



INDIA'S PALESTINE POLICY SINCE 1992

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SASMITA TRIPATHY

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Prof. S. Shamir Hassan

CENTRE OF WEST ASIAN STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

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India has had a consistent and unwavering record of support for the Palestinian cause since the days of its freedom struggle. During the pre-independence period, the Indian attitude was represented by the Indian National Congress and its prominent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi believed that Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. He rejected Zionism which was based on the assumption that the Jews all over world constitute a 'nation' and that by virtue of their religion alone they are the prospective citizens of Israel. For Nehru, Palestine "was not a wilderness or an empty uninhabited place. It was already somebody else home. He identified a similarity between the freedom struggles of India and the Palestinians on two grounds. First, both are national liberation movements against the British imperialism. Second, in India, the British sponsored the Muslim League to undercut Indian demands for independence. In Palestine, the British sponsored the Zionist movement to counter Arab claims for immediate independence. He suggested that only 'on the stable foundation of Arab-Jews cooperation and the elimination of imperialism" the future of Palestine could be secured. This, he suggested, required that the Jews abandon their exaggerated claims and seek peaceful accommodation with the Palestinians.

Thus the INC and its leaders had consistently taken the Arab side on the Palestine question and assessed the entire issue from the India's point of view. This is not without reason. One reason could be the Muslim population of India. This section of people had sympathised the cause of their co-religionists in Palestine. The

Congress could not ignore this fact. Another reason may be the Congress party's uncompromising stand against colonialism. The Palestinian Arabs were placed under the British colonial rule after First World War and were struggling against the colonial power. The Congress was thus brought closer to the Palestinians. It is also possible that the secularist approach of the Congress to politics could be one reason to oppose Zionism and sympathise with the Palestinians. The Congress vehemently advocated secular politics. This made it see Zionism as a movement based on religion. Moreover, Zionism was seen as a tool to be used by the colonial and imperial power, which the Congress could not tolerate.

India's historic and principled support to the Palestinian people during the freedom struggle continued even after independence. Moreover, Nehru's assumption of power as the first Prime Minister of India as well as the Foreign Minister of the country added continuity to its post-independent Palestine policy.

In the initial period, India's policy towards Palestine was consistently in conformity with the basic tenets of its foreign policy: anti-imperialism, anti-racism, support to the liberation struggles around the world, opposition to military occupation, solution of the international disputes through negotiation, a relentless struggle against neo-colonialism etc. In addition to these broad principles, India's position with regard to Palestine was also guided by the general consensus in the Arab world, the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations.

Indian stand on Palestine had also a pragmatic dimension. The partition of India and the creation of an exclusively Muslim state of Pakistan, the subsequent Kashmir problem, the Pakistani attempts to bring about a Pan-Islamic Alliance stretching from Turkey to Pakistan (the emergence of an Anti-India Islamic bloc with Pakistan as its leader) and the fear of the Indian leaders that the Muslim population

of India could identify with pan-Islamism that could rise out of the Arab-Israeli conflict influenced India to forge a conscious policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine. Nehru viewed this pan Islamic tendency as regressive and counterproductive as it could divide and weaken the movement of the Asian people against the imperialist states. Similarly, Nehru did not want Arab-Israeli conflict to affect the Muslim populace of India by giving additional boost to the pan-Islamic and separatist element among them.

India's provided support to the Palestine issue both at the international forums like the UN and NAM and at the bilateral level after the PLO emerged as a significant force in the post 1973 Arab Israeli war period.

In the UN General Assembly, India voted against the partition of Palestine along with the Arabs countries. Two reasons can be given for the Indian stand. First, since the leaders of the Indian National Congress were against the two nation theory and opposed the partition of India on religious ground, it then followed that India was against the partition of Palestine on such grounds. Second, since the Indian leaders had always supported the Palestinian Arabs, they were unable to take a stand against them all of a sudden. India therefore wanted the Jews and Arabs to work out their differences within one Federal State of Palestine but this was not possible since the relations between Zionists and Arabs were unbridgeable by that time.

Soon after its establishment on 14 May 1948, Israel applied for admission to the UN and the matter was put to vote. India's first reaction was to abstain but later India chose to vote against Israel. This was because 'India could not recognise a state which had been achieved through the force of arms and not through negotiations. India, however, recognised Israel on 17 September 1950, after more than years of its creation and after two Muslim majority countries, Turkey and Iran,

had accorded recognition. Nehru, however, made it clear that recognition did not mean endorsement of Israeli position on its frontiers and India would continue to support the cause of the Palestinians.

During the Suez Crisis in October 1956, India denounced Israeli aggression as a flagrant violation of UN Charter and in opposition to all principles laid down in Bandung Conference. India also cosponsored resolutions in the General Assembly urging the immediate withdrawal of French, British and Israeli forces from Egypt. Suez crisis had, however, brought in a major impact on India's policy perspective on West Asia. Though it did not make any direct implication on India's Palestine policy, it hardened India's attitude towards Israel and brought Egypt and India closer to each other.

The border dispute between the Arabs and Israel led to the escalation of another war in West Asia in 1967. Although the closure of Gulf of Aquaba by Nasser and the ordering of the withdrawal of United Nations Emergency Force were the immediate reasons for the escalations of war in 1967, India took a blatantly pro-Arab position during the crisis. At the UN where India was a non-permanent member of the Security Council, its representative, G Parthasarathy placed the responsibility for the 'grave situation' prevailing in West Asia's squarely on Israel. During the 1973 war, India also extended full support to the Arabs. Though Egypt and Syria had launched a coordinated attack on Israel, the Indian government held Israel responsible for encouraging the Arab countries to do so as Israel had refused to vacate the territories occupied by force.

Meanwhile, in the post-1973 war period, India gradually moved away from the policy of supporting individual Arab countries on Palestine issue to back the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by its Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Following the Algiers declaration, India co-sponsored a draft resolution in the UN General Assembly, on October 8, 1974 calling for the PLO's participation in the deliberations of the General Assembly on Palestinian issue. It was the continuous efforts of India and other like-minded countries the PLO acquired observer status in the UN in 1974. India also joined as a co-sponsor of General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism in November 1975.

As a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement, India also played a very important role in setting the NAM's anti-colonial agenda that included strong support to the liberation movements around the world including the one led by the Palestinians. In addition, India highlighted the problems of the Palestine people at different NAM summits starting from the first NAM summit at Belgrade in 1961 and also constantly supported the PLO in its diplomatic bid to become a full member of the NAM. It was also due to the continuous efforts of India and other Non-Aligned Nations, Palestine formally entered into the NAM as a full member in August 1976.

At the bilateral level, India decided to directly deal with the PLO. In 1969, the Al Fatah delegation visited India at the invitation of the Indian association for Afro-Asian solidarity. In December 1974, about 30 MPs demanded the granting of diplomatic status to the PLO to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the 'Palestine Revolution'. On January 10, 1975, India became the first Non-Arab country to recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and permitted it an independent office at New Delhi which paved the way for an official Palestinian presence in India. When Janata party came to power in 1977 after internal Emergency, there were speculations about a possible shift in India's Palestine policy. Belying all expectations, the Janata Government reaffirmed India's support to the Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular and was supportive of

any peace initiative between Arabs and Israel. In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a thumping majority and continued her support to the Palestinian struggle. Her Foreign Minister P.V Narasimha Rao announced in Parliament on 26th March 1980 that India had decided to accord full diplomatic recognition to the office of the PLO in New Delhi by upgrading its office to that of an embassy endowed with all diplomatic immunities and privileges.

In the Algiers Declaration of November 15, 1988, the PLO declared its belated acceptance of the 1947 partition plan and proclaimed the "state of Palestine." India became one of the first countries to recognize the state of Palestine and received PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as a head of state.

Though India has always extended full support to the Arabs on the Palestine issue, the Government of India's policy on the Arab Israel conflict remained a subject of deep dispute by the opposition political parties--- the right wing *Jan Sangh* and the *Swatantra* Party and the middle of the road *Praja-Socialist* Party (PSP) and the *Samyukta* Socialist Party (SSP)--, the national media and the informed Indian citizens. The Congress party itself was also divided on the issue and even senior cabinet ministers had been known to entertain serious reservations regarding the unqualified support extended by the Prime Minister and the External Minister to various moves made by the West Asian nations on different occasions. There are several reasons for opposing India's all out and automatic support for the Arab countries. The first reason was that when the chips were down between India and Pakistan, all Arab countries supported the latter irrespective of the merits of the dispute because of religious considerations. Another reason for opposition was that India's 'one sided' policy on Arab Israel conflict was inconsistent with its avowed foreign policy of non-alignment. The third criticism hinged on the concept of

reciprocity in international relations. The contention in connection with West Asia was that since most Arab countries took up a neutralist stance at the time of the Chinese aggression in 1962 and tended to side with Rawalpindi at the time of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 & 1971, New Delhi was under no moral obligation to support them in their dispute with Israel. The fourth reason for criticism was that if India clearly identified with one side in a conflict, it could hardly have any leverage in helping to bring about a settlement in the Arab Israel conflict. The fifth reason for opposing India's West Asia policy arose from the misplaced 'fear of the Government that if India displeased the Arabs, the latter would take the side of Pakistan and will eventually support Pakistan's demand for Kashmir. Finally, it was argued that the Arabs and the Palestinians had made a historic 'mistake' in rejecting the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which paved the way for the partition of the British-ruled mandate Palestine.

Although it is difficult to dismiss all the points mentioned above, the question is had India not followed a pro-Arab policy as it did over the years what would have been the consequences? Certainly the consequences of a change of policy would have been highly adverse for India. It would have earned the hostility of all Arab countries irrespective of their internal differences including India's trade relationship and oil imports from the region, confirmed the unhappy and erroneous impression in the Soviet bloc that India had for all practical purposes abandoned the policy of non-alignment, facilitated the task of Pakistani and Chinese diplomacy in isolating India in the Third World, created an anti-Soviet alliance of the Muslim countries of West Asia by the West with Pakistan cast in a leading role which would have acquired strong religious and therefore anti-India overtones and alienated the Muslim intelligentsia at home. However, the situation in West Asian witnessed a sea change when Iraq

invaded Kuwait in August 1990. It was during this period the Soviet Union was disappearing from the world map marking the era of unipolar world dominated by the United States, the remaining Super Power. In the meantime, the P.L.O. lost its political leverage on account of its support to Saddam Hussain. The United States took the initiative of holding international Middle East Peace Conference immediately after expelling Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991. This marked new era in West Asia due to different varieties of diplomatic manoeuvring. As a consequence to these developments, India also made drastic changes in its policy towards West Asia. It established full diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992, after 40 years it recognized that country.

The Rao Government's decision to normalize ties with Israel, however, did not happen all of a sudden. The move in this direction was undertaken in mid-1980 when Rajiv Gandhi, known for his non-ideological approach to foreign policy, met his Israeli counterpart Shimon Pares during the annual UN General Assembly session in September 1985. Other events such as hosting the Israeli team for the quarter-final of the Davis Cup Tennis Tournament in July 1987, his meeting with a group of Jewish leaders during his US trip in June 1988, the hosting of an-Anti Defamation League delegation as well as US Congressman Stephen Solarz in January 1989, all contributed towards a rethinking of his policy towards Israel. The kidnapping and murder of some Israeli tourists in Jammu and Kashmir in June 1991, just few days after Narasimha Rao assumed power, provided the Government an opportunity to deal with a humanitarian crisis along with the Israeli Government. On 16 December 1991, India voted with the majority of UN members in repealing the 1975 General Assembly Resolutions equating Zionism with racism. During this time, the Indian media, both electronic and print, started what could be termed as a concerted

campaign for normalization of relationship with Israel. Spearheaded by the well-known strategic expert-turned-academic C. Raja Mohan, the pragmatists saw normalization within the context of the emerging post-Cold War global order. They argued that the earlier justifications for an anti-Israeli policy had crumbled and urged India to recognise and capitalise the new Middle Eastern reality opened up by the 1991 Gulf War that dispelled any doubts as to where the loyalties of the oil-rich Arab monarchies laid, in spite of their many grievances against the United States and the Madrid Peace Conference. The country's opposition parties also maintained a pro-Israeli stand and kept a constant pressure on the government to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The traditionalists who strongly opposed any diplomatic move towards Israel and favoured status quo on moral and humanitarian grounds put forward equally powerful counter-arguments in this regard.

However, with the change of the international scenario caused by the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the United States as the only super power, the pragmatists got an upper hand in the foreign policy debate as the Government began negotiations over normalisation of ties with the Jewish state. Other factors like the liberalisation of the Indian economy, the change of PLO's strategy towards Israel, the start of the Middle East peace process, India's delinking of Pakistan from its Middle East policy, the rising problem of terrorism in the country and the change in India's domestic politics also influenced India's decision. The response and reaction to this decision was however different in different quarters. The commencement of diplomatic relationship was greeted both by the US and Israel. The Arab press greeted the news with a mute reaction mentioning that it was not 'unexpected and dramatic' since efforts had been building up in that direction over the last few months. However, in India, the reaction was

mixed. While the political parties like the BJP and Shiv Sena hailed the move, others such as the CPI, Janata Dal were critical of the move. Indian media, intellectuals and religious leaders were equally divided on the issue.

Although India's relation with Israel started at a low profile during the Congress regime, the relations between the two countries reached new heights during the BJP led National Democratic Alliance regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). When the United Progressive Alliance Government under the Congress leadership came to power in mid-2004, it decided to follow the same line of the policy adopted by the earlier NDA regime. The growing ties between India and Israel and its consequent effect on New Delhi's posture towards Palestine have generated another lively debate in the country. There are two different viewpoints on this issue. According to one view, India's growing ties with Israeli has neutralised its traditional support to the Palestine issue. The other view argues that India's friendship with Israel has not affected its support to the Palestinian cause. A careful examination of the whole issue makes two things clear: First, since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the world has changed dramatically and so also the perception and attitude of Arab countries towards Israel. This is evident in their recognition of Israel and participation in the Middle East peace process. India's changed posture towards Israel was the result of these altered circumstances. Second, there is a tendency among scholars to interpret everything through a zero-sum approach i.e., Palestine's gain is Israel's loss and vice versa. Palestinians would not get anything if India condemns Israel all the time and completely disengages the Jewish State. What is actually important is to use India's leverage vis-à-vis Israel and work towards a just and fair solution of the Palestine problem.

After establishing diplomatic relationship with Israel in 1992, India continued to support the cause of Palestine. At the political and diplomatic level, India provided strong support to the people of Palestinian in their quest for a sovereign, independent and viable state, economically India provided both material and technical support to the Palestinian government and its people in their search for nation-building. The Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat frequently visited India, so also other high level dignitaries. After Arafat's death, the new Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, accompanied by several ministers visited New Delhi in May 2005, October 2008 and in February 2010. From the Indian side, the Union Home Minister, the External Affairs Minister, the Minister of State for External Affairs and other senior officials visited Palestine.

Besides supporting the cause of Palestine through several bilateral visits, India also espoused the cause of Palestine at various international forums such as the UN and NAM. It also provided much needed economic, technical and humanitarian assistance to the PNA, especially after its establishment in 1994 in pursuance of the Oslo principles. India also continues to financially contribute to the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) for undertaking relief work in the occupied Palestinian territories from time to time. Besides, the Government of India has recognised the passport/ travel documents issued by the PNA and established a Representative Office to the Palestine National Authority which is working since June 1996 which was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

However, the Government's claim that it continues to provide diplomatic and political support to the Palestinians in their effort to have a separate homeland and help them in "the reconstruction of their nation" through economic, technical and humanitarian assistance from time to time, has not been shared by a number of

leaders, scholars, journalists and activists who on the contrary argue that India's support Palestine has now been reduced to mere statements, resolutions and occasional economic assistance. In other words, it is clear that India, under the given the circumstances, is no longer supporting the national struggle movements that it used to do in the past. In the garb of so called 'pragmatism', India is steadily getting sucked into the vortex of Western design and quagmire. Whether India is under the NDA or UPA rule, the Government has diluted the country's principled foreign policy for certain interests that are not going to pay it in the long run.

In addition to the Government support, the people of India have always come forward in support of the Palestine issue. This is evident from the numerous campaigns and demonstrations against Israel's actions in Palestine by several civil society groups from time to time. Moreover, frequent seminars and conferences have also been organised in the country in the recent past to raise awareness and garner support for the just cause of Palestine.

