

# Background Guide: HCC

## *Examining the Political and Communal Consequences of the Partition Plan, 3rd June, 1947, and the Division and Administration of Punjab.*

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# Letter from the Executive Board

United Nations Historic Crisis Committee

Dear Delegates,

It is a distinct privilege to welcome you to the Historic Crisis Committee. We are convened today at a watershed moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The date is 3 June 1947. Only hours ago, the Viceroy of India, Lord Louis Mountbatten, broadcast the final roadmap for the independence and partition of British India. For the millions of people residing in the province of Punjab, this announcement marks the end of one era and the violent, uncertain birth of another.

This agenda, Examining the Political and Communal Consequences of the Partition Plan, 3 June, 1947, and the Division and Administration of Punjab, has been selected because it represents the most volatile and logistically challenging aspect of the decolonization process. While the principle of two successor states has been accepted by the major political parties, the practical reality of dividing a province as complex as Punjab remains unresolved. The province is not merely a collection of districts; it is a shared cultural and economic unit, the breadbasket of the empire, and the home of deeply integrated communities of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

As members of this committee, you are tasked with navigating a crisis of unprecedented proportions. You represent the key political, military, and administrative figures who must execute the partition while preventing a total collapse of the social order. The 3 June Plan has set in motion a series of legislative and administrative actions that must be completed in less than seventy days. The decisions you make regarding the placement of the boundary line, the division of the provincial assets, and the management of the communal militias will determine whether this transition is a peaceful transfer of power or a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Historic Crisis Committee operates differently from standard deliberative bodies. You are not here to write long, aspirational resolutions. You are here to take action. Through directives, portfolio powers, and strategic negotiations, you will shape the outcome of the partition in real time. We urge you to move beyond simple slogans and engage with the granular details of governance. You must understand the mechanics of the irrigation systems, the logistics of the army division, and the legal nuances of the Indian Independence Act.

Most importantly, we remind you that the issues we discuss are not abstract. They involve the lives, homes, and dignity of millions of individuals. The violence that has already begun in cities like Lahore and Amritsar is a precursor to a potential genocide. Your deliberations should reflect an awareness of these human dimensions alongside the strategic interests of your characters. We look forward to a session defined by analytical depth, restraint, and decisive leadership.

Warm regards,

The Executive Board

Historic Crisis Committee



# **The Historic Crisis Committee: Mandate, Authority, and Structure**

## **Mandate of the Historic Crisis Committee**

The Historic Crisis Committee is the most action oriented and dynamic organ within the Model United Nations framework. Established to simulate high pressure decision making environments, it functions as a continuous crisis body rather than a traditional deliberative assembly. The mandate of this committee is to respond to a rapidly evolving historical emergency by producing immediate, tangible outcomes through executive actions.

Unlike the General Assembly, which focuses on norm setting and consensus building, the Historic Crisis Committee is designed to produce action. This means the body possesses power unto itself that does not depend on the voluntary obedience of all members to be effective. It represents small, influential groups such as a presidential cabinet, a military council, or a committee of political leaders who possess direct decision making authority over their respective domains.

In the context of the 1947 partition, the committee's mandate includes the following responsibilities:

Overseeing the legislative process through which the Punjab Assembly decides on the partition of the province.

Managing the administrative division of the provincial civil service, the police, and the judiciary.

Coordinating the security response to communal violence and the activities of paramilitary organizations.

Supervising the logistical arrangements for the Boundary Commission and the eventual demarcation of the Radcliffe Line.

Allocating financial resources and physical assets between the emerging administrations of East and West Punjab.

Responding to humanitarian emergencies, including the movement of refugees and the protection of vulnerable populations.

## **Why the Committee Discusses the Partition of Punjab**

Issues are brought before a crisis committee when they involve an urgent threat to stability, a breakdown of existing governance structures, or a fundamental shift in political sovereignty. The

partition of Punjab meets all these criteria. It raises questions about the distribution of power, the protection of minority rights, and the long term viability of the successor states that cannot be resolved through ordinary legislative means.

Punjab is the specific focus of this committee because it is the site where the logic of partition faces its greatest challenge. The province's heterogeneous population and its integrated economic infrastructure mean that any division will inevitably create winners and losers. The presence of the Sikh community, which is concentrated in the central districts, ensures that the partition is a three way struggle rather than a simple binary between India and Pakistan. Because no single institution has a clear mandate to manage this complexity, the committee becomes the space where these competing interests are contested and managed.

## **Powers and Limitations of the Committee**

### **What the Committee Can Do**

The committee can pass directives that enact the collective will of the body. These directives can: Mobilize military units, such as the Punjab Boundary Force, to specific locations to restore order or protect infrastructure. Appoint officials to the Boundary Commission or the various partition sub committees. Declare states of emergency or impose curfews in communal hotspots like Lahore and Amritsar. Authorize the expenditure of provincial funds for emergency relief or administrative transition. Issue public communiques to reassure the population or signal policy shifts to the communal leaders. Establish safe corridors and evacuation protocols for refugees moving between the two parts of the province.

### **What the Committee Cannot Do**

The committee faces structural and political limitations. It cannot: Unilaterally cancel the partition plan once it has been accepted by the national leadership of the Congress and the Muslim League. Enforce directives in regions where the local administration has already collapsed or where the police have become entirely communalized. Override the fundamental provisions of the Indian Independence Act 1947, which is a piece of legislation passed by the British Parliament. Compel the princely states to join a specific dominion if they choose to exercise their legal right to remain independent. Operate with resources or technology that did not exist in June 1947.

## **The Crisis System and the Continuous Timeline**

The committee operates on a continuous timeline, meaning that the simulation progresses even when the committee is not in session. For every hour of debate, several days or weeks of historical time may pass. This creates a sense of urgency and forces delegates to anticipate the consequences of their actions. The committee will frequently be interrupted by crisis updates or breaks, which are short presentations by the staff regarding new developments in the world.

After a crisis update, the committee will typically enter a moderated caucus to discuss the new problem and propose solutions. These solutions are drafted into directives, which are relatively short, handwritten documents that outline a specific set of actions the committee will take. Unlike General Assembly resolutions, directives consist only of operative clauses and are meant for immediate implementation.

## **Directives and Portfolio Powers**

Each delegate in the committee represents a specific character with a portfolio of powers. These powers are based on the character's historical position and influence. For example, a military commander has the power to move troops, while a political leader has the power to call for strikes or mobilize party workers.

Delegates can exercise their portfolio powers independently of the committee through the use of crisis notes. These are private messages sent to the crisis staff in the backroom. Private notes allow for secret maneuvering, the building of personal alliances, and the pursuit of goals that may not align with the committee's public agenda. The backroom staff synthesizes these private actions with the committee's public directives to determine the overall course of the simulation.

## **Personal Messages and Secret Maneuvering**

The use of secret notes is a hallmark of the crisis format. Delegates can use these notes to hire informants, negotiate secret deals with opposing factions, or sabotage the efforts of their rivals. This asymmetric information environment means that not every delegate knows what everyone else is doing, creating a realistic simulation of the distrust and intrigue that characterized the 1947 partition.

## **How Decisions Are Implemented**

A directive requires a simple majority to pass. Once passed, it is sent to the backroom where the crisis directors evaluate its realism and effectiveness. The results of the directive are then brought back to the committee through a subsequent crisis update. The simulation is a feedback loop: your actions change the state of the world, and the new state of the world requires further action.

