Terrorism in South Asia: The "Two Nation Theory" and the Emergence of a New Pakistani State

The Pakistani state was born out of a communal concept called the "two nation theory." The "two nation theory," which was advanced by such people as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder, held that Muslims and Hindus were inherently separate peoples and that, as separate peoples or separate nations, they required their own individual states. Now, for much of these discussions surrounding the "two nation theory," it wasn't clear that you had to have two independent sovereign states, or whether this Muslim state could exist in some sort of federation with this Indian state.

However, as it became clear that the British were going to quit India, it seemed as if the only solution that the various parties could come to was that there was going to be an independent India as well as an independent Pakistan. Now, the British were very interested in getting out of India as soon as possible once they undertook the decision to quit India. And this meant that one of the largest transitions, or one of the largest movements of people, took place with very little security preparations. To give you some sense of the scale, approximately 11 million people left their homes in India to go to Pakistan, or left their homes in Pakistan to go to India.

The most important site of violence and partition took place in the state of the Punjab. The Punjab was divided between India and between Pakistan. The Punjab was always a multi-religious state. Even though most people were ethnically Punjabi, most people spoke Punjabi, you had in that province, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and a smattering of other religious groups as well, such as Ahmadiayya and Shia.

It was impossible to divide up the Punjab in any way that wouldn't require this massive dislocation of peoples. This massive dislocation did not happen without unimaginable violence. Sikhs slaughtered Muslims, Muslims slaughtered Sikhs and Hindus, and they used this communal violence as a way of cleansing neighborhoods as the separation of India and Pakistan loomed.

The events that happened during this partition have left very enduring scars and they passed many of these stories of the horrors of partition down to their children and to their grandchildren. It makes it very difficult to resolve the India-Pakistan dispute when you have this enormous shadow of the events of partition always looming in the background. And you should keep in mind that many of today's leaders are, of course, children of partition.

Once partition was achieved, the question then became, what was Pakistan going to be. The evidence does suggest that Jinnah did not expect that he was going to get, and therefore have
to shepherd through, a completely independent state. When Jinnah found himself in charge of this newly independent Pakistan, he wasn't exactly sure how to govern it. So this was the challenge of the new state.