

Boston College High School

Model UN Conference

XXXIV



1947: The Partition of India



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Letter from the Chair

Hey Delegates,

Welcome to BCHMUN 34! My name's Himnish Jindal and I'm excited to be your chair for the Security Council's committee on the partition of India.

To give a brief introduction of myself, I'm a senior at BC High and live in Quincy, Massachusetts. Whether it is debating with other delegates, collaborating to create working papers, or presenting resolutions, I have loved every aspect of Model United Nations since I started doing it in the fourth grade. I always enjoy going to conferences where I can meet new people and explore new places. Outside of Model UN, I enjoy being an attorney on the Mock Trial team and leading the South Asian Representation Association here at BC High. In addition, I love taekwondo and tennis, as well as spending plenty of time with my friends and family. With that being said, I am eager to meet all of you at the conference and to see what you can do. Whether this is your first time coming to a Model UN conference or if you have been to many conferences before, we hope to make this a memorable experience for you all!

This background guide is intended to help you prepare for the conference by providing useful information on the topic to serve as a basis for your research. That being said, I expect that you will all thoroughly and thoughtfully do independent research to supplement this information you have been given. Striving to do this will ensure that everyone, including you, has the best experience possible at this conference by being knowledgeable and able to discuss the topic at hand. I am looking forward to seeing you all well-prepared, ready to give some amazing speeches and willing to collaborate with your fellow delegates.

I look forward to meeting you all in March and having an awesome conference with you all. If you have any questions, or would simply like to introduce yourself, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Best,

Himnish Jindal '26

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Letter from the Co-Chair

Greetings Delegates,

My name is Jayden Goncalves, and I am honored and excited to welcome you to the BC High Model United Nations Conference as your co-chair. It is a privilege to serve in this role and to work alongside such dedicated staff members and motivated delegates. I am especially looking forward to engaging with all of you as we navigate this committee's complex and thought-provoking topic together.

I am a senior at BC High and have been involved in Model UN for four years, serving as a delegate, and now co-chair. Model UN has been one of the most formative experiences of my high school career, strengthening my leadership, public speaking, and critical thinking skills while teaching me the importance of diplomacy, collaboration, and respectful debate. Each conference has pushed me to grow both academically and personally, and has played a major role in shaping the leader I am today.

Outside of the classroom, I am deeply interested in leadership, service, and civic engagement, and I continuously seek opportunities that challenge me to grow and give back.

I am truly excited to see the ideas, energy, and diplomacy that each of you will bring to committee. On behalf of the entire staff, I encourage you to come prepared, participate fully, and take advantage of everything this conference has to offer. Most importantly, have fun.

Best,

Jayden Goncalves '26

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Introduction to the Committee

In 1947, the United Nations Security Council confronted a crisis in South Asia, one that is inseparable from nearly two centuries of British colonial rule. The cession of the British Raj, through the Indian Independence Act of July 1947, resulted in the division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan.

This transition however was far from being a peaceful or orderly transition. This process represented a rushed and deeply negligent withdrawal by a collapsing colonial power, undertaken without proper preparation for the political, social, and humanitarian consequences that would follow. Within weeks of independence, British India was plunged into one of the largest events of mass violence and forced migration in modern history. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs fled from territories designated as Pakistan into India, while millions of Muslims fled in the opposite direction. Entire communities were uprooted, trains of refugees were massacred, and the death toll skyrocketed.

The humanitarian disaster was the direct consequence of colonial mismanagement, exploitation, and the abandonment of colonial responsibility by the British Empire. As the international body charged under Article 24 of the United Nations Charter with “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security,” the

Security Council is compelled to respond. Delegates in this committee are empowered to investigate the causes of the violence, create strategic plans for ceasefires, peacekeeping programs, and coordinate an international humanitarian relief organization.

This committee must also grapple with the question of colonial accountability. How have the actions and choices of former imperial powers contributed to instability, and what obligations remain in the aftermath. The task before the Council is not only to halt the immediate violence and protect vulnerable civilian populations, but also to confront the structural causes of the crisis. Delegates must work to stabilize two independent states forced into existence, while grappling with the legacy of colonial rule that made such devastation possible.

This committee will challenge delegates to move beyond the surface narratives of decolonization and in turn, engage directly with the values of power, responsibility, and justice in the post-colonial world.

Background on the Current Situation

British colonial rule in India was characterized by communal engineering and repression. From the late 19th century, the Raj systematically and strategically institutionalized religious identities. As one historian observes, these policies effectively “froze” fluid social and religious identities into rigid Hindu and Muslim blocs and “sowed the seeds of division”.

By emphasizing communal differences and systemically separating legal and political categories, colonial administrators ensured that Muslims, Hindus and other groups were seen as distinct political nations within India. In short, British divide-and-rule policies deliberately nurtured religious antagonism and undermined Indian unity long before 1947. At the same time, Indian nationalist resistance was growing stronger. During World War II, Britain forcibly conscripted Indian soldiers and again suppressed nationalist leaders, triggering mass movements. Gandhi’s 1942 “Quit India” campaign and mutinies in the armed forces made clear that continued colonial rule was unsustainable.