# **Introduction to the Agenda - Examining the Partition of Punjab**

## **Why the Partition of Punjab Matters Today**

The partition of Punjab is the defining crisis of the decolonization of South Asia. While the transfer of power at the national level appears to be a peaceful transition, the reality in the provinces is one of total societal breakdown. Punjab is the site where the two nation theory meets the physical and social reality of a deeply integrated population. The province is not merely a territory; it is the economic and military heart of the British Raj.

Smartphones, digital maps, and modern logistics did not exist in 1947. The information available to the administrators is based on the 1941 census, which is already outdated due to the disruptions of the Second World War. The decisions regarding the boundary must be made using hand drawn maps and physical surveys in a climate of intense summer heat and escalating violence. The materials of modern life that depend on the stability of this region, from grain supplies to military readiness, are all at risk.

The term crisis in this committee does not refer to a geological or economic scarcity. There is plenty of land and water in Punjab. Instead, a crisis emerges when the administrative and political systems that manage these resources are suddenly dismantled. A province becomes critical when it plays a central role in the survival of two new nations and its governance is vulnerable to disruption due to communal tension, the speed of withdrawal, and the lack of a neutral security force.

## **The 3 June Plan as an Enabler of the New Reality**

The 3 June Plan, also known as the Mountbatten Plan, is foundational to the transformation of the subcontinent. It accepts the inevitability of partition due to the irreconcilable differences between the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League. The plan proposes the division of British India into two dominions, India and Pakistan, and establishes a hurried timeline for the transfer of power.

The global shift toward independence is the powerful driver of this demand. For many in the subcontinent, control over their own territory is inseparable from political freedom. However, the plan introduces structural constraints. New nations often require years to establish their institutions, but the 3 June Plan gives them only ten weeks. This mismatch between the political decision and the administrative capacity creates a chokepoint where the supply of security and governance cannot keep pace with the demand for order.

## **Why the Supply of Order Struggles to Keep Pace**

While the political decision to partition was made in a few meetings in New Delhi, the implementation of that decision on the ground faces immense barriers. Partitioning a province is not a short term activity. It requires the division of complex systems, including the irrigation canals that are the lifeblood of Punjab's agriculture. These systems were designed to be managed as a single unit, and their division requires technical assessments and community consultations that are impossible in the current climate.

The processing and refining of the partition award are equally difficult. The Boundary Commission faces the task of separating contiguous majority areas while accounting for other factors like railways and infrastructure. This creates a structural mismatch where the political demand for a border can increase rapidly, but the administrative supply of a clear and fair line responds slowly. The result is a total breakdown in law and order, heightened by the presence of armed communal bands.

## **Concentration and Hidden Chokepoints in the Administration**

Public discussion often focuses on the location of the boundary line, but the line is only one part of the problem. The greatest vulnerability lies in the downstream stages of the administration, such as the police force and the civil service. Even if the Boundary Commission produces a fair line, the dependence on a communalized police force to enforce that line creates a systemic risk.

The International Energy Agency has noted that in modern supply chains, power is distributed unevenly. Similarly, in the 1947 administration, power was concentrated in the hands of those who control the archives, the armories, and the transportation networks. A party may have the legal right to a district, but if the local police are from the opposing community, that right is effectively nullified. Power in the partition is therefore determined by the control of the value chain of security rather than just by demographic numbers.

## **The Shift from Negotiation to Conflict**

As the vulnerabilities of the 3 June Plan have become clearer, the political leaders have increasingly reframed the partition as a matter of national survival rather than a constitutional settlement. This shift is a form of securitization, where everyday administrative tasks are treated as strategic assets. The control of the Ferozepur headworks or the Gurdaspur district is no longer about irrigation or tax revenue; it is about the security and viability of the state.

These policies reflect a broader trend where the administration is treated as a strategic infrastructure that must be captured rather than a service that can be shared. While such strategies may enhance the resilience of one community, they also fragment the province and

intensify the competition. When multiple parties pursue similar strategies of capture simultaneously, the result is the duplication of paramilitary forces, the reduction of efficiency, and the escalation of violence.

## **Humanitarian and Social Costs Enter the Debate**

At the same time that partition is promoted as the solution to communal conflict, its implementation raises profound humanitarian and social concerns. The mass migration of people is not merely a movement of populations; it is a displacement that causes land degradation, the destruction of property, and the generation of millions of refugees. Communities near the border often experience total dispossession and health risks due to the lack of sanitation in refugee camps.

Labour conditions in the informal sectors of the province are also a serious concern. The artisans and workers who support the economy are often the first to be targeted in communal raids. The documented cases of child labor and forced abductions during the migration have prompted international scrutiny, though the response from the British and the local leadership remains limited. This creates a central tension in the committee: partition is seen as essential for political independence, but its implementation undermines the very social justice that independence was supposed to achieve.

## **Why Punjab Appears on the Crisis Agenda**

The committee does not exist to regulate the entire decolonization of the British Empire. It focuses on Punjab because the province raises questions that cannot be resolved through bilateral negotiations between Nehru and Jinnah alone. These questions include the distribution of benefits and burdens from the division of the irrigation system, the management of transboundary violence, and the ethical dimensions of the mass migration.

The committee provides a forum where the local leaders, the military commanders, and the civil servants can articulate their concerns and contest the narratives of the national leadership. Even without a permanent legal framework, the language used in this committee shapes the legitimacy of the transition. How states justify their claims to a district, how communal harms are framed, and how responsibility is allocated are all influenced by the political environment shaped in this forum.

<b>District</b>	<b>Muslim Percentage</b>	<b>Hindu Percentage</b>	<b>Sikh Percentage</b>	<b>National Status</b>
Lahore	60.6%	16.6%	18.3%	West Punjab
Amritsar	46.5%	15.4%	35.1%	East Punjab

Gudaspur	51.1%	25.2 %	19.2%	West Punjab
Ferozpur	45.1%	33.7%	15.1%	East Punjab
Rawalpindi	80.0%	10.5%	8.2%	West Punjab
Jullundur	45.2%	28.5%	26.3%	East Punjab



# **The Historical Evolution of the Punjab Conflict**

## **Postwar Foundations: The Collapse of the Unionist Order**

Understanding the current crisis in Punjab requires looking beyond the immediate events of 1947. The tensions are rooted in a longer history of how the province was governed under British rule. For decades, the political landscape of Punjab was dominated by the Unionist Party, a cross communal coalition of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh landlords. The Unionists focused on rural agrarian interests and successfully marginalized communal politics by ensuring that the benefits of the British canal colonies were shared among the landed elite of all communities.

However, the end of the Second World War marked a turning point. The 1946 elections demonstrated the total collapse of the Unionist order. The All India Muslim League, campaigning on the slogan of Pakistan, won the vast majority of Muslim seats, while the Congress and the Akali Dal captured the Hindu and Sikh votes respectively. The province was no longer governed by a coalition of interests but by a set of competing nationalisms that viewed the others as existential threats.

## **The Rise of Communalism and the Lahore Resolution**

The 1940 Lahore Resolution was the primary catalyst for this shift. By demanding independent states for Muslims, the League transformed the constitutional debate into a territorial struggle. For the Muslims of Punjab, Pakistan represented the hope of an Islamic state where their majority status would be permanent. For the Sikhs, it represented the threat of becoming a permanent minority in a religious state.