India has also played a limited role in the Middle East peace process to solve the problem of Palestine. It was invited to become a participant in the multilateral track of the Peace Process that began in 1991 and actively participated in all the five working groups discussing Middle East-Palestine question such as regional economic development, arms control and regional security and environment and water resources. India welcomed the mutual recognition by the State of Israel & the PLO and the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement on Palestinian self-rule on 13 September 1993. It welcomed the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement in Cairo on 4th May 1994 (also known as Gaza-Jericho Agreement). An Indian delegation led by the Minister of State for External Affairs, R.L Bhatia was present during the

signing ceremony. India also greeted the Oslo Interim Agreement (Oslo II) signed on 30th September 1995 and reiterated the view that durable peace in the region was necessary to resolve all outstanding issues to the satisfaction of all concerned parties. Terming the Wye River Memorandum signed between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on 23 October 1998 as 'an important milestone' in the stalled peace process, India supported its unconditional implementation. The Indian Trade and Industry Minister Ashwani Kumar participated in the Sharm El Sheikh summit in February 2005 between Israeli and Palestinian leaders to end the 2000 Intifada and resume negotiations under the roadmap.summit. India was invited as a participant in the Annapolis Conference which was held on November 27, 2007 and Kapil Sibal, the Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, represented the country at Annapolis.

In recent years, there is a growing perception that India should play a more direct and mediatory role in the Israel Palestine Peace process. While India has shown some interest in the regard and this is welcomed by the Israelis and the Palestinians, the domestic discourse on India's new role is sharply divided. There are four different discourses: the Radicals, the Nehruvians, the pragmatists and the status quoists. The Radicals want India to fully support the Palestine issue, end all cooperation with Israel and call for a combination of global isolation, sanctions and external pressure against the Jewish country by the international community. The Nehruvians want India to provide more vigorous support and play an active role in the peace process because unlike in the past, it is now in a better position to play such a role. They support an active role for India in the Palestine issue because the Palestinians are not only fighting for a just and humanitarian cause but there has also not been any change on the ground situation in the occupied territories. The

pragmatists, like the Nehruvians, want India to play a leading role in the peace process but for the sake of its own rising power profile and national interest. According to the status-quoists, India should not change its present policy of keeping a low profile in the Middle East peace process because such a posture better serves its national interests. In other words, the status-quoists maintain that India should continue to resist any temptation to play any overt role in the peace process as it helps to maintain normal ties with all parties to the Middle East conflict without forcing the country into unpleasant situations. In view of these differing perceptions, the real challenge for India in future would be to balance its domestic concerns with the actual requirements at its extended neighbourhood.



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*Dedicated to my
Parents,
Brothers &
Sisters*



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CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN STUDIES

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ALIGARH-202002 (U.P), India, Telephone: 0571-2700920-21, EPABX-1385 (Off.)


DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled as “**India’s Palestine Policy Since 1992**” submitted by me in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Aligarh Muslim University is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted to AMU or any other University for any other degree.


Sasmita Tripathy

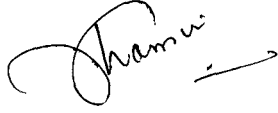
CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



Prof. S. Shamir Hassan
(Chairperson)
Chairman

Department of West Asian Studies
A.M.U., Aligarh-202002



Prof. S. Shamir Hassan
(Supervisor)
Research Supervisor
Centre of West Asian Studies
A.M.U., Aligarh

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Now that I am at the end of it all, there is an inescapable feeling welling inside me: the study could have been bettered.

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Sasmita
Sasmita Tripathy

ABBREVIATIONS

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IBSA	India Brazil and South Africa
ICCR	Indian Council for Cultural Relations
INC	Indian National Congress
JS	Jan Sangh
LAS	League of Arab States
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PNA	Palestine National Authority
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
SSP	Samyukta Socialist Party
UNO	United Nations Organisation
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNRWA	United Nations Relief Works Agency
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
WANA	West Asia and North Africa
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

India's foreign policy posture in recent years, particularly towards Palestine has been a subject of intense debate. India's growing relationship with Israel and its declining support to the Palestine issue has been seen as a fundamental shift in the Indian foreign policy exercise. Critics have accused the succeeding Indian governments during the past two decades of abandoning its independent foreign policy, of deviating from Nehruvian national consensus on the Palestine issue, and towing the pro-Israeli line. Supporters have argued that the shift in the orientation of Indian foreign policy in terms of its changed policy towards Israel bears the mark of "realism" and "pragmatism" and a more balanced approach to the Middle East that is dictated by the changed global circumstances and national interest. In view of this, there is an urgent need to understand India's actual policy posture towards Palestine especially after the establishment of full diplomatic relationship with Israel in 1992. However, before examining India's Palestine policy, it is important to know West Asia as a region, its importance for India and the genesis of Palestine question which is considered as the region's core issue and the source of instability in much of West Asia and the world.

West Asia (Southwest Asia) is a term that refers to the western most part of Asia. It broadly refers to those countries that are members of the League of Arab States, Israel (with its Jewish and Arab population), and the non-Arab countries of Turkey and Iran (which have small Arab populations). These countries are clustered into three sub regions. 1) North Africa, which includes the

countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, 2) The area along the eastern part of the Mediterranean is the Fertile Crescent (Levant of the colonial times) that includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as non-Arab Turkey to the north. 3) Lastly, the oil-producing countries of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, namely, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen and the non-Arab, Persian state of Iran¹. The UN also includes Armenia and Azerbaijan (parts of Caucasus) in its extensive categorization of West Asia.

The debates questioning the logic behind the clustering of countries, which are as varied historically and culturally, as Iran, Turkey, Israel, Somalia, Yemen and Tunisia under a single category (Middle East/ West Asia) arose from time to time. Yet, the grouping (West Asia) does have an underlying principle, as the category of nations do share historical experiences in the spread of Islam, the reach of the Ottoman Empire and the experiences of European colonialism. The point, here, is not to settle on a better or more accurate category but, as Schwedler and Gerner (2008) have pointed out, to recognize the myriad ways in which the region coheres as a whole around some issues, less so around others².

Contemporary West Asia is differently portrayed by different people. Some emphasise the importance of the region in world politics especially for its geo-

¹ "Perspectives on West Asia: Its Evolution as an Area of Study in the Changing Geopolitical Discourses", Concept Note prepared by the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata, 17-18 January 2011 at: http://www.makaias.gov.in/concept_note_west_asia_seminar.pdf

² Jillian Schwedler and Deborah Gerner eds. *Understanding the Contemporary Middle East*. Lynny Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2008 at <https://www.rienner.com/uploads/4934147ec4983.pdf>

strategic location (the entire region acts as a link among the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Red Sea, Atlantic Ocean and Indian Ocean and connects two hemispheres and four continents), vast oil resources and as the cradle of three world religions namely Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Others typically portray it as a region of intrigue and war, the cradle of terrorism and religious extremism. Journalists more often than not report stories of conflict and dispute, abuse of power and privilege accompanied by anxious calls for reform and political change.

India and West Asia:

India considers West Asia as its *extended* neighbourhood and shares civilisational, historical and cultural ties with the West Asian countries. Not only did Arabs and Indians know each other before the advent of Islam but it is said that the Arabs even played a crucial role in the emergence of the very notion of "Hindustan" and even in giving a name to the religion of Hinduism³. India's cultural links with West Asia can be traced to the early years of recorded history. There is evidence, for instance, of trade links between the Harappan civilization and that of Dilmun in the Gulf. In pre-Islamic times, Arab traders acted as middlemen in trade between Bharuch in Gujarat and Puduchery and the Mediterranean through Alexandria and even through the Palakkad gap as evidenced in archaeological finds of Roman coins and artifacts in southern India.

³ "New Dimensions of Indo-Arab Relations", Inaugural Address by Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor at an International Seminar at Maharaja College, Ernakulam, 11 August 2009 at: <http://tharoor.in/speeches/inaugural-address-by-mos-dr-shashi-tharoor-at-international-seminar-on-new-dimensions-of-indo-arab-relations/>

And it is no accident that so many distinguished Arab families in many different Arab countries bear the surname al-Hindi, or that Hind is still a desirable name used by many Arab women.

Some scholars trace Indian studies on the hadith to the early days of the arrival of Islam in India in the South in the 7th century and in the north in the 8th century AD. Islamic scholars from the turn of the 8th Century AD to al- Baruni (d.1048 AD) have, in their writings, documented Indo-Arab cultural links, including Indian contributions to Arab thought and culture. Translations of Indian works were sponsored by the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad where, especially under Harun al-Rashid, Indian concepts in secular subjects ranging from medicine to mathematics and astronomy were absorbed into the corpus of Arab scientific writing. Scholars have also documented the compilation of a large number of Indian works in Quranic studies over the last 500 years as also in Islamic jurisprudence over a slightly longer period. Perhaps less remembered today is the contribution of Indians to Islamic scholarship in the medieval period. Amongst notable scholars was Shah Waliullah of Delhi and his descendants.

Travellers between India and the Arab world were the vehicles not only for scholarly exchanges but also for cultural interaction at a popular level. Much of the Sufi tradition is the result of Indo-Arab interaction and Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, whose shrine at Ajmer is visited by people of many faiths, was himself an Arab. Over centuries, stories from the Panchatantra have blended with the Fables of Aesop and stories from Alf Laila wa Laila or the Arabian Nights. According to Liaqath Ali, many Arabic words can be found in several languages

particularly in Hindi and Urdu. Similarly, the Arabs themselves acknowledge that they learned from India what are known in the West as Arabic numerals.

The age old civilisational ties between the two regions matured into a full-blown multi-dimensional relationship during the medieval period. There was regular interaction between the Mughal Empire in India and the Safavid and Ottoman empires in West Asia. The contours of such interaction extended to a variety of fields⁴. The colonization of the Indian subcontinent by the British gave a new dimension to the relationship. At one level, the strategic importance of West Asia increased as never before for Great Britain to preserve its empire in India while at another; there was a sufficient scaling down of commercial transactions between the two regions. After India became an independent country, there was a qualitative change in the relationship between the two regions.

For a variety of reasons, West Asia has become important for India's foreign policy. First, the West Asian region functions as a bridge between India and other continents and regions like Europe, Africa, and Central Asia through land as well as prominent sea routes⁵. Major ports like Aden (Yemen), Bandar Abbas (Iran), Basra and Umm Qasar (Iraq) and port Said (Egypt) serve as transit points for Indian goods not only to West Asia itself but also to other regions and vice versa. Further, the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Suez Canal provide the shortest sea routes between India and Europe by linking the Arabian Sea with the Mediterranean Sea. Mention may also be made about other international

⁴ For a detail account see Maqbul Ahmad, *Indo-Arab Relations*, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi 1978.

⁵ Bansidhar Pradhan, "Changing Dynamics of India's West Asia Policy" *International Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2004, pp. 2-3.

water ways in the West Asian region like the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, Bab el-Mandeb etc. Developments in the region naturally have a direct bearing on India's economy as well as national security.

Second, the presence of huge amounts of oil and natural gas in West Asia (it provides some 40% of global energy requirements today) is yet another factor that makes the region strategically very important for India. India imports almost 70 per cent of its energy needs from West Asia and this dependence on the region will only increase as India becomes one of the largest energy consumer in the world due to rise in population, rapid economic growth and industrialization.

Third, West Asia also provides a good and thriving market for various Indian commodities like tea, pulses, rice, wheat, dairy products etc. Bilateral trade has assumed added importance in view of the economic liberalization on both the sides. As a group, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is India's second largest trading partner. It is the largest single origin of imports into India and the second largest destination for exports from India. During 2007-2008, the total two-way trade between India and the Gulf region was US\$ 76 billion⁶. To further strengthening and deepening of this relationship, India and the GCC are negotiating an India-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) although there are differences over whether oil should be part of the agreement or not.

Fourth, the discovery of oil and manpower shortages in the Gulf precipitated phenomenal labour migration to the region. Given the population pressure and bleak economic prospects at home, Indian laborers flocked to the

⁶ Tharoor, "New Dimensions of Indo-Arab Relations", *op cit.* No. 3.

Gulf in search of employment and higher wages. Currently, around 6 million Indians live in the Gulf and West Asia⁷, making them one of the largest expatriate community in the region. The Indian expatriate community can be categorized into four broad groups, viz., (a) unskilled workers, employed in construction companies, municipalities, agricultural farms and as domestic workers; (b) skilled and semiskilled workers; (c) professionals, such as doctors, engineers, accountants, employed in government and private sectors; and (d) businessmen.

The Indian Diaspora serves as a major source of India's foreign exchange reserves through remittances in hard currency. The World Bank in its 'Migration and Remittances Fact Book 2011' Report estimated that India was the largest recipient of the remittances from Diaspora in 2010 followed by China and Mexico. The report further said that remittances flow to India was expected to increase to \$58 billion in 2011, compared to around \$55 billion in 2010⁸. Of the total remittance inflows of \$52 billion sent by expatriate Indians in 2010, the West Asian economies had a share of 48% or \$26 billion⁹. The remittances of expatriate Indian workers in the Gulf have contributed significantly to India's economic resurgence even as there have been growing concerns in recent years

⁷ Text of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Speech at the Tenth Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas in Jaipur, January 8, 2012 at: <http://www.pravasitoday.com/read-complete-text-of-pm-manmohan-singhs-speech-at-2012-pravasi-bhartiya-divas>

⁸ *Migration and Remittances Fact Book 2011*, Report of the World Bank at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resources/Factbook2011-Ebook.pdf>. Also see "Are Africans Replacing Indian Workers in Gulf?", *Business Today*, December 25, 2011

⁹ "West Asia Unrest Could Lead to Fall in Remittances to India", *Financial Express*, Feb 23, 2011 at: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/west-asia-unrest-could-lead-to-fall-in-remittances-to-india/753590/0>

about their living and working conditions in the host countries. Towards this end, India is pursuing manpower and labor agreements with Gulf States intended to help Indian workers in the region. In addition, the Indian workforce has been instrumental in sustaining and strengthening the centuries-old socio-cultural links between India and the West Asian region. Moreover, India hosts the second-largest Muslim population in the world which remains interested in Saudi Arabia as the site of the holy shrines at Mecca and Medina.

Fifth, as a rising major power, India considers West Asian region very important in shaping its political, economic, defence and security policies at both the regional and global level. For instance, an India that grows at 7 to 9 per cent will increasingly depend on natural resources from other countries to sustain higher levels of prosperity at home. Resource security will also involve developing special political relationships with the key resource rich nations and the military capabilities to protect the sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean. India also has an interest in preventing hostile powers from either denying access to resources or disrupting the maritime trade routes. As India globalizes, the size of its diaspora will continue to expand and place new demands on protecting its expatriates in the region. India has a high stake in preventing the emergence of failed states in the region which in turn could become havens of international terrorism and religious extremism. Given its own large Muslim population, India would like to see the evolution of the Gulf towards political modernization and religious moderation. India would also prefer to see the Gulf States avoid siding with Islamabad in its disputes with New Delhi and keep away from the internal

politics of the Indian Subcontinent¹⁰. In pursuing these expansive interests in the region, New Delhi has institutionalised bilateral relations with key West Asian countries, deepened commercial ties, expanded energy partnerships and increased political interaction at the highest levels.

Is India important for West Asia? The answer is certainly yes. First, India's location at the base of continental Asia and the top of the Indian Ocean gives it a strategic location in Eurasia as well as among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean from East Africa to Indonesia. India's peninsular projection in the ocean gives it a stake in the security and stability of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) which is crucial for oil trade – the lifeblood of Gulf economies¹¹. Second, India's credibility and role as a “neutral” player in Asia may serve Gulf interests in managing their emerging security and strategic objectives. Unlike the US and other European powers that tie security cooperation with sensitive issues such as human rights, democracy and regime change, India is viewed, even in the Gulf, as a non-interfering partner to align with¹². Third, in many areas, the Gulf countries have the capital, while India offers the opportunities, especially for the development of infrastructure. Moreover, India has developed experience and expertise in key areas such as institution and capacity building, governance, science and technology including Information Technology, space technology and

¹⁰ C Rajamohan, “India's Strategic Challenges in the Indian Ocean and Gulf” in *India's Growing Role in the Gulf: Implications for the Region and the United States*, Monograph jointly published by the Gulf Research Center, Dubai and The Nixon Center, Washington D.C, October 27, 2009 at: www.cftni.org/Monograph-Indias-Growing-Role-in-the-Gulf.pdf

¹¹ Samir Pradhan, “India's Economic and Political Presence in the Gulf: A Gulf Perspective” in *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

biotechnology, healthcare and higher education which could prove crucial for the economic development of the West Asian countries. Finally, India's model of a secular and democratic polity and its commitment to ensuring minority rights has a great attraction in today's West Asia where religious and cultural differences amongst the diverse ethnicities have been exposed¹³.

In view of all the above, India has a stake in the peace and stability in West Asia which is evident from the fact that it is the only region for which the Government of India had appointed a Special Envoy. However, of several issues that trouble the region, the Palestine question is considered as the region's core issue and the source of instability in much of West Asia and hence it is important understand the genesis of this problem.