Exhausted by war and with Indian public support for the Empire collapsing, London’s officials recognized that the Raj was collapsing from within. By mid-1947, Britain’s governors in India warned that the administrative “machine” at the centre had “declined” and the regime had “lost nearly all power to control events”. A British cabinet report in December 1946 conceded they “could not put back the clock” to restore firm British rule, as neither military nor civil forces were capable of enforcing order. In effect,

the British did not relinquish India by choice but were forced out by sustained Indian resistance and imperial overreach. Even as India formally gained independence, British officials insisted that Britain's legal ties would end but its moral responsibility for the subcontinent's fate would endure.

Yet the terms of the transfer of power were shaped primarily by British priorities, not careful planning for a peaceful transition. In early 1947, Lord Mountbatten (Britain's last Viceroy) announced a hurried timetable: independence would come by 15 August 1947, barely a few months away. He warned London that the subcontinent risked "sinking into civil war" if Britain delayed. Britain's rulers thus advanced the deadline from June 1948 to August 1947, pressuring everyone to accept partition as the only feasible compromise. The Indian Independence Act (July 1947) proclaimed two new dominions, India and Pakistan, effective on 15 August – but it specified no actual borders between them. Instead, an ad hoc Boundary Commission was hastily formed, chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer who had never been to India before. (British officials even joked that Radcliffe's "equally admirable ignorance of India" made him a neutral arbiter.) Radcliffe was given only weeks to draw the borders of Punjab and Bengal based on religious majorities.

As one insider later noted, the commission was partly meant to "keep the Sikhs quiet until the transfer of power," after which the British would be gone and local problems would belong to India and Pakistan. In short, Partition was rushed through in Britain's own interests, with no time or plan to manage the coming upheaval.

Current Situation

Millions of Hindus and Sikhs found themselves living in Muslim-majority Pakistan and vice versa, and vast populations began uprooting themselves. Contemporary accounts report that British troops and officials “retreated” from their respective posts, often simply handing authority to local officials without preparing for the crisis. One partition survivor later recalled: “A British officer who was summoned to leave his post quickly picked out my father and handed over his prestigious civil service position”. In effect, the British abandoned law and order before ensuring any mechanism to stop communal violence.

This abandonment came despite warning. As early as 1945 the British military had warned that: “the general internal security position [is] bound to deteriorate” as soon as colonial forces demobilized. Senior commanders recognized that reduced troops and civil support meant they would be unable to contain the expected riots. Trains carrying refugees were cut off, entire villages were massacred, and widespread arson and rape became abundant. Estimates suggest 10–15 million people were displaced and roughly one to two million died in the violence and deprivation that followed. Scholars note this was far higher than any even bleak British planners anticipated.

Even on the brink of chaos, Mountbatten later admitted that any border he drew by 15 August would be “defective,” yet he felt compelled by the political deadline: Radcliffe simply announced “Jinnah, Nehru and Patel told me... they wanted a line by [15th August]. So I drew them a line”. In practice, the 1947 boundaries often ignored

geography, contiguity, and the needs of minority populations. In Bengal and Punjab, two of the provinces worst hit by haste, whole districts were dissected with little regard for communication or resource links, precipitating mass panic. By 1948, Partition had displaced over 14 million people and left entire communities broken. In light of this horror, historical scholarship emphasizes Britain's moral and political responsibility.

Colonial negligence and a rushed withdrawal—undertaken out of expediency rather than justice – left a legacy of suffering for which the former imperial power must answer. As one postcolonial analysis concludes, the carnage of 1947 was not a natural inevitability but a “bloody legacy” of Britain's own divide-and-rule policies and the abandonment of its responsibility to Indian society.

Questions to Consider

- ❖ How can the Security Council help end the communal massacres and ensure a ceasefire or calm along the India–Pakistan border? What tools (diplomacy, mediation, public statements) are available?
- ❖ What steps can the UN take to protect and provide for refugees and displaced persons? Should the Council authorize an international relief mission or expand Red Cross/NGO operations? How to ensure camps and safe passages are neutral and secure?
- ❖ Would it be feasible to deploy a UN peacekeeping or observer force to tense areas (e.g. Punjab crossings or communal hot spots)? What mandates, rules of engagement, and guarantees would be needed for such an operation?
- ❖ What long-term political solutions could stabilize India and Pakistan? For example, how should outstanding issues be handled – the location of disputed boundaries, the future of princely states (like Kashmir), and the rights of minorities in each new country?
- ❖ How should the Security Council balance respect for the sovereignty of the new dominions with its responsibility to maintain peace? Are there precedents (or UN principles) for intervening in a recently independent state?
- ❖ To what extent did the British administration’s actions bear responsibility for the violence and instability of the partition? Should the international community investigate decisions made during the final months of British rule in the Indian subcontinent? Should colonial powers be obligated to manage transitions safely or face consequences? How should the UN respond when a permanent member causes a crisis?

Positions

- **Dominion of India**
- **Dominion of Pakistan**
- **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**
- **United States of America**
- **Republic of China**
- **French Republic**
- **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**
- **Argentine Republic**
- **Kingdom of Belgium**
- **Dominion of Canada**
- **Republic of Columbia**
- **Syrian Republic**
- **Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic**
- **Kingdom of Afghanistan**
- **Dominion of Ceylon**
- **Kingdom of Nepal**
- **Kingdom of Bhutan**
- **Union of Burma**
- **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**
- **Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan**

- **Kingdom of Iraq**
- **Union of South Africa**
- **Republic of Turkey**
- **Dominion of New Zealand**
- **Kingdom of Egypt**

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