This period also saw the emergence of communal militias. The Muslim League National Guard and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh began to expand their membership, recruiting from the thousands of soldiers returning from the war fronts in Europe and Asia. These paramilitary groups provided a sense of security to their communities that the colonial state was increasingly unable to provide. The transition from peaceful political negotiation to organized communal preparation was well underway by the time Lord Mountbatten arrived in India.

## **The Failure of the Cabinet Mission and the Return of Security Thinking**

In 1946, the British attempted one last effort to keep India united through the Cabinet Mission Plan. The plan proposed a decentralized federation where the provinces would be grouped into three sections. Punjab was the heart of Section B, which would have had a Muslim majority.

While the Congress and the League initially flirted with the plan, the trust deficit between them ensured its failure. The Congress feared that the grouping was a backdoor to Pakistan, while the League feared that a strong center would eventually dismantle the provincial autonomy.

The failure of the Cabinet Mission signaled the end of market led or constitutional resource governance. States began to reassess the risks associated with being a minority in a concentrated political system. Unlike earlier periods, where the debate was about the percentage of seats in the assembly, the contemporary shift was toward the control of territory. The security framing of the conflict became dominant, as each community realized that their survival depended on the physical control of the lands they inhabited.

## **Historical Legacies Shaping Today's Crisis**

The current geopolitics of the Punjab partition cannot be understood in isolation. They reflect layered historical legacies that have shaped the region since the nineteenth century. These include: The British policy of favoring the martial races, which left Punjab with a disproportionately large number of ex servicemen. The development of the canal colonies, which created a new economic geography that did not align with traditional communal boundaries. The memory of the Mughal Sikh wars, which provided the cultural symbols and historical grievances used to mobilize the masses in 1947. The administrative history of the 1905 and 1911 partitions of Bengal, which served as a warning of the potential for failure in any territorial division.

Each of these legacies addressed certain problems while leaving others unresolved. The martial race theory provided the empire with soldiers but left the province with the means of civil war. The canal colonies increased wealth but created a new source of conflict over water. The memory of history provided identity but fueled hatred. These unresolved tensions converge in the 3 June Plan, making the governance of the partition both urgent and deeply contested.

# **What is the 3 June Plan and How the Division Works**

## **The Mechanics of the Mountbatten Plan**

The 3 June Plan is not defined solely by its political goals. It is defined by how the administration uses the existing legal and legislative structures to execute the division. A province becomes partitioned when the legislative assembly votes to split its territory. The plan provides a specific procedure for this: the members of the assembly representing Muslim majority districts and those representing non Muslim majority districts will meet separately.

If a simple majority of either group votes for partition, the province will be divided. This mechanism ensures that neither the Muslims nor the non Muslims can be forced into a state they do not want, but it also guarantees that the province will be cut in two. Once the vote for partition is passed, the province is governed by a notional boundary based on the 1941 census. This boundary is temporary and is intended only to facilitate the initial administrative separation.

## **The Boundary Commission: Where Sovereignty Begins**

The second stage of the partition is the appointment of the Boundary Commission. Led by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the commission's mandate is to draw the final international border. This stage is most closely associated with the exercise of political sovereignty. The commission is instructed to demarcate the boundaries on the basis of contiguous majority areas, but the inclusion of the other factors clause gives the chairman immense power to deviate from the census figures.

In practice, the work of the commission depends heavily on the data and arguments provided by the political parties. The Congress, the League, and the Akali Dal have all prepared detailed maps and memoranda to justify their claims to specific districts. However, the operational control of the commission is limited by the lack of time and the absence of accurate geographical surveys for the most contested areas. This makes the boundary commission a site of intense political pressure rather than a technical body.

## **Administrative and Asset Division: The Least Visible Strategic Stage**

After the territorial division is decided, the raw administration of the province must be separated. This involves the division of the civil service, the police, the judiciary, and the provincial treasury. This stage is often overlooked in public discussions, yet it is one of the most strategically important segments of the process. The division of the police force, in particular, is a major chokepoint.

Processing the separation of personnel is technologically complex and politically sensitive. It requires every government employee to choose which dominion they wish to serve. This choice often follows communal lines, leading to the total removal of minorities from the administration of each part of the province. As a result, the capacity to govern is far more geographically concentrated than the population itself. Power shifts away from the central government and toward the communal hubs of the new administrations.

## **Transport, Trade, and Logistics: The Connective Infrastructure**

Between the decision to partition and the final demarcation lie the complex systems of transport and logistics. The railways and roads of Punjab were designed to move grain from the west to the ports in the south and the cities in the east. Partitioning these networks means dividing the rolling stock, the workshops, and the railway police. Disruptions at this stage occur due to the mass movement of refugees and the sabotage of trains by communal bands.

Because the economy of Punjab is globally integrated through the export of wheat and cotton, a disruption in one part of the province can rapidly affect the food security of the entire subcontinent. Logistics and trade also interact with finance. The provincial debt and the pension obligations to thousands of retired soldiers must be shared between the two new administrations. This further complicates the governance, as financial actors often operate across the new borders and beyond the reach of a single provincial government.

## **Where Power Concentrates Along the Value Chain**

A key insight from the analysis of the partition is that power is unevenly distributed. While the majority of the population is rural, strategic leverage concentrates in the urban centers like Lahore and Amritsar, and in the control of the canal headworks. The International Energy Agency's model of supply security risks applies here: the security of the new nations persists only if they can control the downstream stages of the administration.

This means that simply gaining control of a district through a census majority does not automatically reduce the strategic risk. Influence depends less on where the people are located and more on who controls the stages that turn a territory into a functioning state. The concentration of processing capacity in the administration is a major chokepoint that creates systemic risks for both India and Pakistan.

# Why the Partition of Punjab has Become a Geopolitical Issue

## From Provincial Governance to Strategic Assets

The partition of Punjab did not suddenly become a geopolitical issue in June 1947. What has changed is the way the British and the local leaders understand and respond to its importance. Over the past year, the province has moved from being treated as a domestic administrative unit to being framed as a strategic asset linked to national security and regional influence. This shift explains why the boundary negotiations have become so intense and why the communal violence is so organized.

For much of the British era, Punjab was governed as a single unit. The British intervened to regulate land ownership and irrigation, but the social order was largely shaped by local consensus. This changed as the energy transition of the 1940s—the shift from colonial stability to national sovereignty—exposed the limitations of the existing system. The convergence of rising demand for separate states and the increasing concentration of paramilitary power transformed the province into a strategic asset.

## Supply Concentration and Vulnerability

A central driver of the Punjab geopolitics is the concentration of resources. While fertile land exists across the province, the control of the water that makes that land fertile is concentrated in a few key headworks. This creates dependency relationships that are difficult to unwind. The award of the Ferozepur district to India, for example, would place the water supply of the Pakistani part of the Sutlej valley under Indian control.

This concentration increases the vulnerability of the new nations to economic coercion or disruption. From the perspective of Pakistan, such dependencies raise concerns about the reliability of their future food supply. From the perspective of India, the control of these resources is seen as a necessary condition for its own northern security. Power in the partition negotiations shifts toward those who control the stages that turn resources into usable assets.

