were streaming in, and this was a reason why the central government deserved to lose their support, and this was really a reason about how the central government wasn't doing enough to look after the provinces.

So, it was on the basis of that kind of pressure that the pact was signed. Looking at this episode only from the point of view of whether it was a Hindu government or a Muslim government, or a democratic government or an authoritarian government, takes away

from the complexity of how this came about. So, in order to understand anything about the India-Pakistan story, you have to understand that it's an extremely complicated story where ideas of nationhood, territory, and civilization are all in this dangerous kind of cocktail.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Absolutely, that's helpful. I think to my mind this also brings back what Professor Jalal was mentioning earlier about the importance of conversations about federalism on both sides that are implicated in this process too. We are at the half hour mark, so I want to bring in some audience questions. (edited)

Professor Jalal, if you want to take this question on, but Chris and Pallavi feel free. We have a question from Humayun Kabir, who wonders about the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign and independent state. Obviously, we haven't focused as much on Bangladesh in this picture, but I think important to draw out that element of the post-Partition progression. Does the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign independent state to your mind nullify or in some ways challenge the validity of two-nation theory?

Ayesha Jalal:

I mean, it depends on what you mean by the two-nation theory. I don't think that there is one interpretation of that. But yes, I think if you are trying to understand the religious factor as the primary cause of Partition or the continuing tensions in the subcontinent, you would say that the problem will be solved once India becomes the largest Muslim country in the world in 2050. But that's not going to be happening. So, I do think that when you talk about the two-nation theory, there are different ideas.

There are those in Pakistan who believe that after 1947, the meaning of the two-nation theory changed. But in my own view, my own assessment of what the two-nation theory, at least as Jinnah used it, was meant to do is that the political abortion of that theory occurred as early as 1947 with Partition. The two-nation idea as was being applied by Jinnah could only work within the context of an undivided India, which required a power-sharing arrangement between different regions, some of which happened to have Muslim majority population and some with Hindu majority population. But the question was: what will be the structure at the all-India level? That was the primary factor.

So, I do think that we need to understand that the two-nation theory idea was a discursive representation of a case that was inherently political in nature and based on the principle of self-determination, which is really the primary motivating factor of the Muslim League's politics in the final decade of British Raj.

Christopher Clary:

Can I add to that? Obviously, this is a question that is commonly noted. Clearly there aren't just two nations in South Asia. But to say that this is not true does not mean that there is only one nation either. The constructivists are right, that identity is multifaceted and context dependent. And it is clear, as I think Professor Jalal points out, that Islam alone was unable to hold Pakistan together in the face of Bengali political aspirations. But sometimes you hear people say that as if the whole Pakistan project should have just never occurred, and I think that is too far.

I think part of the Pakistan project was premised on this idea that they couldn't figure out a way to resolve these multifaceted issues, often about the failure of federalism, and these tensions within a unified Indian successor state. One possibility might have been a confederal arrangement, where the two-nation theory was kind of born at some level. And there were other possibilities as well. That doesn't mean we should be excited about nations splitting apart. That's always a violent and very unpleasant act but it doesn't change it.

I think this question doesn't get at any of the current problems of Pakistani or Indian life. So I think we just have to be like: 'well, there are three major successor states of British India and how do they figure out how to thrive in the modern era?' I think we can learn lessons and failures from all three, with Bangladesh having put together an incredible last decade and surprisingly.

Ayesha Jalal:

I disagree with you, Professor Clary. You seem to think that Partition as it occurred doesn't really have any solutions. But I think the problem is how you frame Partition. If you frame Partition as a product of Hindu-Muslim problems, then that has salience today, at least in the way it's being utilized in India.

I mean, you know the prime minister of India has declared the 14th of August to commemorate the horrors of Partition, which basically means that he wants to blame the other side for all that happened. So, I do think that the framing of Partition and getting that right has been the fundamental stumbling block of India and Pakistan taking a mature view of the problems that confront them. Partition has become a very easy trope behind which to hide and to talk about sentiments, which I think is a great favorite on both sides at the moment. So, I do think it's very relevant to how we frame the India-Pakistan conflict today.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Thank you both. Pallavi, feel free to jump in if you'd like, or I have another question that we can get to as well.

Pallavi Raghavan:

As far as the two nation-theory is concerned and the creation of Bangladesh, I was also thinking that as we think about these

questions, we also need to bear in mind that a lot of this is also connected to ideas of territoriality that were conceived of by the British, and when the British in the 19th and early 20th century were going about carving out their South Asian possessions and creating the territory of South Asia. In a sense, a lot of the ideas of nationalism start from there. We need to be careful about how we think about nationalism in South Asia and whether it's an authentic thing brimming to the surface or whether it is a manufactured process.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Yeah, that's a great point and dovetails on the next question that I wanted to ask. This is from Omar Naim, who is a student at the University of Washington. Getting back to the colonial legacy, the way that Omar puts this is: 'How and who defined Partition as the split of a "unified India", as opposed to being two new states born out of British colonial rule?'