The Genesis of the Palestine Question

History, and different perceptions of history, is perhaps the most important factors in the Israeli Palestine conflict. Accounts of history, interpreting history in different ways, are used to justify claims and to negate claims, to vilify the enemy and to glorify "our own" side. Dozens of accounts have been written. Most of the accounts are intended to convince rather than to inform. This very brief account is intended as a balanced overview and introduction to Palestinian and Israeli history, and the history of the conflict.

Palestine takes its name from the Philistines—a sea people from Crete and Asia Minor, who lived in the area around 1300 B.C. Around 1000 B.C, the

¹³ Rajendra M Abhyankar ed. *West Asia and the Region: Defining India's Role*, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2008, p. 64.

Israelite King David defeated the Philistines and set up an independent Jewish kingdom of Israel with Jerusalem as capital. This first independent kingdom provided the religious and emotional basis for the persistent Jewish interest in Palestine and the Zionist claims to the area in late 19th century¹⁴. After the death of David's son Solomon, the kingdom got divided into two parts: Israel and Judah which eventually fell to invaders, after which Palestine experienced a succession of foreign rulers.

About 61 B.C., Roman troops under Pompei invaded Judea made it a client state of Rome. The Romans called the large central area of the land, which included Jerusalem, *Judea*. According to Christian belief, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, Judea, in the early years of Roman rule. Roman rulers put down Jewish revolts in about A.D. 70 and A.D. 132 which attempted to restore independence and retain their 'promised land'. In A.D. 135, the Romans drove the Jews out of Jerusalem, following the failed Bar Kochba revolt after which the Jews existed in dispersal. The Romans named the area *Palaestina*, at about this time. The name *Palaestina*, became Palestine in English afterwards¹⁵.

In the fourth century A.D, Christianity became the state religion of the region after the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. Jerusalem enjoyed the official patronage and protection as a result; it became the most important

¹⁴ Bansidhar Pradhan, *From Confrontation to Hostile Intimacy: PLO and the US*, Sehrog Prakashan, New Delhi, 1994, p.1.

¹⁵ "Palestine" in Carl L. Bankston ed. *World Conflicts: Asia and the Middle East*, Salem Press, INS, 2003.

pilgrimage centre for the Christians. The Roman rule over Palestine lasted till early seventh century. Around A.D 614, Jerusalem was taken over by the Persians which remained under their rule for fourteen years. The Persians were defeated by the Byzantines who ruled Jerusalem for a short period of time. In A.D 622, Prophet Mohammed made his famous flight from Mecca to Medina and his teachings of Islam united the Arabs. The Arabs defeated the Byzantines in A.D 634 & 636. During the Muslim rule, a vast majority of the people of Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq were converted to Islam and adopted Arabic as their language. Another significant development that took place during the first phase of the Muslim rule was that in A.D 688, the 9th Caliph built a mosque on the site of the Jewish temple, called the Dome of the Rock.

In A.D 1099, Crusaders from Western Europe conquered Palestine which they called as the 'Holy Land' and held it for almost 150 years when it was recaptured by the Arabs. In 1516, the region fell to the Ottoman Turks, who kept it until the end of the World War I. During mid-1890, an Austrian-Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl called for a meeting of the Jewish leaders from all over the world and proposed that they help establish a homeland for Jews in Palestine.

The movement for resettling Jews in Palestine was called Zionism¹⁶. During the period between 1897 and 1914, several thousand Jews immigrated to Palestine, financed in part by Lord Rothschild, a Jewish banker living in England. In 1917, with World War I hanging in the balance, members of the British Government made two contradictory commitments. Arthur Balfour issued the famous Balfour Declaration¹⁷, which promised British aid in establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine in return for large loans from Jewish Banking houses that the British desperately needed to finance their participation in World War I. Almost simultaneously, a British Army Officer named Thomas Lawrence, best known as 'Lawrence of Arabia', promised independence to the Arabs of the Middle East in return for their help against the Ottoman Empire. Lawrence's promise stirred Arab nationalism.

After World War I, the League of Nations awarded Great Britain three mandates in the Middle East: Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq. Mandate Palestine was about 150 miles long and 80 miles wide, stretching from the Mediterranean on the West to the Arabian Desert on the East and from the Litani River on the North to the Egyptian border in the south. The British officials agreed to prepare the mandates for self-government, which accorded with the promise made by Lawrence. At the same time, the British began

¹⁶ For an excellent account of Zionism see Alain Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation. Zionist Thought and the Making of Modern Israel*, Hurst & Co, London, 2003 and Shamir Hasan, *Emergence of Political Zionism* Centre of West Asian Studies, AMU, Aligarh, 1990 and "Zionism, The Big Three and the Partition of Palestine", *Journal of West Asian Studies*, 1987-88, pp. 80-99.

¹⁷ For a detail analysis of the Balfour Declaration see Mid East Website at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/mebalfour.htm>

allowing the immigration of thousands of Jews to Palestine, in accordance with the Balfour Declaration. The influx of Jews angered many Palestinian Arabs, who expected to form their own nation. Almost immediately, violence broke out between Jews and Palestinians and against the British officials in Palestine. The violence escalated during the period between the two World Wars, with both sides forming paramilitary guerrilla units and carrying out acts of terrorism against each other. After Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, many European Jews began to emigrate to Palestine to escape the Nazi prosecution. This increased influx of Jews angered many Arabs in Palestine who accelerated their violent attacks on Jews. Jewish paramilitary units retaliated¹⁸.

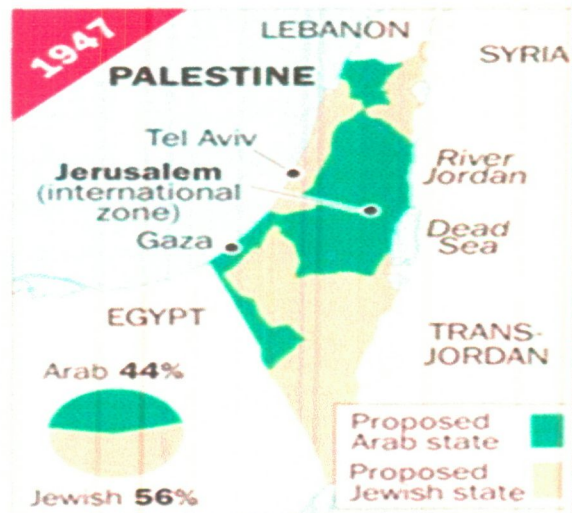
Tired of World War II, at odds with the Zionists and Arabs, and facing growing disorders in its mandated territory, the British government decided to take the Palestine question to the United Nations (UN). On 29 November 1947 the UN General Assembly voted to recommend the partition of Palestine into two states for Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Israel was created in 1948 on the basis of the UN partition plan. The Arabs objected to the creation of the Jewish state and fought a war against it. The Arab side lost the war, and the Palestinian state never really came into being. The territory allotted to the Palestinian state by the UN partition resolution was taken over by Israel and Jordan. About 780, 000 Palestinians became refugees, many of them living in the Gaza strip as well as in

¹⁸ For more on this see "Israel, Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Arab-Israeli Conflict) - A Brief History" - Part I & II, Middle East Web at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory.htm>

LAND IN DISPUTE



Palestine before creation of Israel



UN partition plan for Jewish and Arab states. Rejected by Arabs



Limits of newly-created Israel



Victory in Six-Day War vastly expands Israeli-controlled territory



Oslo agreements give control of some land to new Palestinian Authority



Israeli government seeks to impose final borders by 2010

the West Bank. Some also fled to the neighbouring Arab states of Jordan and Lebanon where they lived in appalling conditions in refugee camps. What followed afterwards is discussed in the subsequent Chapters.

Review of Literature:

The publicly available literature on the subject can be broadly divided in four different categories: Literature on Israel and Palestine and the conflict and peace process between them, Literature on India's Foreign Policy especially policy towards West Asia and North Africa (WANA), Literature on India-Israel Relationship and Literature on India-Palestine Relationship.

A number of works are there on Israel which provides an overview of the history and the nature of the Jewish state. Most important works include Kallen (1921), Herzl (1943), Magnus (1956), Eytan (1958), Helpern (1961), Ben-Gurion (1971), Brecher (1972), Avimor (1991), Goldberg (1996), Dowty (1998), Ellis (2002), Dieckhoff (2003), Nimni (2003), , Jansen (1971), Karsh (2004), Maoz (2006) etc.

Scholars who have contributed for an understanding of the history of Palestine and the quest for its statehood include Jaffries (1939), Crossman (1947), Hodawi, (1967), Cattan (1969 &1973), Abu-Lughod (1971), Darwaza (1973), Kazzinha (1979), (David 1980), Arnonchana (1981), Knight (1983), Dasgupta (1988), Doumani (1995), (Aburish (1998), Friedman, (2000), Gelber (2001), Ghanem (2001), Hatina (2001), Carter (2006), Cook (2008), Arthur (2011) etc.

There is a lot of literature on Arab-Israel conflict. Most important works include Bustain (1958), Gabby (1959), Burns (1962), Binder (1964), Khuri (1969), Dupuy (1978), Bhutani (1980), Bregman & El-Tahri (1998), Chomsky (1999), Karsh (2002), Finkelstein (2003), Hirst (2003), Harms (2005), Herzog (2005), Gelvin (2007), Fraser (2008) etc. The studies on Israel Palestine peace process include Dayan (1981), Bailey (1990), Corbin (1994), Abbas (1995), Aggestam (1999) Beilin (1999), Eran (2002), Agha, Hussein, Shai Feldman, Ahmad Khalidi, and Zeev Schiff (2003), Abunimah (2006), Golan (2007) etc.

There is a long list of literature on India's foreign policy which provides a detail account of foreign policy making and policy posture towards the outside world. Most important works include: Murti (1953), Karunakaran (1958), Prasad (1962 & 1979), Brecher (1968), Das (1969), Vajpayee (1979), Bandyopadhyaya (1984), Appadorai (1985), Appadorai & Rajan (1985), Kapur (1994), Dixit (1996 & 1998), Mansingh (1998), Jetly (1999), Dutt (1999), Gujral (2003), Rajamohan (2003), Koshy (2006), Pant (2009), Sikri (2009), Ganguly (2010), Malone (2011) etc.

Studies on India's policy towards West Asia and North African region are quite large and growing. Most important works are: Bhargava (1967), Rao (1972), Ahmad (1978), Gopal & Gopal (1981), Farooqi (1989), Heptulla (1991), Grover (1992), Ward (1992) Hamid (1993), Singh (1993), Mudiam (1994), Pasha (1995 & 1999), Panjabi (1998), Khan (1999), Blyth (2003), Pant (2003), Dubey (2005), Alam (2008), Malik (2008), Abhyankar, (2008) etc.

Some scholars have extensively researched on India-Israel relationship. Important works include: Hamid (1978), Hasan (1990), Bhanumathy (1997), Mohapatra (1998) Bachar (2002), Berman (2002), Nair (2004), Riaz (2006), Gopal & Sharma (2007), Benkin (2008), Gerbergv (2009 & 2010), Kumarswami, (2010) etc. All the studies mentioned above are good sources of information as they provide some preliminary explanations of the Palestine question and India's policy towards Palestine but they are limited in their scope.

Some specific literature on India's Palestine policy is there. Important works include: Dewan (1966), Gordon (1975), Muslih (1992), Dasgupta (1994), Pradhan (1998 & 2008), Dadwal (1998), Cherian (2000), Karat (2002), Vincent (2007), Khan (2007), Cheema (2008), Hasan (2008), , Hasan (2008), Mohiddin (2010), Ibrahim (2011), Sajad (2011) etc. But there are a number of shortcomings with these works. First, these are mainly book chapters, research papers, articles and event related writings. What is surprising is the fact that although India has had a long history of support to the Palestine cause, there is not even a single book on India's Palestine policy. This becomes more frustrating when one looks at several good books on India Israel relationship although normalization of ties between the two states started only in 1992. Second, whatever little works are there, these are already overtaken by the important events in India-Palestine relationship. Third, these works are mainly descriptive in nature. This study not only tries to fill up the gap mentioned above, it also looks at the issue from a new perspective i,e it analyses one issue from different angles. Moreover by contesting the conventional wisdom relating to various

aspects of India's Palestine policy, it identifies the areas for further research and policy review.

Research Methodology

This study is based on extensive literature survey gleaned from both primary and secondary sources of information. The Researcher has consulted the literature mainly from two sources: a) print resources and b) online resources. She has visited prominent Universities and research institutions in the country for relevant library and archival resources. They include West Asia Department Library, Maulana Azad Library, AMU, JNU Library, IDSA Library, Teen Murthy Library and selected research institutions like IPCS, CPR, ORF etc. Several useful websites were used for scholarly online resources on India's Palestine policy. Most important of them include: the WWW Virtual Library (<http://vlib.org>), the South Asia Resource Access on the Internet (www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/southasia/cuvl/), the United Nations, the President of India, the Parliament of India, the Ministry of External Affairs, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Representative Office of India in Palestine, the MideastWeb etc. These websites contain useful official documents and several secondary sources of information.

The researcher has used Historical Method, Comparative Method and Analytical method to conduct this study. Historical Method has been used to study India's support to the Palestine question right from the pre-independence period. By using the Comparative Method, I have tried to ascertain whether the establishment of diplomatic relationship with Israel has neutralized India's

support to Palestine or not. The Analytical Method is used to critically examine different viewpoints related to the theme under study.

Chapter Outline

For a better understanding of the study, the thesis has been divided into five chapters followed by a brief conclusion, each with its defined scope within the main body of discussion. A brief introduction of each chapter is given below.

The first chapter briefly surveys India's posture towards Palestine during the pre-independence era. It especially focuses on the role and views of the Indian National Congress and its top leadership such as Gandhi and Nehru on the Israel Palestine Question.

The second Chapter analyses India's Palestine policy from 1947 to 1992 when India established diplomatic relationship with Israel. India's support to Palestine at the United Nations, Non-Aligned Movement and the Palestine Liberation Organisation are discussed in this chapter. An effort has also been made to present the unofficial view of India's Palestine policy.

The third chapter analyses the public discourse that led to India's diplomatic recognition to Israel, the international and domestic response to this important political decision and the impact of the growing ties between India and Israel on India Palestine relationship.

The fourth chapter discusses on India Palestine relationship from 1992 to 2012. It deals with India's political, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian help to Palestine at the bilateral and multi-lateral levels. This chapter also examines the gulf between Government's claim for an all-out support to the Palestine issue and the perception that exists among a number of leaders, scholars, journalists and activists who challenge this claim.

The last chapter examines India's role in the Israeli Palestine peace process. It looks India role in all the stages of the conflict: role before 1991, role after the Madrid conference and the possibility of a mediatory role in future in the Middle East peace process. The conclusion presents the main arguments and research findings.

INDIA AND PALESTINE IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

This chapter briefly surveys India's posture towards Palestine during the pre-independence era. An enquiry of the colonial period is necessary for two reasons. First, India's thinking and perceptions during the freedom struggle especially the views of the Indian National Congress (INC) and its top leadership had a direct impact on many of her post-independent policy postures in the global and regional contexts¹⁹. This is best explained in the case of Palestine. Second, a peep into the colonial era would shed light on India's approach to the Palestine question especially the history of India's commitment to the Palestine cause, the principles that have moulded India's approach and the rationale of such a policy posture.

It is however instructive to note that during the colonial period, India had no foreign policy of its own. It was meant to serve the colonial interest of the occupying power. During this period the real projection of the country's worldview was made by the INC which passed resolutions and made demands on international affairs expressing the aspirations of the Indian people. Like the leaders of most of the countries of West Asia, the Indian political leaders were engaged in the common struggle against imperialism, hence there grew a strong

¹⁹ For more on INC's perception's on world affairs see Bimal Prasad, *The Origin of India's Foreign Policy: Indian National Congress and World Affairs: 1885-1947*, Bookland Pvt. Ltd, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 14-57.

feeling of affinity and solidarity among these peoples. INC's involvement in the affairs of the region was through two specific issues—the *Khilafat* Movement and the Palestine question.

(a) The INC & the Khilafat Movement

It was the first occasion on which the INC had taken a specific interest on a foreign issue. The issue brought up a profound impact on Muslims all over the world, since they maintained a unique and grave concern over the issue. The situation was not at all different in India also. Hence the INC and its leaders thought it as an issue capable of forging unity between the Hindus and the Muslims²⁰.

The entire issue of *Khilafat* was unfolded during the First World War, when Turkey joined the German side in fighting Britain. This put the Indian Muslims in an intrinsic position, as they were torn between their fears about the fate of the Caliphate and their loyalty towards the British. The British Government in turn, took pains to assure the Indian Muslims that Turkey would get a fair deal in any post-war settlement.