## The Energy Transition of Sovereignty and Strategic Competition

The global shift toward decolonization has intensified these dynamics. While independence is intended to reduce the burden of empire, it introduces new forms of dependency on strategic territory. Unlike colonial rule, which was maintained through a central authority, the new

sovereignty is embedded in long lasting infrastructure like the canal systems and the railway networks.

As the Congress and the League race to scale up their respective nations, access to the resources of Punjab becomes a determinant of national leadership. Governments increasingly view the partition process as an extension of their national building policy, linking it to military readiness and industrial competitiveness. This has contributed to a paradox: the goal of independence requires a peaceful transition, yet the national strategies increasingly prioritize strategic advantage over communal harmony.

## **Trade Tools and Economic Statecraft in 1947**

Geopolitics over the partition is rarely expressed through open diplomatic notes. Instead, it operates through administrative tools, regulatory measures, and the division of the civil service. The use of the police to facilitate communal raids, the withholding of intelligence from the other side, and the selective destruction of records have become key mechanisms through which the parties attempt to secure an advantage.

In the months leading up to June, the major parties have expanded the use of such tools. These measures are often justified under the guise of maintaining law and order, even when their effects extend toward securing territorial gains. This form of economic and administrative statecraft blurs the line between governance and war. It also complicates the work of this committee, as actions taken by one party to enhance their community's resilience are perceived by others as a form of aggression.

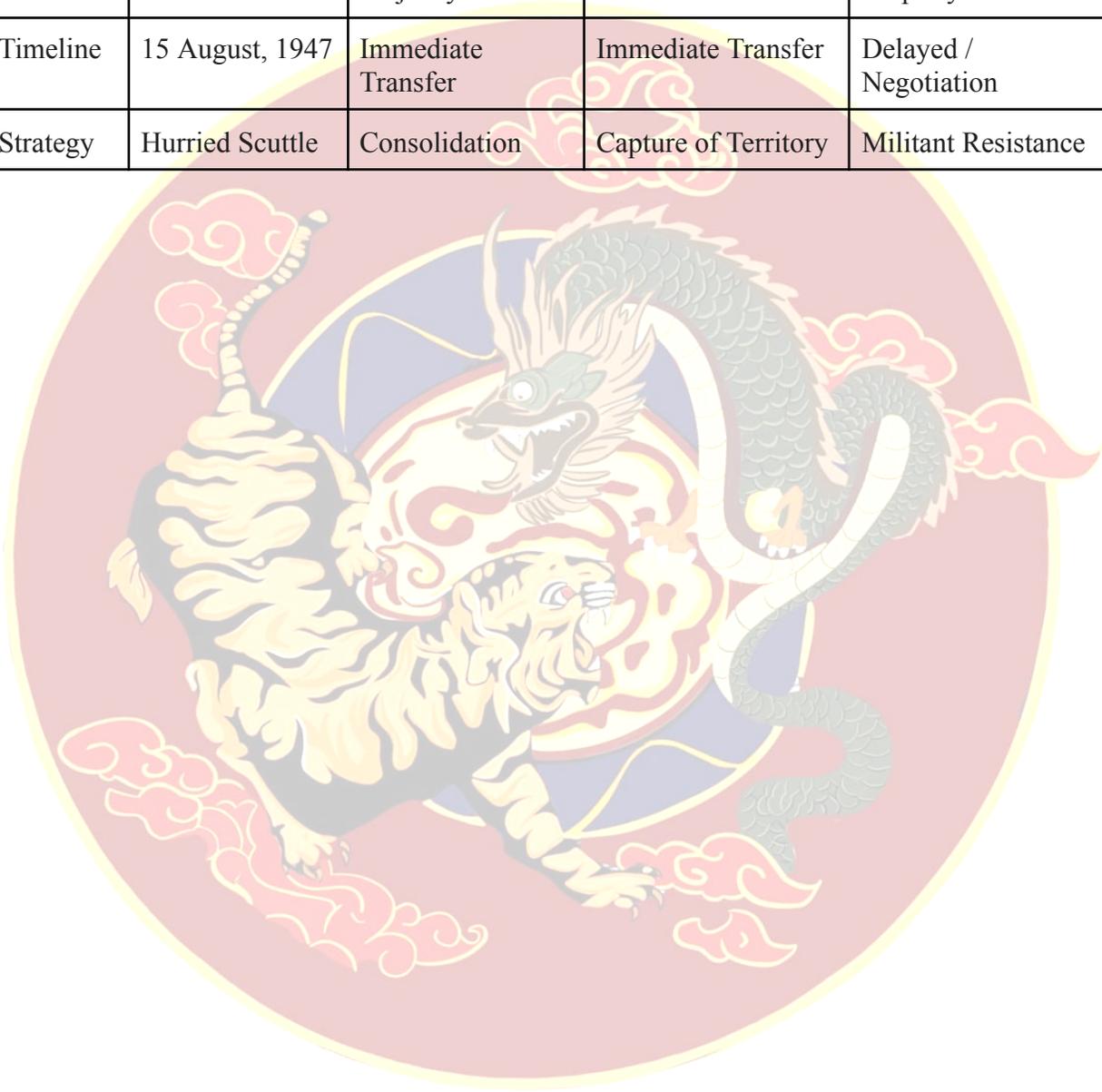
## **Great Power Rivalry and the Narrative of Responsibility**

The competition over Punjab cannot be separated from the broader patterns of rivalry among the emerging national powers. The conflict intersects with concerns about military capability and influence over the future of the subcontinent. Control over the recruitment grounds of the army and the strategic gateways to the northwest confers long term advantages that go beyond immediate territorial control.

Narratives play an important role in this competition. The British frame their withdrawal in terms of responsibility and the fulfillment of a pledge to independence, while simultaneously pursuing a strategy of a hurried scuttle to avoid the fallout of civil war. The Congress frames its position in terms of secularism and unity, while the League emphasizes the rights of self determination. These narratives shape the international perception of the crisis and influence which policies are seen as legitimate within this committee.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>British</b>	<b>Congress</b>	<b>Muslim League</b>	<b>Akali Dal</b>
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	<b>Stance</b>	<b>Stance</b>	<b>Stance</b>	<b>Stance</b>
Goal	Orderly Withdrawal	Strong United Center	Sovereign Pakistan	Azad Punjab/Sikhistan
Boundary	Radcliff Award	Contiguous Majority	Six Full Provinces	Holy Sites / Property
Timeline	15 August, 1947	Immediate Transfer	Immediate Transfer	Delayed / Negotiation
Strategy	Hurried Scuttle	Consolidation	Capture of Territory	Militant Resistance



# **International Law and Global Rules Governing the Partition**

## **The Indian Independence Act 1947 and Legal Sovereignty**

Despite the growing strategic importance of the partition, there is no single international treaty that governs the entire process. Instead, the governance of the 1947 transition is shaped by the Indian Independence Act, a landmark piece of legislation passed by the British Parliament. This act legally ends colonial rule and creates the two independent dominions of India and Pakistan. It provides the legal framework for the transfer of power and establishes the "appointed day" as 15 August 1947.

The act transforms the political landscape by ending British sovereignty and redefining governance structures. It empowers the constituent assemblies of the new dominions to draft their own constitutions and repeal existing British laws. This means that after August 15, the British Parliament will no longer have any legal authority in the subcontinent. However, this legal clarity does not resolve the upstream problems of territorial demarcation or the protection of minorities.