Professor Raghavan, I'd be curious if you could take that on, particularly in the context of your research now, which is looking at other Partitions, right? We focus a lot on South Asia, obviously, but this was perhaps a prescription for some of these challenging processes of decolonization that was used elsewhere in the world, too. So, I wonder if you could address Omar's immediate question, but also maybe just reflect a little bit on other Partitions that were playing out at the time.

Pallavi Raghavan:

Yeah, thank you. So, what I'm doing at the moment is sitting in London and working at the British Library and looking at the Curzon papers, looking through the papers of the 1905 agitation after the Partition of Bengal. And what's really interesting about this whole time is that basically you had a collection of an unwieldy, big chunk of land in the eastern sector of the subcontinent, of Bengal, Assam, bits of Bihar, and bits of Uttar Pradesh. By all accounts, this was a very unwieldy province and in 1905, after many decades of discussion, Curzon decides that it's time to reorganize this sector and to create new provinces of East Bengal and Assam. So, what we're really talking about is a process of administrative reorganization of territory because there was a piece of land that was too big.

But what's interesting about this in this moment is the ways in which territorialized nationalism was conceived in India. What happens is that many Bengali politicians say that this is an example of how the British are trying to divide us, they're trying to hurt our nationalism, and the right way of defining India territorially is something that looks like this.

And I think it's in that 1905 moment that the first definitions of how South Asia ought to be territorially defined happens. When we're talking about who created nationalism and when, we also need to

bear in mind that there was nothing particularly sacrosanct about either of these people's maps, but the idea of a rightfully defined territorial nation-state was actually coming out of an opposition to another plan for how territory ought to be organized.

And a lot of this was also in turn to do with people's interests and people's stakes about how rent collection ought to be organized in Bengal. So, our "right idea" of the way the Indian state ought to be defined was first created by people who wanted to control how they received rent from the eastern sectors of Bengal. So, when we think about whether this nation-state is pure or authentic, we should keep in mind that it was created after 1905. It wasn't a particularly old, timeless idea.

Ayesha Jalal:

I would just like to chime in on one thing in response to Omar's question. I think it's not just a question of why not just create two states? The point is that you had to tear apart two provinces. The real Partition of India is the Partition of Punjab and Bengal, whether you like it or not. And so, I think that's the problem that it was not just a question of doing a division of the spoils and giving the Muslim League this...it was a question of the tearing apart a province. And that's where the human tragedy occurred, more so in Punjab, and in the case of Bengal, it was staggered over several years. But that is the real issue.

I mean, if you want to understand Partition, I welcome people to get down to provincial politics to understand it, and that's exactly what nobody wants to do. You want to understand it in the context of Jawaharlal Nehru and Jinnah, while ignoring the provincial pressures on them that led them into that direction or played a part in the decision that was eventually taken. So again, I think it's not foregrounding the primary factors that drove Partition and looking at the discursive formations to justify Partition that are the nub of the problem.

Christopher Clary:

As the political scientist on a panel with historians, the political scientist says, 'they're these routine, regularized laws of politics that generate some predictability in life.' And the historians say, 'no it's all very complex and contingent.' And there's just no doubt that the Partition experience suggests that they're both things operating, but there's an enormous amount of contingency in this very hasty British exit with lots of fluidity about choices.

To some extent, things might have been very different if the Maharaja of Kashmir was a different character, that if the set of senior politicians in the Muslim League had decided to be less coercive with how they dealt with him. We just don't know. So, there is this contingency that I do think has these ripples into the present,

and that will always be there alongside some of the predictability that might come from how politics function over time.

Ayesha Jalal:

I think the other factor in this that's extremely important and that maybe you are trying, Elizabeth, to move towards, is that we have so far foregrounded the status conception of Partition. Partition did not just occur at the level of national discourse and politics. It occurred with people and how people have experienced Partition is extremely important.

The two countries are there to inconvenience people's movements and their ability to interact with loved ones. That is also a kind of Partition that needs to be foregrounded, and that's the people's Partition, not just those of the states.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Maybe Professor Jalal if I could pick up there. I was so struck by your book, *The Pity of Partition*, which in many ways does foreground the personal aspects of this. And there are a couple things that I want to focus on. But first, there was a news article maybe a couple weeks back and I don't have it in front of me, so I might not get all the details right, but I was so struck by it. It was a woman in India who was going back to Pakistan to visit her ancestral home. And this was something that had come up on social media and was just kind of a force and it ended up happening and there was a lot of news coverage, and it was this moment of bittersweet celebration and reflection. And it was such a striking story to me, particularly as we approach the 75th anniversary of Partition.