However, the armistice which ended the war not only deprived Turkey of its land but also landed the Sultan under the control of the Allied Powers. The Sultan of Turkey or Caliph, being the spiritual head of the Muslims of the entire world over, the Khilafat Movement was launched aiming at defending the Caliphate.

²⁰ For a more perceptive analysis on the Khilafat Movement and its implications for the Indian freedom struggle see A.C Neimeijer, *The Khilafat Movement in India 1919-1924*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1972.

The INC took the issue into its hearts and expressed solidarity, sorrow and sympathy of all Indians towards the fate of Turkey. At the annual session of the Congress in 1922, its President, R.N Mudholkar, referred to the matter and at the next session of the INC in 1923 its President Nawab Syed Mohammed Bahadur made further reference to the troubles of the Islamic world outside India and the anxiety that caused among the Indian Muslims²¹.

However, the emergence of Gandhi in the Indian freedom movement brought drastic changes in the programmes and strategies of the INC. Realising the domestic situation in India; he left no stone untouched in taking up the Khilafat issue. He criticised the authorities for "moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immorality"²². Further, the Non-Co-operation Resolution adopted by the INC at its Calcutta (Kolkata) session in 1920 emphasized the importance of the Khilafat issue for the Indian Muslims and exhorted the other Indians to extend support to their Muslim brothers in their hours of trial and agony.

Incorporating this particular issue into Gandhi's programme indeed proved to be a strong though temporary bridge to the Muslim community. In retrospect, Gandhi has been criticized for including an essentially religious issue and an extra-India one at that, into the programme of a movement that professed secular and pan-Indian aims. But Gandhi's sense that religion and politics were not separate spheres and that a religious issue could be effectively used to recruit

²¹ Bimal Prasad, "Foreign Policy Making in India" in B.N Pande ed. *History of the Indian National Congress 1885-1985*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1985, p.809.

²² Quoted in B.N Pande ed. *The Indian Nationalist Movement 1885-1947: Select Documents* Macmillan, London: 1979, p. 53.

Muslim support was not inaccurate. The Caliphate campaign of the early 1920's also demonstrated that Congress leaders would give weight to the views of Indian Muslims on certain vital issues like Middle East.

The entire issue, however, turned to be irrelevant when Kamal Pasha abolished the Caliphate and declared Turkey a Republic in 1923. Nevertheless, the issue has become an important indicator to assess the approach of INC on issues affecting the people of West Asia in the pre-independent period.

(b) The Palestine Question:

Like the Khilafat issue, India's response to the Palestine question could also be traced to the post-World War 1 period. During this period, the Indian attitude was represented by the Indian National Congress. Indian national leaders who were leading India's struggle for independence from British colonial rule had shown a strong interest in the Palestine problem, and the ongoing Arab-Jews struggle in the Holy Land. The INC while formulating the policies considered the domestic situation in India, which in a bigger way conditioned its perceptions, policies and the extent of its involvement in the Palestine question²³.

While the INC was trying to keep the people of India united in a single state based on secular principles in the domestic level, the British administration was deliberately trying to keep them divided by encouraging Muslim religious identity in order to keep the Muslims away from the freedom movement. The British tried to develop the feeling that the Muslims were a separate people. Indian national leaders, fully realizing the malignancy of the British move, left no

²³ Sudha Rao, *The Arab-Israel Conflict: The Indian View*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1972, p.12.

stone unturned to reassure the Muslims of India that they were not separate from the rest of the Indian masses. Right from the beginning, the INC was firm in its political belief that the question of minorities had to be settled within the framework of a pluralistic order and not by partition²⁴.

Leaders of the INC such as Gandhi, Nehru and Maulana Azad were unanimous in their opinion that a country like India should not be split on the basis of religion. In keeping with this political belief, they supported the Arab stand opposing the partition of Palestine in the same way as they opposed the demands of the Muslim League for the creation of Pakistan by partitioning India.

As early as in 1921, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) passed a resolution to assure the Muslim states that "when India has attained self-government, her foreign policy will naturally be always guided so as to respect the religious obligations imposed upon the Musalmans by Islam"²⁵. Further, in 1922, the INC asserted that unless "the Jazirat-el-Arab, (the Arab world) were freed from all non-Muslim control, there cannot be any peace and contentment in India"²⁶.

However, the first direct reference to the Palestine cause was made in 1923 when Congress President Mohamad Ali Jinnah urged the Indians to make common cause with the Palestinians. In 1924, the All India Congress Committee

²⁴ Najma Heptulla, *Indo-West-Asian Relations: The Nehru Era* Allied Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p. 146.

²⁵ A. Main Zaidi ed. *Congress and the Minorities* Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, New Delhi, 1984, p. 40.

²⁶ Cited in G.H Jansen, *Zionism, Israel and Asian Nationalism*, The Institute for Palestinian Studies, Beirut, 1971, p.181.

passed a resolution on the 'Egyptian Crisis' which was the first non-Khilafat move on West Asia²⁷. Later in 1927, the Congress in its Madras session, asked for the withdrawal of Indian troops from Iraq, Iran and from all other countries. In 1928, the INC extended its sympathy to Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq in their struggle against the Western imperialism²⁸. Further, in the Brussels Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, the INC declared, "this Congress sends its warm greetings to the people of Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq and its assurance of full sympathy with them in their struggle for emancipation from the grip of Western imperialism"²⁹.

By the mid-thirties, the situation in Palestine had deteriorated due to the emergence of Nazi Germany. Violence and counter-violence continued unabated in Palestine. The reaction of the INC to this state of affairs was unequivocally in favour of the Arab cause. In 1936, the INC adopted a resolution on Arabs in Palestine at its Wardha session and expressed its greetings and sympathy "to the Arabs of Palestine in their struggle for freedom against British imperialism"³⁰. Considering the volume of attention given by the Muslims and the sentimental attachment by the Muslim League towards the issue of Palestine, the INC observed September 27, 1936 as 'Palestine Day' by holding meetings and

²⁷ The Belgaun Session of the AICC, December 1924, *Encyclopedia of INC*, Vol. VIII, p.681.

²⁸ Prasad, *op cit.* No. 21, p.814.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Encyclopedia of INC*, Vol. XI, p.153.

demonstrations throughout the country in support of the Arab cause³¹. A mass meeting was also held in Allahabad in support of the Arabs. Similarly, the Sindh Congress Socialist Conference held at Karachi on July 18, 1936 sent its greetings to the Arabs in Palestine and hoped that they would keep up the fight till independent Palestine was established³².

In October 1937 at its Calcutta session, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) protested "against the reign of terror that has been established in Palestine by British imperialism with a view to coercing the Arabs into accepting the proposed partition of Palestine and assured them the solidarity of the people with them in their struggle for national freedom"³³. The following year, it resolved that "Britain would be well advised in reversing its present policy and leave the Jews and the Arabs to amicably settle the issues between them"³⁴. A resolution conveying Bombay citizen's full sympathy to the Arabs in Palestine was adopted at a public meeting held under the auspicious of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee to celebrate the Palestine Day. Addressing the audience there, Sarojini Naidu stated that the fight against imperialism was a world fight and therefore it was the moral duty of the exploited people like Indians to sympathise with the Arabs fighting for independence from British domination³⁵.

³¹ R. Sreekantan Nair, *Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed; India and Israel* Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.65.

³² Prasad, *op cit.* No. 21, p. 146.

³³ *Encyclopedia of INC*, Vol. 9, p.260.

³⁴ Birendra Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, B.R Publication Corporation, New Delhi, 1979, p. 146.

³⁵ Heptulla, *op cit.* No. 24, p.149.

In its 51st session in February 1938, the Congress condemned the plan for partition of Palestine, protested against the repressive policy of Britain and expressed sympathy with the Arabs. It also appealed to the Jews "not to seek the shelter of the British Mandatory and not to allow them to be exploited in the interests of the British imperialism"³⁶. In 1939, the INC sent a communication to Aminul Husseini, the Mufti of Palestine, wishing the Arab Higher Committee "complete success in the attainment of their objective" against the Zionists³⁷.

Some Muslims in India also organised themselves separately to propagate the cause of the Palestinian Arabs. The Muslims of Uttar Pradesh, for instance, organized the Provincial Palestine Conference at Allahabad on July 18, 1936. Maulana Qutubuddin Abdul Wali, the President of the Conference, lamented that after making a number of promises to the Palestinian Arabs, Britain, unmindful of those promises, was using the Jews as instruments for strengthening her hold upon Palestine, and congratulated the Palestinian Arabs for their brave stand against tremendous odds³⁸. Nehru in his message to the conference expressed his sympathy and solidarity with the Arabs who were fighting bravely for the freedom of their country. This struggle, Nehru emphatically stated, had nothing to do with religion. It was not against the Jews. It was a national struggle in which the Arabs of different faiths were joining hands

³⁶ N.V Rajkumar ed. *The Background of India's Foreign Policy*, All India Congress Committee, New Delhi: 1952, pp. 49, 54-55.

³⁷ Joseph B. Schechtman, "India and Israel" in *International Relations and Foreign Policy of India*, ed., V. Grover, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 471-72.

³⁸ Heptulla, *op cit.* No. 6, p.149.

for the common object of securing the independence for their country. "And thus there is much in common between their struggle and ours", Nehru further remarked, "and even on the narrow grounds of self interest we in India should support and sympathies with the Arabs. I trust that the Arab struggle in Palestine will help us to see our own struggle in a proper perspective and make us forget our internal divisions in the face of common diversity"³⁹.

Maulana Ahmed Sayeed, the President of the first session of the Bihar Muslim Independent Party Conference held at Patna on September 12, 1936 criticised the British Government's policy in regard to Palestine⁴⁰.

Asaf Ali tabled an independent adjournment motion in the Legislative Assembly on September 11, 1936 to discuss the failure of the Government of India in inviting the attention of the British Government to the danger of persuading the policy of denying the indigenous population of Palestine their legitimate right of self-determination⁴¹. Sir Mohammad Yakub raised the Palestine issue on September 14, 1936 in the Indian Legislative Assembly. Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Shaukat Ali asked the Government of India to clarify the British policy towards Palestine⁴².

On August 1, 1937, a meeting of the Muslims of Calcutta protested against the plan of partitioning Palestine into two parts as per the Peel Commission plan. Addressing the 'All India Palestine Conference' held in

³⁹ Prasad, *op cit.* No. 21, p. 146.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), April 27, 1937.

⁴² *The Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), September 15, 1936.

September 1937 to express sympathy with the Arabs in their fight for freedom, Saikat Ali declared that every Muslim in India felt the strongest sympathy for the brave Arabs. A.R Siddiqi, the President of the conference, urged the Muslims of India to raise their voice in unison with the rest of the Muslim world against the contemplated amputation of Palestine⁴³.

In October 1937, the Muslim members of the Central Legislature in India in a statement noted with concern the developments in Palestine and expressed their sympathy with their Arab brethren in the fight against the heavy odds to safeguard legitimate rights and to save the Holy Land from Zionist aggression. They demanded that the whole of Palestine should be handed over to the Arabs, the sons of the soil⁴⁴. The All India Shia Political Conference held at Lucknow in October 1937 condemned the Peel Commission's recommendations for the division of Palestine⁴⁵. The Raja of Mahmudabad, the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the 25th session of the All India Muslim League held at Lucknow in October 1937, pointed out that Indian Muslims were anxiously watching the developments in Palestine and warned the British Government that any further inroads upon the rights of the Arabs of Palestine would start a conflagration which would lead to disastrous results⁴⁶. In his Presidential address, Jinnah told the British Government that the question of Palestine, if not fairly met, boldly and courageously decided, was going to be the turning point in the history of the

⁴³ *The Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), September 25, 1937.

⁴⁴ *The Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), October 11, 1937.

⁴⁵ *Indian Annual Register*, 1937, vol. II, p. 416.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.402.

British Empire. Expressing India's support to the Arab cause Jinnah said, 'The Muslims of India will stand solid and will help the Arabs in every way they can in their brave and just struggle that they are carrying on against all odds'⁴⁷. The All India Muslim League wished that the recommendations of the Peel Commission should not be compiled with for they were opposed to the religious sentiments of the Muslims⁴⁸.

The Sindh Provincial Muslim League prayed for the success of the Cairo conference which was held in October 1938 for the defence of Palestine and attended by the Arab and Muslim countries and declared that to achieve a lasting settlement of the Palestine issue, it was highly essential that the British government should invalidate Balfour Declaration, withdraw the scheme of partition of Palestine, and confer full independence upon Palestine⁴⁹.

On January 31, 1939, H.S Suhrawardy, Secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, issued an appeal stating that 'Palestine Day' should be observed on February 8, 1939 throughout India to express the solidarity of the Indian Muslims with the Arabs in Palestine⁵⁰.

The *Jamiat-uj-Ulema-i-Hind* conference held in March 1939 urged the fulfillment of the Arab demands for the reconstitution of Palestine into a self-

⁴⁷ A Ahmad, *Pakistan and the Middle East*, Karachi, 1940, p. 162.

⁴⁸ *The Times of India*, October 18, 1937.

⁴⁹ *The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, October 12, 1938.

⁵⁰ *The Star of India*, January 31, 1939.

governing state and the complete stoppage of Jewish immigration into Palestine⁵¹.

Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, the President of the Bombay Muslim League conference held in May 1939, declared that the Muslims of India had deep friendly feelings for the Arabs in Palestine and urged the British Government to settle the Palestine issue in a just manner⁵².

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the most prominent and vocal nationalist leaders of India, vehemently opposed to the idea of creating a state Israel in Palestine. It is important to note here that his idea was no way influenced by the Muslims sentiment in India. He was firm in his belief that one can not divide the people on the basis of religion. In Calcutta session in 1937, INC assured the Arab people 'full solidarity of the Indian people in their struggle for national freedom'⁵³.

However, the Jewish dimension of the problem was drawn by Subhas Chandra Bose in February 1938, in the 51st session of the INC held at Haripura; Bose highlighted the contradiction involved in the British policy in Palestine⁵⁴. Hence, the AICC in the same year (1938) appealed to the Jews not to seek

⁵¹ *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, Vol. 1, p. 382.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ N. V Rajkumar ed. *The Background of India's Foreign Policy*, Navin Press, New Delhi, 1952, p. 54.

⁵⁴ For full text of the Presidential address see Sisir Bose and Sugata Bose eds. *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp.197-219.

shelter on the British mandate and not to allow them to be exploited in the interest of British Imperialism⁵⁵.

A similar view was expressed by Nehru, while addressing the Peace and Empire Conference in London on July 15, 1938. Nehru held British imperialism responsible for the unrest in Palestine and suggested that the Palestine problem could be solved only when the Arabs and Jews coming together with an agreement and not by the British Imperialism⁵⁶.

In its annual session in 1939, the Congress adopted a resolution on Palestine expressing its sympathy with the Arabs and hoped for the emergence of an independent democratic state in Palestine with specific provision for the protection of the rights of the Jews. In the same year, it adopted another resolution condemning Hitler's programmes against Jews and criticizing the Jews for relying on the "British armed forces to advance their special privileges in Palestine and thus aligned themselves in the side of the British Imperialism"⁵⁷.

Finally, the fifty-second session of the INC was held in Tripura in March 1939 that categorically reiterated the significance of the earlier resolve⁵⁸.

From the above discussion it is clear that in no other people's affairs INC was as much involved as in the case of the Palestine Arabs. Now the question is why INC took such interest on Palestinian Arabs. The answer is that the attitude of the INC towards Palestine question as a whole was influenced by

⁵⁵ *Report of the Fifty-First Indian National Congress, Haripura, 1938*, Ahmedabad, 1938, p. 199.

⁵⁶ Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia op cit*, No. 34, pp. 145-46.

⁵⁷ Cited in Nair, *op cit*. No. 31, p.66.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

its leadership especially the top leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. Hence an analysis of the perceptions of these two leaders on the Palestine question is needed which was later bequeathed by free India and its successive political leadership.

Perception of Gandhi

Even before the emergence of the Palestine question, Gandhi had been closely associated with the Jews. During his *Satyagraha* days in South Africa, he was an admirer of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. Moreover, Hermenn Kakenbach and H.S.L Palak were his close associates⁵⁹. He was also deeply shocked by the sufferings and hardships of the Jews, who, he believed, were treated worse than the untouchables in India⁶⁰. However, his personal sympathy and affinity towards the Jews did not influence his views on the Palestine question. He wrote "my sympathies are all with the Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became life-long companions. Through these friends, I came to learn much of their age long prosecutions....But my sympathy does not blind me to the requirements of justice. The cry for the national home of the Jews does not make much appeal to me. The sanction for it is sought in the Bible and in the tenacity with which the Jews have hankered after their return to Palestine. Why should they not like other peoples of the earth make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their

⁵⁹ For a detail discussions see Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha and the Jews: A Formative Factor in India's Policy towards Israel* Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, Jerusalem, 1977.