## **Permanent Sovereignty Over Natural Resources and the Succession**

The foundational legal principle governing the resources of Punjab is the right of successor states to control the assets within their territory. This principle, which would later be formalized in the United Nations General Assembly, is already central to the claims of India and Pakistan. It grants the new states authority over land, water, and infrastructure, but it also creates a conflict when these resources are physically interconnected.

The tension between the sovereignty of the new states and their functional interdependence lies at the heart of the partition debates. For example, the legal right of West Punjab to the water of the rivers must be balanced against the physical control of the headworks by East Punjab. International law provides no clear mechanism to resolve such a dispute between two newly sovereign states, making it a political issue for this committee to address.

## **The Boundary Commission and the Terms of Reference**

The work of the Boundary Commission is governed by the terms of reference agreed upon by the national leadership. These terms instruct the commission to demarcate the boundaries on the basis of contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non Muslims, but they also include the other factors clause. This clause creates a significant legal ambiguity. Does it allow the commission to

prioritize irrigation over population? Does it allow for the consideration of historical religious sites?

The widespread use of this clause to justify specific territorial awards risks undermining the perceived fairness of the entire process. Moreover, the commission's decisions are meant to be final and binding, but they lack any international enforcement mechanism. This results in a situation where the boundary award is legally definitive but politically contested, leading to the ongoing conflict along the Radcliffe Line.

## **Human Rights and the Responsibility of the Colonial State**

Human rights law, as it existed in 1947, further shapes the expectations of the partition. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had not yet been adopted, the existing international standards obligated the British state to protect the lives and property of those under its jurisdiction. This responsibility is particularly relevant during the transition of power, when the risk of communal violence is at its highest.

However, the British have increasingly relied on the "scuttle" strategy to limit their responsibility. By advancing the date of independence, they have legally transferred the responsibility for security to the successor governments before those governments have the capacity to exercise it. This creates a gap between the legal obligations of the state and the physical reality on the ground, leading to the humanitarian disaster that has become a defining feature of the partition.

## **Investment Law and the Division of Assets**

A significant portion of the partition governance occurs through the division of the physical and financial assets of the empire. This involves contracts, pension obligations, and the division of the central treasury. The Indian Independence Act provides for the continued validity of existing laws and civil service appointments to ensure administrative continuity.

While these instruments aim to provide stability, they can also constrain the policy space of the new dominions. The division of the army and the civil service along communal lines may be a practical necessity, but it also weakens the institutional capacity of both states. This contractual layer of the partition often operates with limited transparency, reducing the public oversight of the transition and complicating the accountability of the leadership.

# **The Role of the British Administration and the Successor Governments**

## **The United Nations and the Absence of Global Oversight**

The United Nations, though in its infancy in 1947, plays a minimal role in the governance of the partition. It does not function as a regulator or a peacekeeper in the Punjab. Instead, the influence of the international system lies in the norms of self determination and the growing pressure for decolonization. The UN General Assembly is the representative political body where these norms are debated, but it lacks any enforcement power over the British withdrawal.

The absence of an international oversight mechanism means that the partition is governed by the colonial administration and the political parties. This lack of a neutral referee is one of the primary reasons for the failure to reach a peaceful settlement. Without a body to provide objective data on reserves, demographics, or environmental impacts, the parties are left to contest every fact and figure.

## **The British Viceroy and the Politics of the Scuttle**

The role of the British administration is defined by the tension between its historical mandate to maintain order and its immediate goal to exit the subcontinent. Lord Mountbatten has focused on speed and political consensus among the national leaders rather than on the technical details of the provincial division. This approach has been successful in securing an agreement on the principle of partition, but it has been catastrophic for the people of Punjab.

The reports from the Governor of Punjab, Sir Evan Jenkins, have consistently warned of the risks of a hurried scuttle. He has highlighted that without a strong and neutral security force, the partition will lead to a massacre. However, these warnings have been ignored by the Viceroy and the national leadership in favor of a political settlement. The administration's role has shifted from governing the province to managing the liquidation of its assets.

## **The Interim Government and the Communalization of the Center**

The Interim Government, formed in 1946 with both Congress and League ministers, was intended to provide a transition to independence. However, it quickly became a site of communal competition. The ministers used their departments to promote the interests of their communities and to prepare for the eventual partition. This has led to the fragmentation of the central administration and the loss of any neutral authority.

This communalisation from the top down has had a devastating effect on the province. The police and the civil service in Punjab take their cues from the national leadership rather than from the local administration. When the national leaders emphasize the strategic importance of a district, the local officials use their power to secure that district for their community. The role of the interim government has been to facilitate the partition of the administration rather than to govern the province.

## Technical Frameworks and the Failure of the Boundary Force

Efforts to provide a technical framework for the partition have been limited and largely ineffective. The Punjab Boundary Force, established to maintain peace along the contested border, is the most prominent example of this failure. The force is composed of units from the Indian Army that are themselves divided along communal lines. It lacks a clear mandate, a unified command, and the resources to manage a territory of its size.

The failure of the Boundary Force highlights the limitations of trying to solve a political and social crisis with a purely technical instrument. Without a political agreement on the final boundary and a commitment to the protection of minorities, no military force can maintain order. The institutional fragmentation within the security forces mirrors the fragmentation of the province itself, making the role of the administration increasingly irrelevant.

## Knowledge Production and Information Asymmetry

Beyond their formal mandates, the British and the local parties contribute to the crisis through the production of information. Data on demographics, land ownership, and irrigation are often politically sensitive and are used as tools of negotiation. The lack of shared and reliable data on the communal composition of the border districts has allowed the parties to make exaggerated claims and has fueled the fears of the population.

The role of knowledge production in the partition is to frame the conflict rather than to resolve it. Each party produces assessments and reports that justify its territorial claims and ignore the social costs of the division. This information asymmetry is a major barrier to cooperation and ensures that the partition is governed by narratives rather than by facts.

Organisation	Primary Role	Composition	Effect on Punjab
Boundary Commission	Demarcation	Radcliffe + 4 Judges	Haphazard Border
Boundary Force	Peacekeeping	50,000 Troops	Ineffective/ Biased
Interim Government	Administration	Congress + League	Divided Oversight

Punjab Police	Law & Order	20,000 Constables	Communalised
Partition Committees	Asset Division	Civil Servants	Fragmented Resources



# Humanitarian and Social Impacts of the Punjab Partition

## Environmental and Social Disruption from the Partition

While the partition is often described as a political solution, its humanitarian and social impacts raise serious questions about its sustainability. The mass migration of people is not a neutral movement of populations; it is a disruptive event that transform the landscapes and communities of Punjab. Large scale displacement causes the generation of massive volumes of waste in refugee camps and the disruption of agricultural cycles.

One of the most significant environmental risks arises from the breakdown of the irrigation systems. As the administration is divided, the maintenance of the canals and the management of water flows are neglected. This can lead to land degradation, water pollution, and the loss of biodiversity in the river valleys. The International Energy Agency's warning about the sustainability of rapid industrial transitions applies here: without strong governance, the partition can undermine the long term ecological and social resilience of the province.

## The Targeting of Women and Gendered Violence

The social impact of the partition is most visible in the systematic targeting of women. In both urban and rural areas, women have become the primary victims of communal "honor" and territorial cleansing. The reports from the time indicate extreme cruelty, including women being stripped naked and paraded in public, mass public rapes, and forced abductions. Historians estimate that nearly 75,000 to 100,000 women were abducted during the migration.