But I wonder, Professor Jalal, if you could reflect on the generational transition that we're approaching as we reach the 75th anniversary. Certainly, those who most immediately experienced Partition, those who have lived through it and remember... we're losing those stories and there have been remarkable efforts to do some of that memory-making. We have the Museum of Partition, for example.

But as this younger generation comes up, they've heard the family histories that might not know it as immediately. And I wonder in your view, is there a way to remember and reflect and not brush over that past, but for younger generations of Indians and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis as well to reflect and remember, but also chart a different way forward? Maybe through oral history, through narrative historiography, literature... How do those interact in this space for peace building as we take on this new generation, 75 years after?

Ayesha Jalal:

I think that's a very interesting and important question, Elizabeth. First of all, I do think that the earlier generations who actually experienced Partition, and Pallavi's book substantiates that, were much more willing to compromise and give and take than is the case

of subsequent generations who imbibed the hand-me-downs of Partition, the stories of Partition, accepted them, embroidered them. And as for the younger generation, I think the younger generation is completely untutored. I mean, it did not experience Partition.

The problem with memory is that it is a reflection of the present. It sees the past of Partition and the violence through the prism of the present. And unfortunately, in the case of the subcontinent, a continued violence along communitarian lines has hardened those perceptions, not to mention the wars between India and Pakistan.

So, I think that the role of Partition memory studies is tricky. It can lead to an affirmation of the violence, and you can say that it was Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs and strengthen those divisions. And then there are those who can overcome that by seeing the more human dimension, as Manto does very effectively. It was the circumstances that had created a beast out of human beings. The fact that the law-and-order situation collapsed, and it was an opportunity for everyone to get away with anything they wanted that led to the violence.

But how we remember the violence through the prism of memory, unfortunately, does reflect our own present positioning and how we view Partition. So, it isn't an easy situation but having said that, my last point really is it depends on the sort of individual you are. If you are somebody who likes to affirm national discourses, well, you will continue to perpetuate a particular view of Partition and India-Pakistan relations. And then there are innumerable younger people, with no personal experience of Partition, who take to a different kind of narrative that they find that more attractive. They are trying to build bridges with each other and understand each other more.

So, I do think that all manners of people exist in this world. And there are some who are working towards a different narrative, but it's not a political narrative. It's a personal narrative, which can have a collective around it. But for it to filter up all the way into the political is, I think, a big ask.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

I wonder, Pallavi, if I can turn to you next. As I noted earlier, part of the project of your book as you set it out is to create an alternative history, to identify this space where there was more cooperation, born out of necessity certainly, but nonetheless surprising, for those of us who are used to more traditional discourse around Partition and its aftermath. Picking up on Professor Jalal's points in terms of the politicization of memory and memory work, any thoughts from your perspective as we look ahead? As we look past the 75-year mark, how can we as scholars, but also as people who care about the region and influence policy and narratives in various ways, can better create space for a more nuanced understanding of this history?

And in what ways can history then kind of elucidate this need for greater collaboration between the two sides as we saw in the early years?

Pallavi Raghavan:

I grew up in Delhi and I live in the neighborhood of Chittaranjan Park, and you cannot go anywhere in Delhi without a Partition story popping up. I mean, it's inescapable. But at the same time, I also think you need to be careful of how you treat Partition memory, and you need to see that when you're dealing with these stories, the people who are telling you these stories are not the concerned actors themselves. It's not the person who was actually there in 1947. It's the grandson or the granddaughter of the person who was there in 1947.

I mean the granddaughter may have a slightly different agenda from what the grandparent may have had. And if I could steal an example that my colleague and friend Ali Kazmi is fond of quoting in the classroom, where he talks about the experiences of abducted women in 1947 and 48, and the fact that if anybody has cause to feel hurt by the Partition, it was these women who bore the cost on themselves. They asked their governments for rehabilitation or asked their governments to leave them alone or asked their governments for jobs and things, but they never asked their governments to go to war with the other. They didn't make any kind of statements about India-Pakistan relations or what was to be done about bilateral issues. And I think you need to keep that kind of distinction in mind when thinking about how Partition is a kind of tool in the shaping of the bilateral relationship.

As far as this issue of memory is concerned, it is important to remember that Partition signifies all kinds of different things to all kinds of different people and there is no one narrative of Partition and there's no one mainstream memory of Partition either. It's not even as if violence or loss is the only narrative to be told about Partition. There are all kinds of other stories around it as well.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

No, that's a great point. Chris, if I could turn to you, we've obviously spent a lot of this conversation reflecting on difficult legacy issues that characterize India-Pakistan relations in some ways even today. But I think we should also point out that there are some glimmers of hope that we're seeing these days. The ceasefire along the LOC has held since February of 2021. The Brahmos incident in the spring of this year fizzled in many ways; didn't turn into a crisis. We're seeing cooperation between India and Pakistan in sending humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. It's been remarkable, particularly in the context of challenges with food supply out of the situation in Ukraine.