⁶⁰ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 68 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1958, p. 137 (hereafter referred to as Gandhi's work).

livelihood⁶¹? Gandhi's perception on the whole issue was based on his deep faith in non-violence and the centrality of means over ends.

Having full faith in *Ahimsha*, Gandhi wrote, "If I were a Jew, I should tell them (the Jews): do not be so silly as to resort to terrorism, because you simply damage your own case which otherwise would be a proper case⁶²..... "A religious act", he observed "cannot be performed with the aid of the bayonets or the bomb"⁶³. They can settle in Palestine only by the goodwill of the Arabs'...Again talking to an American journalist, he stressed that the solution to the problem lay in the total abandonment of "terrorism and other forms of violence" by the Jews⁶⁴.

In March 1921, he wrote, "By no cannons of ethics or war..... can Palestine be given to the Jews.....⁶⁵The Jews cannot receive sovereign rights in a place which has been held for centuries by Muslim powers by right of religious conquest"⁶⁶. In an article published in the *Harijan* of November 26, 1938 he similarly wrote that "I don't believe in any kind of war, and a war is therefore outside my horizon or province"⁶⁷.

⁶¹ *Harijan*, November 11, 1938 and *Gandhi's Works*, Vol.68, p. 137.

⁶² *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 87, p. 417.

⁶³ *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 68, 1938.

⁶⁴ *Gandhi's Works*, Vol.88, p.262.

⁶⁵ *Young India*, March 23, 1921, *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 19, p. 472.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ *Harijan*, November 26, 1938 and *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 68, p. 137.

Similarly, on the eve of the Palestine tragedy, he was more convinced of the grievous wrong done to the Arabs and wrote expressing his moral support to the helpless Palestinians who were being uprooted from their homes and fields. "The Jews" he wrote, "have erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves on Palestine with the aid of American money or British arms for forcing themselves on an unwelcome land"⁶⁸.

He examined the rationale of the Zionist movement. He rejected Zionism which was based on the assumption that the Jews all over world constitute a 'nation' and that by virtue of their religion alone they are the prospective citizens of Israel. Like Indians, he believed the Arabs were also the victims of an unpardonable conspiracy of division of their land on the basis of race and religion. According to Paul Power, there are four reasons why Gandhiji opposed Zionism. "First, he was sensitive about the ideas of Muslim Indians who were anti-Zionists because of their sympathy for Middle Eastern Arabs opposed to the Jewish National Home; second, he objected to any Zionist methods inconsistent with his way of non-violence; third, he found Zionism contrary to his pluralistic nationalism, which excludes the establishment of any State based solely or mainly on one religion; and fourth, he apparently believed it imprudent to complicate his relations with the British, who held the mandate in Palestine"⁶⁹.

Gandhi was hurt when he was told that the Zionist lobby has given a new twist to his convictions against the Zionist antics. The international Zionists

⁶⁸ Quoted in G.H Jansen, *Statesman* (New Delhi), April 5, 1966.

⁶⁹ Quoted A.K. Ramakrishnan, "Mahatma Gandhi Rejected Zionism", Released August 15, 2001, The Wisdom Fund, Website: <http://www.twf.org>.

magnates especially in Britain and the USA came out with a startling clarification of his pronouncements. They argued that Gandhi was opposing the Zionist moves because he wanted to please the Indian Muslims some of whom are his close associates. He after knowing such perceptions of the Zionists came out with a stronger statement. 'I have said often" he wrote, 'that I would not sell truth for the sake of India's deliverance. Much less would I do so for winning Muslim friendship"⁷⁰.

Thus the cry for a national home for the Jews did not make much appeal to him. This plea, he believed, could not be sustained on moral or political grounds. Morally he advocated that "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs"⁷¹.

At the same time, Gandhi criticized the Jews for their dependence on British Imperialism. This he said "The Palestine of Biblical conception is not a geographical tract. It is in their hearts. But if they must look to the Palestine of geography, as their national home, it is wrong to enter it under the shadow of British gun"⁷².

But Gandhi firmly believed that the Palestine question was having some moral connotations and so the same should be settled peacefully between

⁷⁰ *Gandhi's Works, op cit.* No 37.

⁷¹ Quoted in Jansen, *op cit.* No 68. Also see *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 68, p. 137.

⁷² *Harijan*, November 26, 1939. Also see *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 68, p. 140.

the two parties and hoped that if the Arabs provide refuge to the Jews without the mediation of any Nation, it will be in their tradition of generosity⁷³.

How could Gandhi reconcile his opposition to Jewish nationalism on the grounds of inappropriately mingling religion and politics and his own activity of mixing Hinduism and Indian nationalism? Gandhi maintained that Indian nationalism was a non-sectarian or all-sectarian movement, i.e it was for all Indians regardless of their religion, a point of view which he adhered to the end of his life.

From the above discussion, it is clear that he was taking a pro-Arab stand on the Palestine question. This was mainly due to his high moral conviction and belief in non-violence. One could also notice in his attitude a soft approach for the Jews on humanitarian grounds when he said that “the Jews have a good cause in Palestine and in terms of claim they got priority”⁷⁴. This was because of his life-long friendship with many Jews and also for the age-long prosecution meted out to them. However, a few months before his assassination, Don Campbell of Reuters asked him, ‘What is the solution of the Palestine problem?’. In reply, Gandhiji in great despair said that it had become a problem which seemed insoluble⁷⁵.

⁷³ *Gandhi's Works*, Vol. 82, p. 262.

⁷⁴ Louis Fischer, *Gandhi and Stalin: Two Signs at the World's Crossroads*, Rajkamal Publication, New Delhi, 1947, p. 42.

⁷⁵ Krishan Gopal and Sarabjit Sharma, *India and Israel: Towards Strategic Partnership*, Authors Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 113.

Perception of Nehru

Towards the end of the 1920's, Jawaharlal Nehru –a man most travelled and conversant with foreign affairs than any of his fellow Indian nationalists- was the recognized spokesman of the INC on foreign affairs and every resolution of the Congress on foreign affairs was practically inspired, drafted and piloted by him⁷⁶.

Nehru's postures about Jews were same as that of Gandhi. On the plight of the Jews, he wrote, "They had no home or nation, and everywhere they went, they were treated as unwelcome and undesirable strangers.... They were humiliated, reviled, tortured and massacred"⁷⁷. But his sympathy towards the Jews did not influence his views on Palestine. For him, Palestine "was not a wilderness or an empty uninhabited place. It was already somebody else home"⁷⁸.

He was also fully conscious of the fact that the real issue in Palestine was not religion as some of the Indian Muslims thought it to be but imperialism--a phenomena which had been generated by conflicting interests of democracy and fascism, nationalism and imperialism and socialism and decaying capitalism. Nehru appreciated the brave Arab people for putting up a valiant fight in the

⁷⁶ J Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy: Determinants, Institutions, Processes and Personalities*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1984, p.286.

⁷⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, New Delhi, 1987, pp.62-3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.763.

cause of national independence and assured them the solidarity of the Indian people with them in their struggle for national freedom⁷⁹.

He identified a similarity between the freedom struggles of India and the Palestinians on two grounds. First, both are national liberation movements against the British imperialism. In his presidential address at the AICC Session at Faizpur on 27th December 1936, Nehru said that "the Arab struggle against British imperialism in Palestine is as much part of this great world conflict as India's struggle for freedom"⁸⁰.

Second, in India, the British sponsored the Muslim League to undercut Indian demands for independence. In Palestine, the British sponsored the Zionist movement to counter Arab claims for immediate independence. The Pakistan movement and the Zionist movement, to him were false illegitimate nationalisms. They were small disruptive communal movements based on religion, backed by Western exploiters.

He was of the opinion that Jews should not rely on British support and should reach an agreement with the Arabs to safeguard their position in an independent Arab country. To him, the British appeared to be exploiting the differences between the Jews and the Arabs in the same manner they were promoting communal tensions in India⁸¹. Hence, while addressing the audience

⁷⁹ *Encyclopedia of Indian National Congress*, Vol.10, p.260.

⁸⁰ *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol.7, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 602-3.

⁸¹ S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography 1889-1947*, Vol.1 Oxford University Press, London, 1975, pp. 232-3.

at Allahabad on the occasion of the Palestine Day in September 1936, he reminded the British policy of playing off one community against another in order to consolidate its position. To him, England was putting up Jewish religious nationalism so as to make it appear that her presence was necessary as an arbitrator and to keep the peace between the two. Hence he thought that "Palestine is essentially an Arab country and must remain so, and the Arabs must not be crushed and suppressed in their own homelands"⁸².

He argued that only 'on the stable foundation of Arab-Jews cooperation and the elimination of imperialism'⁸³ the future of Palestine could be secured. This, he suggested, required that the Jews abandon their exaggerated claims and seek peaceful accommodation with the Palestinians.

Thus, the views expressed by both Gandhi and Nehru were identical in character. Both leaders had sympathy for the Jews. However, with regard to their claim for a separate state, both of them opposed it. Their opposition was based on three grounds. First, both had a firm view that any state based on religious exclusivity could not sustain on moral and political grounds. Secondly the Biblical Association of the Jews to Palestine (Jews longing for Jerusalem and Mount Zion have been recorded many a time in the Bible) has been regarded as insufficient basis for the creation of a modern state. Third, it is reprehensible that the Arabs in Palestine would have to pay for the crimes of Hitler's Germany and other Europeans who had prosecuted the Jews. Both Gandhi and Nehru wanted that the issue should be resolved by the parties concerned, away from the

⁸² Nehru, *op cit.* No. 77, p.767.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

intervention of the imperialist forces through a federal state comprising of both the Arabs and the Jews. At the same time, they were not in favour of the victimization of one by the other. They stood for granting all kinds of democratic rights normally enjoyed by the minorities in other countries.

A close look at the above shows that the INC had consistently taken the Arab side on the Palestine question and assessed the entire issue from the India's point of view. However, the Indian National Congress's attitude towards the Palestine question as a whole, to a large extent, was influenced by its leadership. The organization's stand on the issue was almost identical to the views of both Gandhi and Nehru. This is not without reason. One reason could be the Muslim population of India. This section of people had sympathised the cause of their co-religionists in Palestine. The Congress could not ignore this fact. Another reason may be the Congress party's uncompromising stand against colonialism. The Palestinian Arabs were placed under the British colonial rule after First World War and were struggling against the colonial power. The Congress was thus brought closer to the Palestinians. It is also possible that the secularist approach of the Congress to politics could be one reason to oppose Zionism and sympathise with the Palestinians. The Congress vehemently advocated secular politics. This made it see Zionism as a movement based on religion. Moreover, Zionism was seen as a tool to be used by the colonial and imperial power, which the Congress could not tolerate.

When India became independent in 1947, it could not keep itself away from these intellectual, ideological and moral legacies of the past. Moreover,

Nehru gave official colour to the views of the INC on Palestine once he became the Prime Minister as well as the Foreign Minister of independent India.

INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS PALESTINE (1947-1992)

India's historic and principled support to the Palestinian people during the freedom struggle continued even after independence. Besides, Nehru's assumption of power as the first Prime Minister of the country added continuity to its post-independent Palestine policy.

In the initial period, India's policy towards Palestine was consistently in conformity with the basic tenets of its foreign policy: anti-imperialism, anti-racism, support to the liberation struggles around the world, opposition to military occupation, solution of the international disputes through negotiation, a relentless struggle against neo-colonialism etc⁸⁴. In addition to these broad principles, India's position with regard to Palestine was also guided by the general consensus in the Arab world, the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations.

Indian stand on Palestine had also a pragmatic dimension. The partition of India and the creation of an exclusively Muslim state of Pakistan, the subsequent Kashmir problem, the Pakistani attempts to bring about a Pan-Islamic Alliance stretching from Turkey to Pakistan (the emergence of an Anti-India Islamic bloc with Pakistan as its leader)⁸⁵ and the fear of the Indian leaders that the Muslim population of India could identify with pan-Islamism that could rise out of the Arab-Israeli conflict influenced India to forge a conscious policy towards the

⁸⁴ For a detail account of India's foreign policy see Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy op cit*, No. 76.

⁸⁵ Heptulla, *Indo-West Asian Relations, op cit*. No. 24, p. 161.

Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine. Nehru viewed this pan Islamic tendency as regressive and counterproductive as it could divide and weaken the movement of the Asian people against the imperialist states. Similarly, Nehru did not want Arab-Israeli conflict to affect the Muslim populace of India by giving additional boost to the pan-Islamic and separatist element among them⁸⁶.

Thus, although India and Israel had no serious bilateral problems, their only major difference was related to the Palestine issue and by the late 1950s, opposition to Israeli policies and commitment to the Palestine cause became one of the main features of India's foreign policy. India's policy towards Palestine cause can be analysed through the following main headlines.

India's Support to Palestine Issue at the United Nations

On February 14, 1947, the United Kingdom, the mandatory power in Palestine (1918-48), frustrated in its attempt to solve the Palestine problem at London conference, "threw up its hands and handed the problem over to the United Nations"⁸⁷. The UN General Assembly, at its session held on 28th April 1947 discussed the Palestine issue and decided to constitute an eleven nation investigation commission named as the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine's (UNSCOP) to investigate the cause of the conflict in Palestine, and, if possible, devise a solution for Palestine. India was appointed as a member of this special committee. The UNSCOP put forward two plans, the

⁸⁶ P.J Vincent, "Cultural Determinants of India-Israel Relations and the Question of Palestine" in M.H Ilias and P.J Vincent eds. *India-West Asia Relations: Understanding Cultural Interplays*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2007, p.159.

⁸⁷ Gopal and Sharma, *India and Israel, op cit.*, p. 14.

majority plan and the minority plan; the majority plan insisted on the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and the other Jewish, with the internalisation of Jerusalem under UN jurisdiction while the minority plan suggested the creation of a federal state with Jewish and Palestine units, with Jerusalem as the national capital.⁸⁸

In the General Assembly, two thirds of the delegations voted for partition but India sided with the Arabs and voted against the resolution. Two reasons can be given for the stand that India took. First, since the leaders of the Indian National Congress were against the two nation theory and opposed the partition of India on religious ground, it then followed that India was against the partition of Palestine on such grounds⁸⁹. Second, since the Indian leaders had always supported the Palestinian Arabs, they were unable to take a stand against them all of a sudden. India therefore wanted the Jews and Arabs to work out their differences within one Federal State of Palestine but this was not possible since the relations between Zionists and Arabs were unbridgeable by that time.

Despite India's opposition, the majority plan of the UNSCOP was adopted by the General Assembly with certain modifications. The plan was adopted by 33

⁸⁸ For a detail discussion on these two plans see *United Nations Special Committee on Palestine: Report to the General Assembly*, New York, 1947, Vol. 1, pp. 47-58.

⁸⁹ Leonard A Gordon, "Indian Nationalist Ideas about Palestine and Israel", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol.37, No. 3-4, Summer-Autumn, 1975, p. 27.

votes in favour, 13 against and 10 abstentions. India voted against the plan along with the Arab and other countries⁹⁰.