This violence is not merely a byproduct of the riots; it is a deliberate tool of the communal militias. By targeting women, the militias attempt to humiliate the opposing community and force them to flee the territory. The governance response to this crisis has been slow and often exclusionary. The eventual "recovery" operations by the governments of India and Pakistan frequently prioritized national and patriarchal honor over the self identity and well being of the women themselves.

## Community Displacement and the Loss of Livelihoods

The mass migration has led to the total displacement of communities and the disruption of traditional livelihoods. Large scale mining of communal identities has required the acquisition of land that displaces residents and alters social dynamics. In cities like Lahore and Amritsar, the removal of minorities has led to the loss of artisanal skills and the breakdown of urban economies.

Where the consultation processes are non-existent, the partition becomes a source of permanent conflict rather than a settlement. These issues are particularly acute where the governance institutions are already fragile. The limited access to legal remedies and the information asymmetry between the refugees and the state exacerbate the power imbalances. The refugees find themselves as "aliens" in their new surroundings, facing discrimination and economic insecurity.

## **Labour Conditions and the Informal Economy of Violence**

Labour conditions in the province have collapsed as the formal economy is replaced by the informal economy of violence. While industrial operations in the cities may provide some formal employment, the risks remain high. In the rural areas, the landless laborers and menial workers are often the most vulnerable to communal attacks, as they lack the resources to flee or the protection of the landed elite.

Governance responses to this labor crisis are complex. The abrupt enforcement of communal boundaries removes livelihoods without providing alternatives, pushing vulnerable populations into deeper insecurity. This highlights the need for the committee to understand the labor issues within their broader social and economic contexts. The massacre of thousands of laborers on both sides of the border often goes unnoticed in the official records, as they do not appear in the revenue registers.

## **The Unequal Distribution of Costs and Benefits**

A recurring pattern in the partition is the unequal distribution of costs and benefits. The environmental degradation and social disruption are concentrated in the border regions and the extraction of minorities, while the political and strategic benefits accrue to the national leadership in the central hubs of New Delhi and Karachi. Expanding the territory of a state does not guarantee development gains if the population remains displaced and the infrastructure is destroyed.

This imbalance contributes to the perceptions of injustice and fuels the ongoing political resistance to the partition award. The legitimacy of the clean energy transition to independence is challenged by the contradictions between the national goals and the local practices of violence and displacement. If the partition is associated with such profound harm, the public support for the new nations may erode over time.

# Case Studies in Boundary Demarcation and Strategic Competition

## The Lahore and Amritsar Chokepoint

One prominent pattern in the partition involves the strategic signaling around the cities of Lahore and Amritsar. These two primary urban areas are only twenty-five miles apart and were once part of a single economic and cultural ecosystem. The decision to bisect this system by awarding Lahore to Pakistan and Amritsar to India has turned them into strategic chokepoints.

The determination of the boundary in this region was dictated by the primary mandate of contiguous majority areas, but it also reflects the sensitivity to the needs of the Sikh community in Amritsar. Radcliffe's decision to award the eastern corner of the Lahore district to India was a form of administrative surgery that attempted to balance the communal claims. However, the result has been a permanent frontier of tension and the total removal of minorities from both cities.

## Gurdaspur and the Geopolitics of Access

Another recurring pattern concerns the contest over the Gurdaspur district. Gurdaspur has a very slim Muslim majority (51.1%), but it is strategically vital because it provides the only land access from India to the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Radcliffe's decision to award parts of this district to India is one of the most controversial aspects of the partition.

This case illustrates the use of the "other factors" clause to override the demographic mandate. While the decision was justified on the grounds of infrastructure and irrigation, its geopolitical implications for the future of Kashmir are widely recognized. The Gurdaspur award demonstrates how governance failures can stem from the prioritization of strategic depth over communal fairness, leading to long term conflict between the successor states.

## Ferozepur and the Irrigation Salient

The Ferozepur district provides a case study in the intersection of irrigation and strategic security. The district houses an army arms depot and contains the headworks of a canal system that irrigates the princely state of Bikaner. Initial drafts of the Radcliffe Line reportedly placed parts of Ferozepur in Pakistan, but a late stage alteration moved them into India.

This change has been the subject of bitter controversy and allegations of political interference by Mountbatten. It reveals how the administration of the partition can be influenced by the lobbying of powerful local actors and the strategic needs of the national leadership. The Ferozepur salient

remains a point of military insecurity and has prompted multiple conflicts between India and Pakistan over the control of the Sutlej waters.

## **Artisanal Mining of Identity and the Unintended Consequences**

The communalization of the princely states provides another instructive case. States like Patiala and Bahawalpur acted as "artisanal miners" of communal identity, providing support to their respective communities and facilitating the movement of refugees. While these states aimed to provide security, their actions often produced unintended consequences.

The presence of armed bands supported by the princely rulers accelerated the ethnic cleansing of the neighboring British districts. The use of jeeps and professional weapons by these bands turned the riots into a regular war of extermination. These cases underscore the limits of a decentralized governance model where local power centers can undermine the central administration's efforts to maintain order.

## **The Financial Scuttle and the Legacy of Debt**

Less visible but equally significant are the cases involving the division of the provincial treasury and the pension obligations. The hurried scuttle meant that there was no time for a detailed audit of the assets and liabilities of the province. Governments had to rely on rough estimates and provisional agreements.

This financial scuttle has reduced the policy flexibility of the new administrations and has obscured their long term obligations to their citizens. The lack of transparency in these financial arrangements has contributed to the perceptions of unfairness and has complicated the reconstruction efforts in both East and West Punjab. These patterns illustrate how the financial governance of the partition intersects with the territorial division in ways that are difficult to regulate through existing legal frameworks.

# Why Global and Local Cooperation is Structurally Difficult

## Sovereignty and the Control Over Strategic Geography

At first glance, cooperation on the partition of Punjab should be straightforward. Both India and Pakistan depend on the stability of the region and both face the risks of a total breakdown in order. Yet in practice, cooperation has remained limited and fragile. This difficulty reflects the deep structural features of the international system and the nature of the partition itself.

The most fundamental barrier is the principle of state sovereignty. In June 1947, the parties are focused on building sovereign nations, not on maintaining regional cooperation. Any commitment that limits their control over territory, water, or the army is viewed as a threat to their autonomy. Even when they recognize the shared risks of communal violence, they prioritize the preservation of their decision making freedom over collective solutions.

## Asymmetries Along the Regional Supply Chains

Cooperation is further complicated by the unequal distribution of power. Some districts host the population, others host the irrigation headworks, and still others host the industrial capacity. These asymmetries shape the incentives of the actors. The party that controls the headworks often benefits from the existing arrangements and resists reforms that threaten their advantage.

Such asymmetries also influence the negotiation dynamics within this committee. Delegates enter the discussion with different priorities and capacities, making consensus difficult even when their interests overlap. The party concentrated at the extraction of territory stage may seek greater value capture but lack the leverage to enforce changes. As a result, cooperation efforts often reflect existing power hierarchies rather than correcting them.

## Fragmented Institutions and the Lack of Trust

Another structural obstacle is the institutional fragmentation of the 1947 administration. The partition sits at the intersection of trade, environment, human rights, and security. Each of these domains is governed by different committees and sub committees with distinct mandates. No single institution integrates these perspectives into a coherent framework.