So, to my mind, those are three areas where perhaps there's some silver lining or an alternative sign that there are some glimmers of



hope, perhaps. But I wonder from your view, having reflected on the relationship over the past seven decades and applying this lens of leader primacy theory, how do you see the prospects for peace building between India and Pakistan today and are there any low hanging fruits in terms of confidence-building measures or just other efforts that you would see as potentially promising for the both sides to be able to pursue in the current moment?

Christopher Clary:

Thank Elizabeth. I'm writing on the ceasefire now for USIP, so I've been thinking about that quite a bit. But I guess my big picture is that after the 1971 war, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto meets with the US embassy before he's formally in charge. And he says, "we're in a hell of a mess." That's where I think South Asia is now. I think it's in a hell of a mess.

There are really incentives for peace. India has the worst relations with China that it's had since the 1970s. And Pakistan is facing an interactive, multifaceted, combined political economic crisis that is at least as bad as the crisis that was in the late 1990s during the Asian financial crisis. So, both countries have reason to do other things with their resources rather than fight with each other, but the political context, and this is all about Rawalpindi, makes me deeply pessimistic.

I don't think Bajwa is a war monger vis-à-vis India. I think there's a lot of evidence from his career and his private and public statements that he has no great desire to make things worse with India. But I think there's a lot of hawks in Pakistan that think Bajwa was just served badly by that positioning, whether it's true or not. So, I think there's a lot of people in Pakistan that think that a more confrontational stance would have served Bajwa better.

And now we're in this post-Bajwa, post-Khan maneuvering to try to figure out what coalition will emerge. And that's generated a lot of fluidity, that fluidity could break in a positive way. Imran Khan had a lot of sympathetic noises about India in the last few months, as his own political fortunes have failed, as his own civil-military discomfort has grown. But I don't see us having enough stability in Pakistan for years before somebody can actually do anything, and if we manage to preserve the ceasefire, I actually think that's the ceiling I have in terms of my optimism.

I think it's very likely that could break down and it could break down opportunistically on the Indian side. Especially if they go to elections in Kashmir, which have been postponed many times after the splitting of the former Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories.

So, I'm quite worried. In fact, I would say I'm deeply pessimistic about the next five years, despite the fact that both countries have the highest incentives for cooperative activity at an interstate level of any period I can recall for decades.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Yeah. I wonder, Professor Jalal and Professor Raghavan, anything you would add there or other kind of concluding remarks, things we didn't cover today that you think are important to add to this conversation before we wrap up?

Ayesha Jalal: I think the point about pessimism about Indo-Pakistan relations is spot on, so long as Kashmir is in the appalling conditions that it is. There can be no peace, Bajwa or no Bajwa, and I don't think that it's just a matter of the hawks. I think it's something much more deeply embedded and that's what happens when 75 years of a narrative has been accepted by people.

But where I would disagree is that it's not just the instability of Pakistan that's the biggest problem. I think the problem is in India. I mean, is there a leadership that can take a stance on Kashmir which would be conducive to peace, not just in Kashmir and in Pakistan? I think India's politics are in flux, and so long as the Hindu Rashtra is in the process of making, I think that will continue to be a major stumbling block.

Pallavi Raghavan: Yeah, just two quick points. One is about the current moment in India. I think that what's at play here is a kind of breakdown of the Westphalian ideal that was at play in the 1950s. I think what we're seeing right now is a people giving up on that and trying to reach for the civilizational state instead.

And one explanation for the current nature of the India-Pakistan relationship and the current nature of the regime in India is that it's not using the same kinds of definitions that were at play in the 1950s and 60s at all. I mean, it's reaching for a wholly different set of ideals. And so, one of the reasons for Professor Clary's pessimism is that we're not talking about two people who have the same sorts of objectives in mind. I think that needs to be born in mind.

And the other thing, if I could just come back to Partition again... Through this discussion, one of the things I was thinking about was that when I was doing a PhD on Partition, [...] it felt so much more distanced. I had no sense that it would suddenly become part and parcel of headlines and of our everyday reality in India. And I think at this moment, Partition historians have a real responsibility to come forward and participate in the debate about this.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: That's a great note to end on, and I am particularly grateful for all three of you for doing just that today. I really enjoyed this

conversation; it's been so rich and very grateful to you for sharing your insights. Thanks too to the audience for tuning in. The video of this event will be posted on both the Stimson Center website and the South Asian Voices website. And I would also recommend, if you're interested in hearing more perspectives on Partition and its legacies, South Asian Voices will be posting a [series of pieces](#) examining the lasting impact of Partition on the security and politics of the region, from the point of view of our contributors in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, so please do be on the lookout for that. Thanks again to all of you.