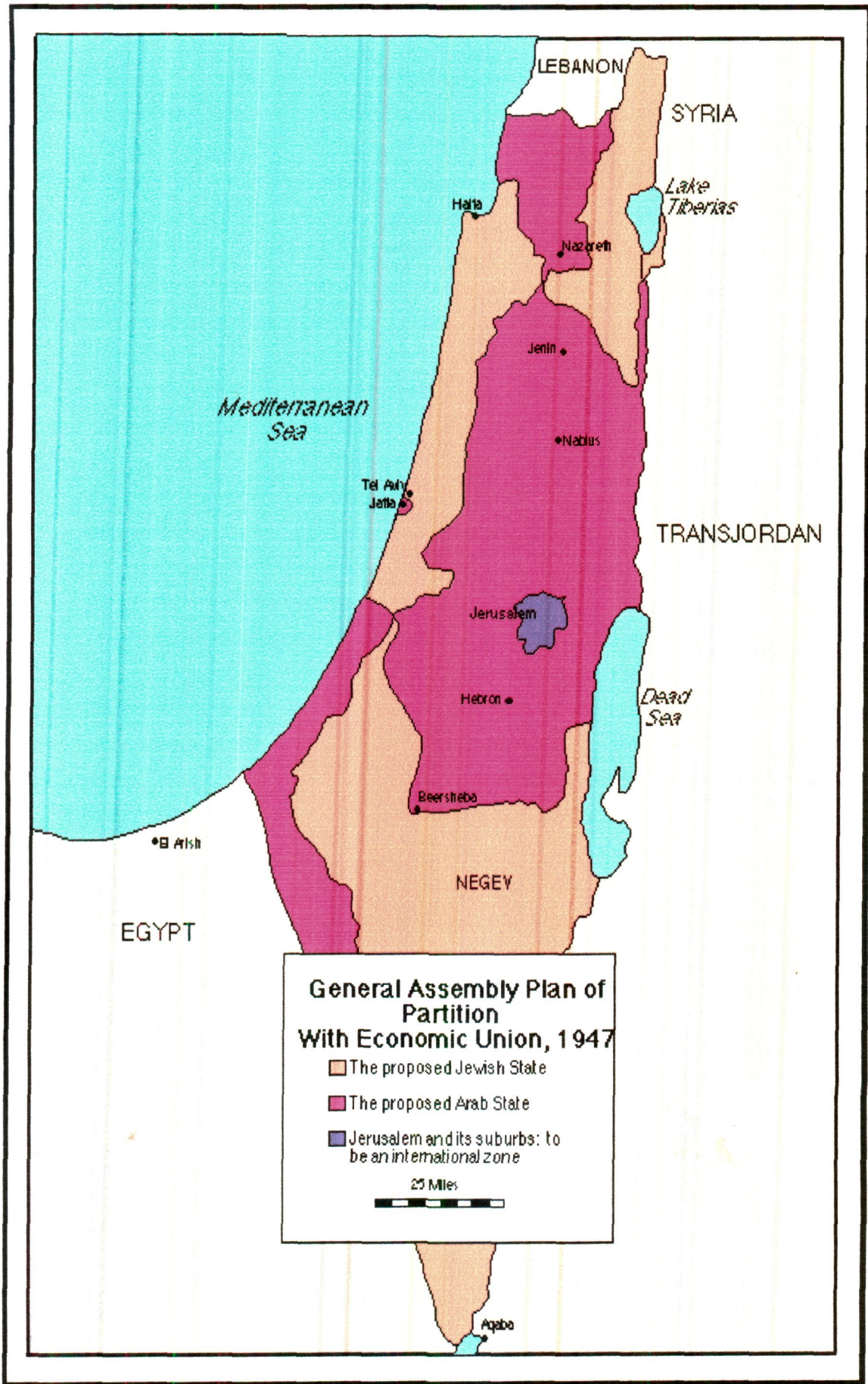
The UN partition plan was followed by unrest and chaos and both Jews and the Arabs were preparing to take over control of Palestine after the British withdrawal. Meanwhile, on 14 May 1948, on the day in which the British Mandate over Palestine expired, the Jewish People's Council gathered at the Tel Aviv Museum approved the proclamation, declaring the establishment of the State of Israel.

After its establishment, Israel applied for admission to the UN and the matter was put to vote. India's first reaction was to abstain but later India chose to vote against Israel. This was because 'India could not recognise a state which had been achieved through the force of arms and not through negotiations. The General Assembly vote was in favour of Israeli admission to UN (37 to 2 with 9 abstentions)⁹¹.

America was the first country to recognise Israel followed by the USSR. Israel was keen on securing India's recognition being the most influential post-colonial state in Asia with considerable say on Asian thinking. India, however, recognised Israel on 17 September 1950, after more than years of its creation and after two Muslim majority countries, Turkey and Iran, had accorded recognition.

⁹⁰ Nair, *Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed*, *op cit.*, No. 31, p.70. Also see Shamir Hasan, "The Evolution of India's Palestine Policy: A Fall from the Heights?", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 36, No. 1-2, January-February, 2008, p.82.

⁹¹ Vincent, *op cit.*, No. 86, p. 160



Was this recognition due to domestic concerns, including the fact that there was a Jewish community living in India (40,000 Jews out of a population of over 360 million)? An official communiqué gave two reasons for this decision. First, as in the case of communist China, the government of India was recognising 'an established fact'. Secondly, non-recognition was not only inconsistent with the overall relationship between two member states of the UN but would also limit India's role as a possible peace-maker between the Arabs and Israelis⁹². According to Shivshankar Menon, a third reason was to enable peace to prevail in the region, enable de-colonization and to put an end to imperialism⁹³. Nehru, however, made it clear that recognition did not mean endorsement of Israeli position on its frontiers and India would continue to support the cause of the Palestinians.

Although India recognised Israel, yet it refrained from exchanging diplomatic representatives at any level. In 1953, Israel was allowed to open a consulate in Bombay but India refrained from maintaining a diplomatic presence in Israel. Israel's repeated attempt to establish full diplomatic ties with India failed

⁹² Punyapriya Dasgupta, "Betrayal of India's Israel Policy", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 11-18, 1992, p. 769.

⁹³ Shivshankar Menon's talk on "Indian Foreign Policy in the Middle East" at the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem, 7 May 1997 at: <http://www.passia.org/meetings/97/meet04.htm>

because of Nehru's firm attitude⁹⁴. David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel stated in 1960, "I cannot understand how Mr Nehru fits his behaviour to Israel with Gandhi's philosophy of universal friendship"⁹⁵.

According to Prithvi Ram Mudian, "The confusion and fluidity that characterised West Asian politics in the aftermath of the creation of Israel and the implacable Arab hostility to it, concern over Pakistan's efforts to cultivate West Asia on a religious basis, the internationalisation of the Kashmir dispute after India took it to the UN, and the sensitivities of the large Muslim population that remained in India after partition were some of the major factors that prompted the Indian government to be careful and slow in extending formal recognition to Israel"⁹⁶.

It may be mentioned that Jawaharlal Nehru is considered as one of the three founder members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), along

⁹⁴ The lobbying to garner India's support for the creation of Israel had started even before India got its independence. For instance, Albert Einstein, the great physicist who declined an offer to become Israel's second President wrote a four-page letter dated June 13, 1947 to Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister designate of India for supporting the establishment of a Jewish state. He opened with praise for India's constituent assembly, which had just abolished untouchability. "The attention of the world was [now] fixed on the problem of another group of human beings who, like the untouchables, have been the victims of persecution and discrimination for centuries – the Jews." He appealed to Nehru as a "consistent champion of the forces of political and economic enlightenment" to rule in favour of "the rights of an ancient people whose roots are in the East". Nehru was not unaware of the sufferings of the Jews. But he did not like the idea of a new state being thrust on the land of others. Nehru replied to Einstein and courteously turned down the request. For more see Syed Sultan Mohiddin, "Palestine Conflict and India's Response", *Radiance Views Weekly*, November 14, 2010.

⁹⁵ Cited in Michael Brecher, *The New States of Asia: A Political Analysis*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963, p. 131.

⁹⁶ Prithvi Ram Mudiam, *India and the Middle East*, British Academic Press, London, 1994, p. 206.

with Presidents Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia and Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt. This relationship with Nasser and other Arab members of the movement made it difficult for Nehru to align openly with Israel. Besides, while the NAM was an attempt to stay non-aligned during the Cold War, Israel was seen as too closely aligned with the United States.

The withdrawal of the US offer to finance the construction of the Aswan Dam across the Nile led to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by President Nasser in 1956. The negotiations between Egypt and Anglo-French Governments failed to persuade Nasser to modify his position. While the issue was being debated, Israel launched an attack on Egyptian position in Sinai on October 29, 1956⁹⁷. Israel's unabashed and unprovoked aggression on a Third World country with ex-colonial powers like UK and France under false pretences dissipated whatever little sympathy the Indian leaders and the public entertained for Israel. An official statement issued on 31st October 1956, denounced Israeli aggression as a flagrant violation of UN Charter and in opposition to all principles laid down in Bandung Conference⁹⁸ and Nehru publicly denounced the Israeli action as 'clear naked aggression'⁹⁹. India also cosponsored resolutions in the General Assembly urging the immediate withdrawal of French, British and Israeli forces from Egypt.

⁹⁷ For an excellent account of the Suez Crisis see W. M. Roger Louis and Roger Owen eds. *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, Oxford, 1989.

⁹⁸ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi No. 10, October 1956, p. 150.

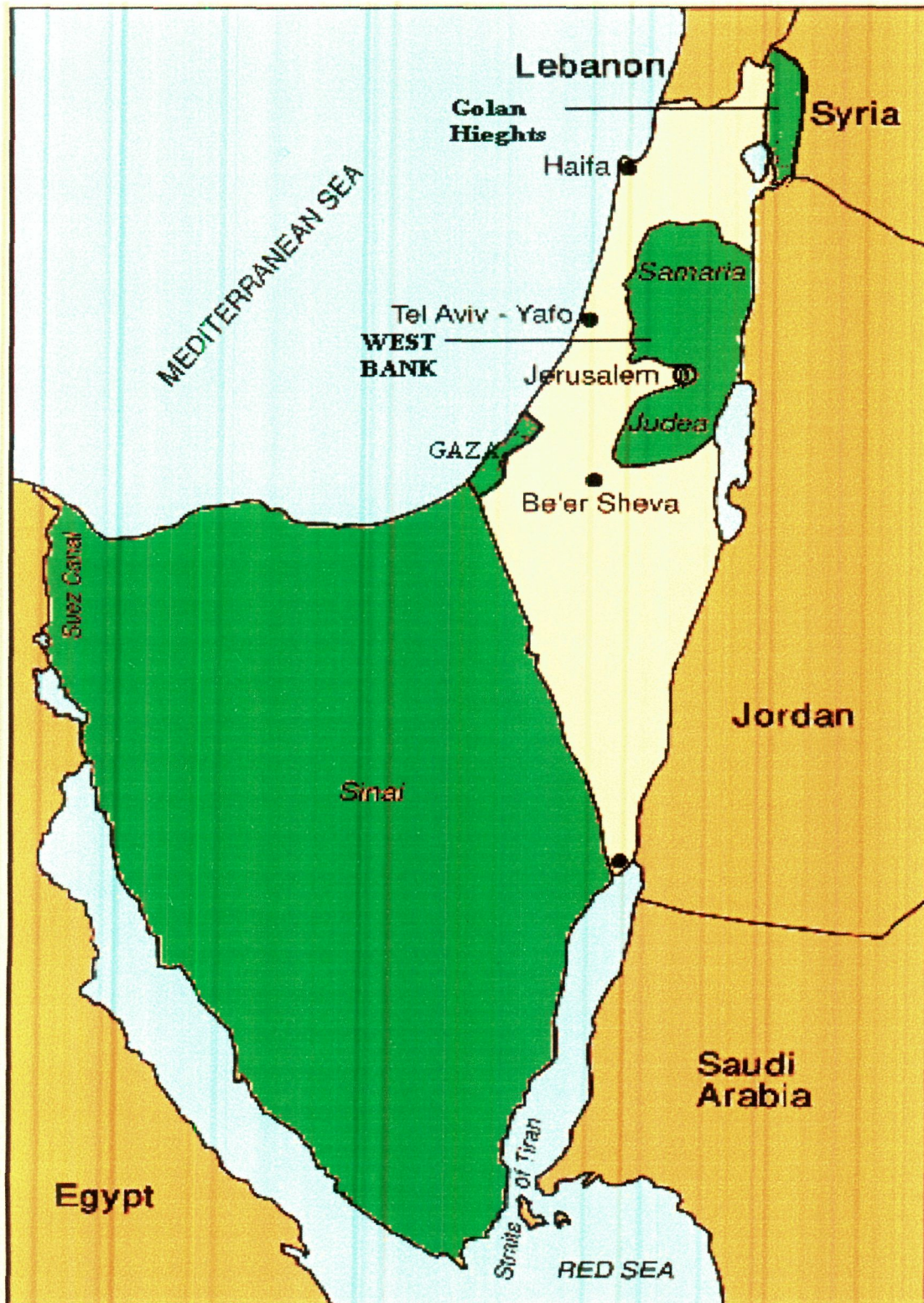
⁹⁹ *Hindu*, November 2, 1956.

According to Kumarswami, India's Israel policy at that time was influenced by three distinct factors: Afro-Asian solidarity based on anti-colonialism; Israel's increasing identification with imperial powers and consequent alienation from the newly independent countries of the Third World; and the growing friendship between Nehru and Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser. As a result, Nehru, who was extremely circumspect in his public reaction to the Hungarian crisis the same year, was vociferous in denouncing Israeli aggression toward Egypt¹⁰⁰. The Suez crisis had, however, brought in a major impact on India's policy perspective on West Asia. Though it did not make any direct implication on India's Palestine policy, it hardened India's attitude towards Israel and brought Egypt and India closer to each other.

The border dispute between the Arabs and Israel led to the escalation of another war in West Asia in 1967¹⁰¹. Israel seized the Sinai, Gaza, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from the Arabs. Although the closure of Gulf of Aquaba by Nasser and the ordering of the withdrawal of United Nations Emergency Force were the immediate reasons for the escalations of war in 1967, India took a blatantly pro-Arab position during the crisis. At the UN where India was a non-permanent member of the Security Council, its representative, G Parthasarathy placed the responsibility for the 'grave situation'

¹⁰⁰ P. R Kumarswami, "Indian-Israeli Relations: Humble Beginnings, A Bright Future", *The American Jewish Committee*, 2002 at: <http://www.ajc.org/InTheMedia/PublicationsPrint.asp?did=512>

¹⁰¹ For more on 1967 Arab Israel war see John Norton Moorre ed. *The Arab-Israel Conflict*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1974, Vol. 1 & 2.



The areas shown in bright green (Sinai, Golan Heights, Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem) were occupied by Israel during the 6-day war. Israel has since returned all of Sinai to Egypt in return for peace. Most of Gaza is currently under the jurisdiction of the autonomous Palestinian Authority (2002). Parts of the West Bank had been ceded following Oslo II agreement to the Palestinian authority, but these areas are currently re-occupied by Israel. Following the 6 day war, Israel began building settlements in these areas

prevailing in West Asia's squarely on Israel¹⁰².' Similarly, Indira Gandhi in a statement in the *Lok Sabha* on 6 June 1967 said, "I do not wish to utter harsh words or use strong language. But on the basis of information available, there can be no doubt that Israel has escalated the situation into an armed conflict which has now acquired the proportions of a full-scale war"¹⁰³.

The Fourth Arab Israeli war started when on October 6, 1973, the Egyptian and Syrian armies simultaneously attacked Israel to get back the territories they had lost in June 1967. During this war, India extended full support to the Arabs. Though Egypt and Syria had launched a coordinated attack on Israel, the Indian government held Israel responsible for encouraging the Arab countries to do so as Israel had refused to vacate the territories occupied by force. "The Government has consistently declared that the cause of the tension in the area is due to Israeli aggression and refusal to vacate territories occupied by armed force. Our sympathies are entirely with the Arabs whose sufferings have long reached a point of explosion"¹⁰⁴. Indira Gandhi gave two reasons for this Indian attitude. Firstly, India's old and solid relations with the Arabs required India to "stand by its friends in the time of their travail" and secondly, Israel's refusal to vacate the Arab lands occupied in 1967 war and its refusal to honour

¹⁰² Quoted in Mudian, *op cit*, No. 96, p. 212.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 211.

¹⁰⁴ Statement by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on the eruption of fighting in West Asia, October 7, 1973, in Krishan Gopal and Kokila Krishan Gopal, *West Asia and North Africa: A Documentary Study of Major Crises*, V.I Publications, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 145-46.

UN resolutions¹⁰⁵. Swaran Singh later revealed in his speech in the Rajya Sabha that India also offered some material support to the Arab friends and that medicines and doctors were supplied to both Egypt and Syria¹⁰⁶.

Meanwhile, in the post-1973 war period, India gradually moved away from the policy of supporting individual Arab countries on Palestine to back the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by its Chairman Yasser Arafat in its struggles for an independent homeland. Following the Algiers declaration, India co-sponsored a draft resolution in the UN General Assembly, on October 8, 1974 calling for the PLO's participation in the deliberations of the General Assembly on Palestinian issue¹⁰⁷. It was the continuous efforts of India and other like-minded countries that enabled Yasser Arafat to address the UN General Assembly and deliver the historical 'Olive branch' address on November 13, 1974¹⁰⁸. Responding to Arafat's address, India's Foreign Secretary, Kewal Singh made a statement at the UNGA on 19th November 1974, in which he endorsed the views expressed by Arafat at the UN. In a statement he contended that in Arafat's speech, India found the echoes of the same values to which India was dedicated, i.e., democracy, secularism, human dignity and common nationhood for

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁶ Minister of External Affairs Swaran Singh's speech in the Rajya Sabha in reply to the debate, December 6, 1973, in *Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

¹⁰⁷ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 3, March 1974, pp. 121-123.

¹⁰⁸ For the full text of Arafat's address see *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 2, Winter 1975, pp. 180-192.