This fragmentation allows the parties to justify their actions under one regime while undermining the objectives of another. For example, the closure of a canal can be defended on technical grounds while primarily serving a strategic goal. Such overlaps create ambiguity and reduce the trust between the parties. The lack of transparency in the administration of the partition further intensifies these cooperation challenges.

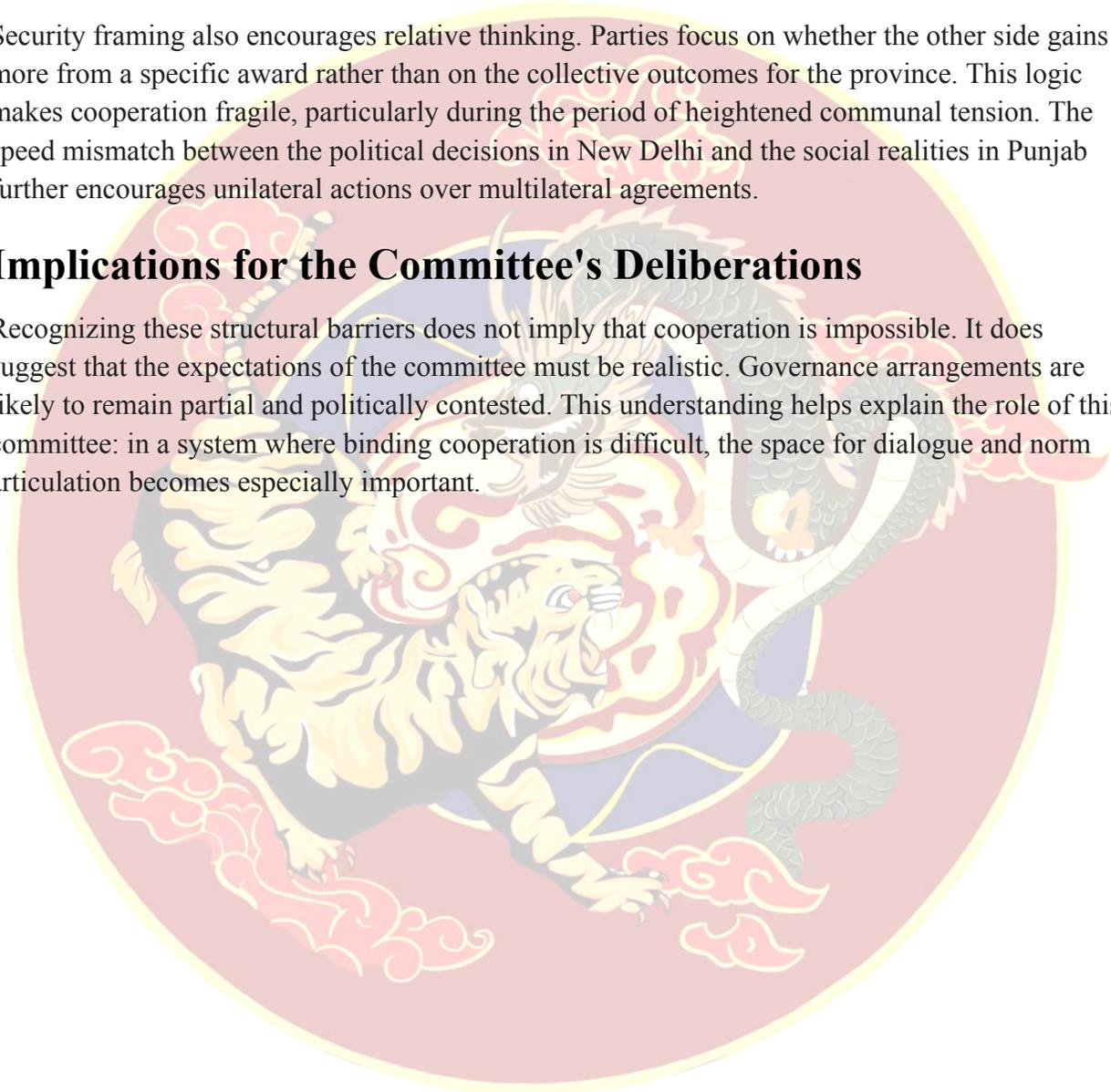
## **Security Framing and the Trust Deficit**

The securitization of the partition process declines transparency and makes information sensitive. Governments withhold data on their police movements, their reserve funds, and their strategic plans, fearing a disadvantage. This lack of predictability undermines the cooperative mechanisms that depend on shared information.

Security framing also encourages relative thinking. Parties focus on whether the other side gains more from a specific award rather than on the collective outcomes for the province. This logic makes cooperation fragile, particularly during the period of heightened communal tension. The speed mismatch between the political decisions in New Delhi and the social realities in Punjab further encourages unilateral actions over multilateral agreements.

## **Implications for the Committee's Deliberations**

Recognizing these structural barriers does not imply that cooperation is impossible. It does suggest that the expectations of the committee must be realistic. Governance arrangements are likely to remain partial and politically contested. This understanding helps explain the role of this committee: in a system where binding cooperation is difficult, the space for dialogue and norm articulation becomes especially important.



# **Key Governance Trade offs and Dilemmas in the Partition**

## **Administrative Urgency versus Human Security**

The most visible dilemma in the partition is the tension between the urgency of the British withdrawal and the security of the population. The hurried scuttle may be administratively efficient for the departing colonial power, but it is catastrophic for the minorities who are left without protection. Accelerating the transfer of power often increases the communal violence, as the regulatory oversight is weakened.

This dilemma is especially acute in the context of the 3 June Plan. The plan is promoted as the only way to prevent a civil war, yet its implementation has generated a human rights disaster. This creates a paradox where the effort to solve a political crisis contributes to a humanitarian one. Balancing the need for a quick exit with the obligation to protect the vulnerable remains the persistent challenge of this committee.

## **Territorial Integrity versus Communal Fairness**

Another central trade off involves the tension between maintaining the integrity of the irrigation and transport systems and the fair distribution of population. From an economic perspective, the province functions most efficiently as a single unit. However, the political reality of 1947 demands its division.

Diversification of the state and the creation of two administrations may reduce the political tension, but it increases the costs and leads to the duplication of services. When both India and Pakistan adopt similar resilience strategies simultaneously, the efficiency of the provincial economy declines and the competition intensifies. Measures that appear rational from a national perspective can collectively produce suboptimal outcomes for the people of Punjab.

## **Accountability versus Inclusion in the Recovery of Women**

The efforts to recover abducted women raise another set of trade offs. International and national pressure to recover these women has led to strict ordinances and recovery operations. While these measures aim to provide accountability for the violence, they can also exclude the voices of the women themselves.

Abrupt recovery actions can remove women from the new homes and families they have formed, even when those homes were established through violence. This dilemma illustrates the limits of a purely compliance based governance. Improving the social justice of the partition requires balancing the accountability for the crimes with the inclusion and self determination of the

victims. Policies that focus only on the national honor may shift the problem rather than resolve it.

## **Short term Pressure versus Long term Stability**

Partition policy is often driven by the short term pressure to meet the independence deadline and to respond to the communal riots. These pressures favor measures such as the use of the military to suppress violence and the fast tracking of the boundary award. However, the decisions made today will shape the environmental outcomes and the political relations of the subcontinent for decades.