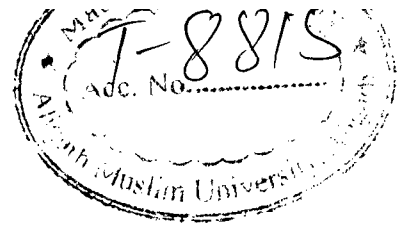
multiracial and multi-religious groups¹⁰⁹. Further, as a follow up to the success and response to her efforts at the UN in favour of the Palestine cause, India introduced another draft resolution on 21st November, 1974. This resolution also affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestine people to self-determination without external interference. It also stood for the Palestinian national independence and sovereignty¹¹⁰. Consequently, the PLO acquired observer status in the UN in 1974. India also joined as a co-sponsor of General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism in November 1975.

A number of reasons are there for India's decision to strengthen and legitimize the diplomatic and international status of the PLO. First, India realized that the PLO was much more amenable to pursue its diplomatic option at the critical juncture because it began to appreciate both its necessity and efficiency. Secondly India was also aware that such a cause would strengthen the hands of Arafat and Al –Fatah within the PLO whose ideological moderation suited India's political preferences in the region admirably. Thirdly, India was worried that unless the momentum for peace and a negotiated settlement was carefully nurtured there was always the possibility that it might lead to a new political stalemate in West Asia in which the Palestinians would be the worst sufferers¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁹ Nair, *Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed*, *op cit.*, No. 31, pp. 77-78.

¹¹⁰ *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *op cit.*, No. 108, pp. 295-96.

¹¹¹ Mudiam, *op cit.*, No. 96, p. 185.



India's Espousal of Palestine Issue at the NAM

As a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement, India also played a very important role in setting the NAM's anti-colonial agenda that included strong support to the liberation movements around the world including the one led by the Palestinians. In addition, India highlighted the problems of the Palestine people at different NAM summits and also constantly supported the PLO in its diplomatic bid to become a full member of the NAM.

However, before the NAM came into being in 1961, two significant developments took place in Asia that crystallised the collective thought on NAM. The first was the Asian Relations conference of 1947 and the second was the Bandung conference of 1955. Speaking in the plenary session of the Asian Relations Conference on 24 March 1947, Nehru remarked "Palestine is essentially an Arab country and no decision can be made without the consent of the Arabs"¹¹². India played a lead role at the Bandung Conference and declared its support to "the rights of the Arab people of Palestine and called for the implementation of the UN Resolutions"¹¹³.

The first NAM summit at Belgrade in 1961 pledged for the "full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine in conformity with the UN Charter and resolutions of the United Nations"¹¹⁴. In its second summit in Cairo in

¹¹² *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series II, Vol. 2, New Delhi, p. 511.

¹¹³ *Asian Recorder*, New Delhi, April 23-29, 1955, pp. 191-2.

¹¹⁴ *Documents of the Gatherings of Non-Aligned Countries, 1961-79*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 1981, p.5.

October 1964, NAM explicitly endorsed the principle of self determination for the Palestinians and declared its full support to the Arab people of Palestine in their struggle for liberation from colonialism and racism¹¹⁵. The third summit at Lusaka in 1970 maintained that Israel had occupied “the territories of three non-aligned countries” and added “the full respect for the inalienable rights of the Arab people of Palestine as a prerequisite for peace in the Middle East” and reaffirmed its support to them “in their struggle for national liberation and against colonialism and racism”¹¹⁶. The Algiers declaration of NAM in 1973, at India’s insistence emphasized that just and durable peace in the region could be obtained only on the basis of “two indispensable fundamental pre-requisites; restoration of the Palestine people’s national rights, the foremost among which is the right to return to self-determination---and --ensuring global recognition of the PLO as the legitimate and the sole representative of the Palestinian people”¹¹⁷. At the Colombo NAM Summit in 1976, India wholeheartedly supported a resolution that condemned ‘Israel’s racist, expansionist, terrorist policy and its attempt to Judaize Arab territories’¹¹⁸. It was also due to the continuous efforts of India and other Non-Aligned Nations, Palestine formally entered into the NAM as a full member in August 1976.

¹¹⁵ *Summit Declarations of the Non-Aligned Movement 1961-2009*, Institute of Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu, 2011, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ *NAM Documents*, p. 51.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 111.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.186.

Thus India had played a very significant role in getting the PLO recognised as the true representative of the Palestine people both in the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. According to Prithvi Ram Mudiam, India sought to help the PLO gain international political acceptance as a reasonable and moderate organization and live down its image as a terrorist outfit by canvassing its case in the UN and outside, so that when the time for the final settlement came, the PLO would have gained sufficient respectability and credibility to participate in the negotiations as an independent organization genuinely representative of the Palestine people¹¹⁹.

India's Relationship with the PLO

The formation of PLO as an umbrella organization of various Palestine guerrilla groups in 1964 was an important step towards the liberation of Palestine. The unexpected defeat of the Arab armies in June 1967 brought PLO to agree on the necessity of launching independent military action by integrating various armed organisations called the *fidayeen*. The Cairo Congress of the Palestinian National Council held in 1 February 1969 elected Yasser Arafat, a young Palestinian engineer, as the Chairman of the PLO. The PLO under Arafat's leadership acted as a unifying force among the scattered Palestinian community and confirmed the Palestinian national identity. The Cairo Congress of the Palestinian National Council held in 1 February 1969 elected Yasser Arafat, a young Palestinian engineer, as the Chairman of the PLO. In this endeavour, India specifically preferred Al-Fatah, the largest of the Palestinian

¹¹⁹ Mudiam, *op cit.*, No. 96, p.185.

groups, led by Arafat. This was because of the following reasons. First, Al-Fatah was essentially a nationalist organization which embarked on an ambitious effort to unite the Palestinians at every level. It wanted to establish a democratic state in Palestine regardless of race and religion to build a progressive society contributing effectively towards the creation of a progressive and united Arab society. These objectives were naturally to India's liking. Second, its approach was secular. It did not give a religious colour to its struggle with Israel by characterising it as 'Jihad'. Third, India believed that the pragmatic approach of Yasser Arafat and his charismatic leadership would be helpful in resolving the dispute¹²⁰.

In 1969, the Al Fatah delegation visited India at the invitation of the Indian association for Afro-Asian solidarity¹²¹. During the visit, the delegation called the Indian Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh and requested permission to open an office in India. In December 1974, about 30 MPs demanded the granting of diplomatic status to the PLO to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the 'Palestine Revolution'¹²². On January 10, 1975, India became the first Non-Arab country to recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and permitted it an independent office at New Delhi which paved the way for an official Palestinian presence in India. Mrs. Gandhi told an interviewer that

¹²⁰ Vincent, *op cit.*, No. 86, pp. 166-67.

¹²¹ Nair, *op cit.*, No. 31, p. 74.

¹²² *Hindustan Times*, December 23, 1974.

this act had nothing to do with economics but was rather a political act "because we feel that injustice has been done"¹²³.

Comparing India's recognition of Israel in 1950 and the PLO in 1975, Krishan Gopal and Sarbjit Sharma find the following differences. First, while recognising Israel in 1950, India had formally expressed its reservations vis-à-vis Israel's frontiers and the status of Jerusalem. There was no official statement about any such conditions being attached to the recognition of the PLO. Second, while India was one of the last independent non-Muslim states in 1950 to recognise Israel, it became the first non-Arab state to recognise the PLO. Third, unlike the Israeli example, the recognition of the PLO was soon followed by the opening of an independent office in the Indian capital which became an embassy within six years. Finally, in 1950s, its recognition of Israel was conveyed through a unilateral message whereas its recognition of the PLO was formalised through an agreement between India and the PLO¹²⁴.

When Janata party came to power in 1977, there were speculations about a possible shift in India's Palestine policy. However, the presence of the Pro-Israeli Jana Sangh and its leader Atal Behari Vajpayee in the Moraji Desai led Janata Government could not change India's traditional policy towards West Asia. The Janata Government reaffirmed India's support to the Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular and was supportive of any peace initiative between

¹²³ Cited in Gordon, *op cit.*, No. 89, p. 228.

¹²⁴ Gopal and Sharma, *op cit.*, No. 89, p. 147.

Arabs and Israel. It was during this period, Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defence Minister made an unofficial visit to India (August 14, 1977). During his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Moraji Desai told him, 'You must make peace with the Arabs. The Israelis have suffered from the Nazi's and from the prosecution in Europe, but the Palestinians should not be made to pay for it'¹²⁵. The argument of Dayan that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state would be permanent threat to the peace and security of Israel was out rightly rejected by Desai. When he raised the question of establishing full diplomatic relations between the two countries, Desai pointed out that 'India has mistaken.. in not having done this at the very outset, when Nehru had come to power with India's independence. But this mistaken policy could now not be changed'. Desai said, according to Dayan, that the Indian people would rise against the government if there was an attempt at having diplomatic relations with Israel¹²⁶.

On the question of the regularization of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, the Janata Government responded very sharply. On 22nd August 1977, the Ministry of External Affairs issued an official release in which it said, "India was always against acquisition of territory by any country by use of force. India therefore strongly deplores the action taken to regularize existing Israeli settlements in the occupied areas and to authorize new ones"¹²⁷.

¹²⁵ Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough—A Personal Account of the Egypt—Israel Peace Negotiations*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978, p. 26.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 8, August 1977, p. 138.

The Camp David Accord that was signed between Egypt and Israel on 17th September 1978 was denounced by the PLO and the Arab world. Egypt was accused of destroying Arab solidarity by signing a separate treaty with Israel. In this context, the response of India was totally in tune with the Arab world. A. B. Vajpayee, the Foreign Minister said at a press conference that India did not welcome the Camp David Accord because it suffered from three major shortcomings. First, Palestine was the key issue in the Middle East problem and there could be no lasting peace until the inalienable rights of the Palestine people were restored. Secondly, PLO had not been recognized by Egypt and Israel as the representative body of the Palestinians. Third, the Camp David Accord was silent on the status of Jerusalem. Such a response of India, no doubt, reiterated her full and unconditional support to the Palestinian cause and interests of the PLO¹²⁸.

Following the Camp David Accord, when the Arab states made combined efforts to expel Egypt from the NAM at its Havana summit in September 1979, India stood by Egypt and firmly opposed such a move. Expressing India's concern more candidly, the Indian Foreign Minister, S.N Mishra argued that 'the Egypt-Israeli treaties have caused fears and misgivings which have led to the exacerbation of the situation particularly by dividing the Arab world. It is for Egypt to remove these misgivings'¹²⁹.

¹²⁸ *Hindu*, October 7, 1978 and *Sunday Standard*, October 8, 1978.

¹²⁹ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 9, September 1979, pp. 173-180.

Another significant development of the period towards the commitment of the Palestine cause was the observation of the "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine People" organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the PLO in New Delhi on 29th November 1979. Presiding over the function, the Minister of State for External Affairs, B Barua said, "Today when an increased number of people all over the world are coming to see and understand the justice of Palestinian demand, we Indians, not only feel a sense of gratification but also a sense of vindication for our long-standing and consistent policies"¹³⁰.

In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a thumping majority and continued her support to the Palestinian struggle. Her Foreign Minister P.V Narasimha Rao announced in Parliament on 26th March 1980 that India had decided to accord full diplomatic recognition to the office of the PLO in New Delhi by upgrading its office to that of an embassy endowed with all diplomatic immunities and privileges¹³¹. As a follow up to this, Arafat paid a three-day official visit to India between 28th and 30th March 1980. At a dinner given in honour of him, Mrs. Gandhi said that sympathy for the Palestinians 'has been a part of independent India's foreign policy from its very inception'. She also reiterated that a just peace and a comprehensive solution to the Middle Eastern crisis could be found only with the "full participation of the PLO as an equal partner in any

¹³⁰ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 9, November 1979, p. 213.

¹³¹ *Hindustan Times*, March 27, 1980.

settlement¹³². In turn, Arafat in his speech described India “as an eternal friend”. In an interview, he expressed the hope that Palestinians are sure of success if a great country like India steadfastly supports the Palestine cause¹³³.

Though India’s full diplomatic recognition of PLO in general was meant to strengthen its diplomatic option, there were three considerations that prompted the Indian Government to resort to such step. First, India considered it in her interest to strengthen the radical elements in the Arab world to counterbalance the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalists who are trying to give a ‘religious twist’ to what was really a political struggle against Israeli administration. Second, India was impressed by the ‘refreshing moderation’ that Arafat himself had been displaying in promoting the Palestinian cause¹³⁴. Third, India also thought it wise to clarify the Islamic world about the initial Indian position with regard to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan¹³⁵.

India’s Palestine policy was further strengthened when Arafat visited second time to India as Head of the State in exile in May 1982. This time, his visit was politically significant as it took place against the background of Israeli threat to invade Lebanon and the resurgence of Islamic fervour in the region as a consequence of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. During the occasion, at a dinner given in honour of Mr Arafat, Mrs Gandhi

¹³² *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 3, March 1980, pp. 75-6.

¹³³ *Hindustan Times*, March 29, 1980.

¹³⁴ *Hindu*, March 29, 1990.

¹³⁵ *Tribune*, March 31, 1986.

described him as 'the symbol of a people afire with the spirit of freedom'¹³⁶. On the other hand, Arafat expressed his gratitude for the 'strong and very important support which you extended to our just cause and national struggle'¹³⁷. Further, in the same meet, the two leaders issued a Joint Indo-PLO communiqué on 23rd May 1982. The communiqué expressed concern over the Israeli acts of violence and aggression against Palestinian people in the occupied territories and their continuous aggressive acts and threat of invasion of south Lebanon, aided by the regular flow of highly sophisticated imported weapons¹³⁸.

In June 1982, Israeli invaded Lebanon. Mrs Gandhi described it as "Israeli attempts to wipe out the Palestine movement"¹³⁹. P.V Narasimha Rao, the Foreign Minister of India, referred to the invasion as the 'enactment of a savage drama involving the butchery of our Palestinian brothers and sisters'¹⁴⁰. In view of this sharp and harsh Indian response on Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Israeli Consul, Mr Yosef Hasseen, made a public statement in 1982 that New Delhi's anti-Israeli position was 'unrepresentative of Indian popular opinion'¹⁴¹.

¹³⁶ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 5, May 1982, pp. 152-54.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 154-56.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 156-58.

¹³⁹ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 7, July 1982, pp. 183-84.

¹⁴⁰ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 6, June 1982, pp. 163-4.

¹⁴¹ In an interview, Mr Hasseen said "There was a strong Muslim Arab lobby in New Delhi and the Arab ambassador was making use of Indian Muslims to bring pressures to bear on the Government". He also opined that Israel was getting a bad Press in India because the Press was following the official line and that India was competing with Pakistan to impress the Arabs. For more see *Times of India*, April 3, 1982.

Subsequently, in September 1982, India declared the Israeli Consul *persona non-grata* and ordered him to leave the country.

The Indian stand on Israeli invasion of Lebanon was gratefully acknowledged by Faisal Ahudav, the PLO Ambassador to India. Later in September 1982, Mrs. Gandhi further sent a message to Arafat in which she praised the PLO's spirited resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon¹⁴². Here one could see India's deliberate diplomacy and political strategy in West Asia in favour of the Palestinian cause and thus to nurture and strengthen the PLO as the sole crusader of the rights and interests of the Palestinians.

In March 1983, the seventh NAM summit was held in New Delhi and the Movement's Chairmanship had passed to India. At the end of the summit, the NAM issued 'the New Delhi message'¹⁴³ which besides expressing the customary support for the Palestine cause sent a message of solidarity to the Palestine people and condemned Israeli attempt 'to quell legitimate opposition by the Palestinians in the occupied territories'¹⁴⁴. The summit also resolved to set up a NAM Committee on Palestine in order to monitor closely the developments in relation to the Palestine issue and initiate 'some action' in the face of rapidly deteriorating situation in the Middle East. The first meeting of the Committee was held at New Delhi in

¹⁴² *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 9, September 1982, p. 277.

¹⁴³ *Foreign Affairs Record*, No 3, March 1983, pp. 54-56.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 60.

October 1983 and it urged that a process of negotiation should be launched without delay. In another meeting in New Delhi in April 1985, the committee recommended the convening of an international conference under the aegis of the UN in order to obtain a 'comprehensive, just and durable peace in West Asia'¹⁴⁵.

In April 1984, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Arafat's headquarters in Tunis after a state visit to Libya. When Mrs Gandhi was assassinated a few months later by her bodyguards in New Delhi, a shocked Arafat wept in public.