Short term responses that overlook the long term consequences can lock in unsustainable practices and reduce the future flexibility of the successor states. The mismatch between the speed of the political decision and the long time horizons of the provincial administration complicates the governance. Balancing the urgency of the crisis with the foresight required for a stable future is a task that the committee must undertake.



# **Conclusion: What is Ultimately at Stake in the Punjab Partition**

## **The Legitimacy of the New National Order**

The partition of Punjab is the core of the 1947 crisis. It enables the creation of two new nations but also exposes the deep tensions within the international system. These tensions are not temporary disruptions; they reflect enduring questions about power, responsibility, and fairness. At one level, the debates in this committee appear technical, involving the division of assets and the placement of a line. Yet beneath these discussions lies a broader question about how the global community manages the shared dependence on essential resources during a time of crisis.

The legitimacy of the successor states depends on how they handle the partition. If the new nations are born in a bloodbath and their territories are defined by arbitrary surgery, their stability will be forever compromised. Legitimacy is not a moral abstraction; it affects the political stability and the long term security of the region. Addressing the challenge of legitimacy requires recognizing that the social and humanitarian concerns are not secondary to the partition; they are integral to its success.

## **Persistent Inequality and the Scars of Demarcation**

Another core issue is the persistent inequality in the distribution of the costs of partition. The border regions of Punjab bear the environmental and social burdens, while the strategic benefits accrue elsewhere. Efforts to correct these imbalances face structural constraints embedded in the global political economy. Without addressing these factors, the calls for a fair and peaceful partition risk remaining aspirational.

This inequality shapes the geopolitical narratives of the subcontinent. The "scars" left by the Radcliffe Line are so deep that even generations later, they remain raw. The decision to divide the country along religious lines has embedded communal hatred in the people and has damaged the shared cultural heritage of Punjab forever. The strong cultural heritage and the shared history of the province have been divided, and the wounds are still far from mended.

## **Law, Politics, and the Role of this Committee**

The legal framework of the 1947 transition provides important reference points, but it remains fragmented and unevenly enforced. The gap between the law and the political reality explains why the partition cannot be resolved through technical instruments alone. Politics determines how the legal boundaries are interpreted and contested.

In this context, the role of this committee is clear. We do not manage the entire world, but we govern the political space in which the partition takes place. By making the trade offs visible, articulating the shared principles, and maintaining a space for dialogue, the committee plays a vital role in shaping how these questions are approached. As the partition of Punjab continues to shape the future of South Asia, the way it is governed will reflect the character of the international system itself.



# Questions to Consider

What are the primary factors that make a province like Punjab "critical" during the decolonization process, and how does this affect the supply of security?

How does the concentration of irrigation infrastructure in specific districts create strategic chokepoints that complicate the territorial division?

In what ways has the securitization of the administration changed the behavior of the political leaders compared to the earlier periods of constitutional negotiation?

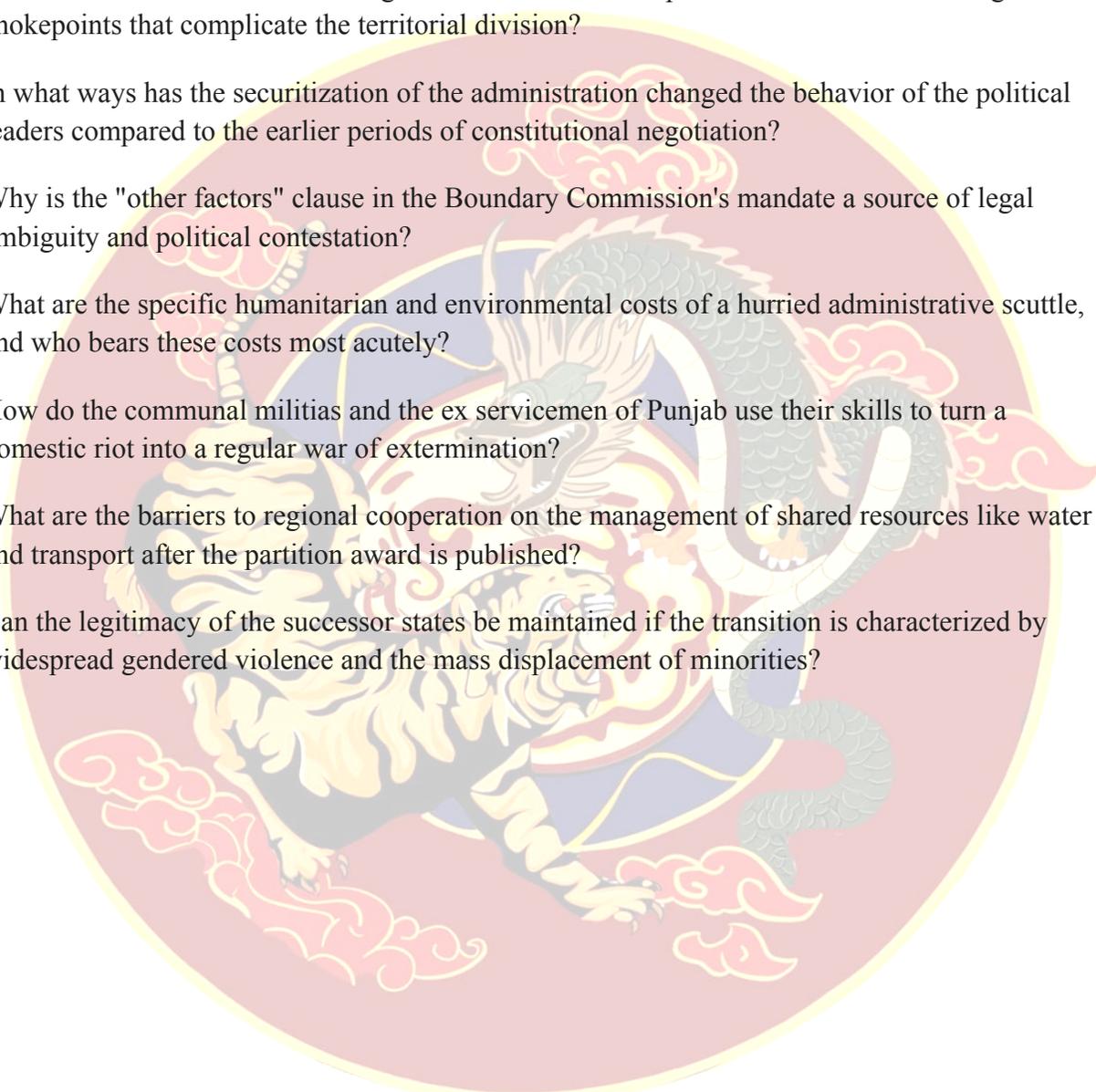
Why is the "other factors" clause in the Boundary Commission's mandate a source of legal ambiguity and political contestation?

What are the specific humanitarian and environmental costs of a hurried administrative scuttle, and who bears these costs most acutely?

How do the communal militias and the ex servicemen of Punjab use their skills to turn a domestic riot into a regular war of extermination?

What are the barriers to regional cooperation on the management of shared resources like water and transport after the partition award is published?

Can the legitimacy of the successor states be maintained if the transition is characterized by widespread gendered violence and the mass displacement of minorities?



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