By this time, there emerged factional crisis within the Palestinian movement. India realized that this new development would work against the very base of the Palestinian cause. Hence India stood for the unity of all factions and even deputed S.L Yadav, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha to attend the crucial 17th session of the Palestinian National Council in Amman in November 1984 which was to decide the fate of Arafat's leadership in the PLO. Notwithstanding this, India's sympathy was with Arafat.

In June 1985, few months after assuming power, Rajiv Gandhi paid a state visit to Egypt and reaffirmed India's longstanding support for Arabs and the Palestinians. When Israeli air raided against the PLO headquarters in Tunis in 1985, India strongly condemned it as "aggressive and expansionist" and

¹⁴⁵ *Ministry of External Affairs Annual Report, 1985-86*, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 20.

portrayed the act as a “threat to peace and security.” It also sent messages of solidarity and support to both Arafat and the Prime Minister of Tunisia¹⁴⁶. However, India was not prepared to go along with the Arab states in expelling Israel from the United Nations.

The outbreak of the Palestinian intifada (uprising) in December 1987 in Gaza and West Bank due to the ‘iron fist’ policies of Israel is counted as a major event in the history of Israel Palestine conflict¹⁴⁷. Given its historical disposition, India’s sympathy and support for the Palestinians was inevitable. Another outcome of the intifada was the Algiers Declaration of November 15, 1988, in which the PLO declared its belated acceptance of the 1947 partition plan and proclaimed the “state of Palestine.” India became one of the first countries to recognize the state of Palestine and received PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as a head of state¹⁴⁸. The intifada also influenced India’s refusal to play the Davis Cup delegation playoff tennis match in Israel in April 1988. The PLO leader was very much conscious of India and her role. He expressed ‘deep gratitude’ and ‘appreciation’ for the solid support of India for the cause of Palestinian self-determination and independent statehood. Arafat, who became a frequent visitor to India and was received as a head of state after India’s recognition of the newly proclaimed State of Palestine in November 1988, was presented the ‘Jawaharlal

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁷ For a detail account of the 1987 intifada see Jawaid Iqbal, “The Palestinian Uprising: Causes and Catalyst”, *Journal of West Asian Studies*, 2004, pp. 20-34.

¹⁴⁸ Bansidhar Pradhan, “India’s Policy Towards the PLO”, in Riyaz Punjabi and A.K Pasha eds. *India and the Islamic World*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1998, p. 67.

Nehru Award for International Understanding' by the Indian Government in March 1990. This award to Chairman Arafat was "a well deserved tribute to his wise and inspiring leadership of the Palestine people and was "symbolic of India's unequivocal and strong reassertion and reiteration of its unfailing and consistent support and abiding commitment to the Palestinian cause"¹⁴⁹.

Mudiam rightly emphasises three elements in India's approach to the Palestinian question in order to demonstrate that there have been fundamental differences between the Indian approach and that of the more extremist elements among the Arabs and the Palestinians to the issue from the very beginning, though these difference have been somewhat obscured by India's loud and consistent support for the Palestinian cause over the years.

First, it is often overlooked that India never associated itself in any way with the extreme Arab demand for the liquidation of the state of Israel. Once India recognised the existence of Israel as an established fact, it implicitly accepted the position that any solution put forward for solving the Palestinian refugee problem should address and take care of the legitimate security interests of the Jewish state. In other words, the Indian and Arab policies on Israel have differed radically as far as the fundamental issue of the existence versus the annihilation of Israel is concerned.

Second, India was genuinely concerned about the plight of the displaced Palestinians, though at this stage India merely considered them as refugees and

¹⁴⁹ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XXXVI, No 1, January, 1990 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1990.pdf>, p. 42.

even thought it possible that some of them, at least, could be absorbed by various Arab countries. Hence India extended consistent support to all efforts aimed at providing immediate relief as well as long term rehabilitation of the Palestinian refugees.

Third, India never endorsed the Arab position of refusing to negotiate with Israel. India, over the years, stuck to the position that only direct negotiation between the Arabs and Israel would provide a way out of the Arab-Israel stalemate. Nehru himself time and again, "probed in his talks with the Arab leaders, especially Nasser, into whether there was an opening for reconciliation with Israel, but he had always come up against a wall of steel".¹⁵⁰

India's Palestine Policy: An Alternate View

Though India has always extended full support to the Arabs on the Palestine issue, the Government of India's policy on the Arab Israel dispute remained a subject of deep dispute by the opposition political parties--- the right wing *Jan Sangh* and the *Swatantra* Party and the middle of the road *Praja-Socialist Party (PSP)* and the *Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP)*--, the national media and the informed Indian citizens. The Congress party itself was divided on the issue and even senior cabinet ministers had been known to entertain serious reservations regarding the unqualified support extended by the Prime Minister and the External Minister to various moves made by the West Asian nations on different occasions.

¹⁵⁰ Mudiam, *op cit.*, No. 96, pp. 177-78.

During the mid and late fifties, opposition parties in India from the Left (Communists and Socialist parties of all hues) to the Right (Jan Sangh and Swantantra Party) had supported the Arab cause and had demanded the ending of West backed military grouping in West Asia. However the stand of the Arab states during India's armed engagement with China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965 & 1971 had convinced these parties that India, in spite of its full support to the Arabs, had not been able and was not likely to ensure Arab neutrality in her disputes with its neighbours. So they raised strong objections to what they called as the "one-sided and self-destructive position" taken by the Government of India on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Moreover, the opposition was against any national commitment to Indian initiatives which were not backed by a national consensus¹⁵¹. However, since the Congress party led by Nehru, Shastri, and Mrs. Gandhi had always had a large majority in the Lok Sabha and remained in power for a long period of time, the opposition criticisms had usually not changed Government's policy. But by pressing questions, criticizing government positions and offering alternatives, the opposition had made the *Lok Sabha* a debating forum and had let the Congress know that there were other viewpoints in the country.

Quite apart from the opposition reaction, the national press too did not endorse the style and content of the Government's West Asia policy. The Indian media which had been traditionally very supportive of the Arab cause had

¹⁵¹ For an excellent discussion on opposition parties viewpoint see R.K Srivastava, "India and the West Asian Crisis", *Foreign Affairs Report*, April, 1968.

criticised the official Indian position in the 1967 war. The news papers like *Times of India*, *Indian Express*, *Statesman* and *Hindustan Times* made some critical remarks on Indian policy vis-à-vis support for the Arabs¹⁵². Their embittered mood had been shaped against a double back-drop of pan-Islamic sentiments and consequent pro-Pakistani feelings of some of the West Asian nations and the belief of a large section of Indians in the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state.

As far as the public perception was concerned, a survey conducted in mid-July 1967 by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion on the "West Asian Crisis" had revealed that two out of three respondents in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras opposed India's extension of unqualified support to the "Arab cause" and maintained that India needed to take a "more objective and impartial stand" on the Arab Israel issue¹⁵³. Similarly, some of occasional letters to the editor published in three important Indian newspapers—*Hindustan Times*, *Statesman* and *Times of India*—as of late July 1967, favoured the Israeli position¹⁵⁴.

There are several reasons why the opposition parties, national media and informed Indian citizens criticised the Government of India's policy towards the Arabs. The first reason was that when the chips were down between India and

¹⁵² To know more on this aspect see *Indian Opinion on the West Asian Crisis*, Indo-Israeli Friendship League, Bombay, 1967.

¹⁵³ *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Public Opinion, July 1967, pp. 3-19.

¹⁵⁴ Richard J Kozichi, "Indian Policy towards the Middle East", *Orbis*, Fall, 1967, p.107.

Pakistan, all Arab countries supported the latter irrespective of the merits of the dispute because of religious considerations. That Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan openly and that several other Arab countries did so only a little more discreetly at the time of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 and 1971 had confirmed to this conviction. The *Jan Sangh*, for instance, argued that there was no reason why India should unnecessarily continue to alienate Israel for the sake of the undependable Arabs. It wanted New Delhi to establish full diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv so that the closest collaborations could develop between two non-Muslim countries in this pre-dominantly Muslim region¹⁵⁵.

Another reason for opposition was that India's 'one sided' policy on Arab Israel conflict was inconsistent with its avowed foreign policy of non-alignment. If non-alignment is defined as independence in foreign policy and judging every international event on its merits, then many argued that India's continuous and automatic support to the Arabs had made "screaming nonsense of its non-alignment" policy¹⁵⁶. Though Egypt and Syria had launched a coordinated attack on Israel in 1967, the Indian Government conveniently ignored certain

¹⁵⁵ For more on this see Balraj Madhok, "India's Foreign Policy: The Jan Sangh View", *India Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, January-March 1967, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ C Rajagopalachari, for instance, argued that "the non-alignment of India had become indeed a joke". He cited the Government of India's blind support to Nasser against Israel in regard to the Aqaba Gulf-Swatantra, *Newsletter*, No. 61, July 1967, pp. 4-5. The Jana Sangh leader Balraj Madhok similarly said that government must pursue a policy of non-alignment in the Arab Israeli dispute as the Arabs pursued the policy of non-alignment vis-à-vis India's conflict with Pakistan and China-- Madhok's statement in Parliament, *Indian Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.6, No. 4, June 15, 1967, cols. 12150-12162. The *Swatantra* Party called India's standing alignment against Israel as unfortunate and declared that India's role in the world as a crusader for peace and non-alignment has come to an end-- *Swantra Newsletter*, No 61, July 1967, pp. 4-5. *Swarajya*, the party mouthpiece maintained that India's support for the Arabs stood against the principle of peaceful coexistence as these states were out to destroy Israel-- *Swarajya*, Vol 11, No 50, 10 June 1967, p. 2.

unpleasant facts¹⁵⁷ in relation to the conflict and blamed Israel for encouraging the Arab countries to attack it. The fact that Arabs had initiated the conflict was by-passed and no reference was made to the Arab refusal to negotiate. Moreover, India's stand at the UN seemed to suggest that the Arab had no option but to use of force to regain the lost territory. According to Mohammad Ayoob "instead of advising caution to Egypt, the Indian leadership seemed to have told Nasser only what he wanted to hear. Similarly, instead of advising its Arab friends on the realities of the situation after the 1967 war, India, nevertheless, steadfastly upheld the position of upholding the Arab stand of non-recognition of Israel"¹⁵⁸.

The third criticism hinged on the concept of reciprocity in international relations. This had wide appeal in the country in view of its unhappy experience with Mao's China, Sukarno's Indonesia and Nkrumah's Ghana. The contention in connection with West Asia was that since most Arab countries took up a neutralist stance at the time of the Chinese aggression in 1962 and tended to side with Rawalpindi at the time of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 & 1971, New Delhi was under no moral obligation to support them in their dispute with

¹⁵⁷ According to the *Statesman*, India did not discourage Nasser's demand for withdrawing the UNEF, did not disapprove Nasser's hostile act in closing the Gulf of Aqaba, impeded an early cease-fire by insisting on the condition of returning to the lines held on June 4 and pressing for a resolution at the UN which took no account of Israel's need for security against a ring of encircling neighbours who declared that the war was not over and nothing had changed their purpose. See *Statesman* Editorial, June 12 & 13, 1967.

¹⁵⁸ Mohammad Ayoob's comments on S.A.H Haqqi's article ("Israel and the West Asian Crisis", *Mainstream*, 29 July, 1967), *Mainstream*, 26 August, 1967.

Israel¹⁵⁹. President Nasser undoubtedly played a helpful role at the Colombo Power's conference¹⁶⁰, but his role during the Indo-Chinese war in 1962 had saddened many in India¹⁶¹. Similarly his Prime Minister Ali Sabry took up a blatantly pro-China line and Heykal, a close confidante and editor of *Al-Ahram*, indulged in cheap criticism of India¹⁶². The response of other Arab states to the Sino-Indian conflict was also disappointing. In a resolution on Kashmir at the UN in 1962, several Arab countries endorsed Pakistan's position. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, Jordan served as Rawalpindi's mouthpiece in the Security Council and Saudi Arabia reportedly provided funds for the purchase of arms¹⁶³. At the Casablanca Conference of the Heads of Arab States in September 1965, several Arab states endorsed the Pakistani position. They also voted against India in the UN Security Council election in 1966 as Syria was a candidate. The huge disappointment encountered by India at the Rabat Conference of 1969 left

¹⁵⁹ Girilal Jain, "India's West Asia Policy", *Times of India*, November 22, 1967.

¹⁶⁰ At the Colombo Conference which was held on 10 December 1962, Nasser was instrumental in preventing the conference from adopting an anti-Indian and pro-Chinese stance. For more see Peter Lyon, *Roots of Modern Conflict: Conflict Between India and Pakistan: An Encyclopaedia*, ABC CLIO INC, California, 2008, p. 46.

¹⁶¹ Indians expected Nasser to come out more openly and empathetically on India's side just as India had supported Egypt during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Instead of just offering to mediate, Nasser should have condemned China for its aggression against India.

¹⁶² Girilal Jain, "Disillusionment with the Arabs: A Shift in Indian Opinion", *Round Table*, July 1967, pp. 433-8.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

a bitter taste and the opposition parties took it up to flog the government for its pro-Arab stance vis-à-vis Israel¹⁶⁴.

There were many voices in the Arab world carelessly pouring scorn at Indian leaders and suggesting that India was already, or was on the way to becoming an American colony. Pictures of India disintegrating into chaos under the weight of obscurantism and incompetence were gleefully drawn by some Arab commentators¹⁶⁵. Similarly, during the Indo-Pak war in November 1971 that eventually led to Pakistan's dismemberment and the rise of an independent Bangladesh nation, countries like Egypt and Syria took a neutral stand while nations like Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia condemned India¹⁶⁶.

In contrast to this Arab record, Israel never hesitated to come to India's defence, publicly and vigorously, in most of India's major conflicts with its neighbours. For instance, during national crises such as the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962 and the Indo-Pakistani wars in 1965 and 1971, India sought and obtained

¹⁶⁴ The Rabat Conference of Islamic leaders was convened on September 23 and 24, 1969, to condemn Israel for the burning and destruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. When the Indian delegation led by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed reached Rabat to attend the conference, the Information Minister of Rabat conveyed that Pakistan and a few other countries had objected to the Government of India's participation in the conference and pleaded that they—either voluntarily withdraw from the conference or accept the status of observer or remain physically absent from the conference without withdrawing from it. They were even refused entry to the conference hall. The conference met without any representation of India and adopted a final declaration which made a reference in its preamble to the representatives of the Muslim community in India being present at the conference which was contrary to the facts. Expressing his displeasure Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed said: "The Government and people of India deplore the discourtesy shown by the Conference in not honouring its own invitation which had been extended unanimously to the Government of India". For More see A. Appadorai, *Select Documents on India's Foreign Policy and Relations, 1947- 72*, Vol. II, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985), p.371-72.

¹⁶⁵ Jain, *op cit.* No. 162.

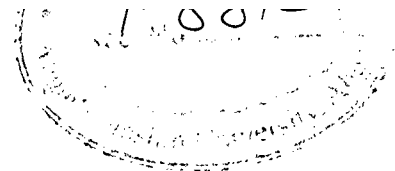
¹⁶⁶ Arthur G. Rubinoff, "Normalisation of India-Israel Relations: Stillborn for Forty Years", *Asian Survey*, Vol.35, No.5, May 1995, p.498.

a limited quantity of mortars and ammunition from Israel¹⁶⁷. Similarly, Israel took a pro-India stand by criticizing Pakistan during its war with India in 1965 & 1971 and backed India's stand that the 1972 Shimla agreement between India and Pakistan could be the only basis for a final settlement of the Kashmir issue. In view of this, a section among Indians thought that an Indian policy of all-out support to Arabs against Israel was not only needless but also unjustified.

The fourth reason for criticism was that if India clearly identified with one side in a conflict, it could hardly have any leverage in helping to bring about a settlement in the Arab Israel conflict. In a joint letter to the Prime Minister, the *Jana Sangh*, PSP, SSP, *Swatantra Party* and DMK appealed to adopt an "objective attitude" towards the 1967 conflict and "abstain from taking sides or apportioning blame at this stage"¹⁶⁸. Such an attitude, they stated, would not be conducive to India's playing an honourable part in resolving peace in West Asia. Similarly the *Jana Sangh* in a resolution at its All India Working Committee meeting at Rajkot said that "by taking sides in a most blatant manner, India has ruled itself out of any mediatory role in an area crucial to our vital national interest. By going more Arabian than Arabs, New Delhi has neither served national interests nor promoted the cause of peace". New Delhi's West Asia

¹⁶⁷ P.R Kumarswami, "Israel India Relations: Seeking Balance and Realism" in Efraim Karsh ed. *Israel: The First Hundred Years*, Vol. IV, Frank Cass, London, 2004, p. 263. Also see Ramananda Sengupta, "India Walks a Tightrope in its Relations with Israel, Arab Nations", *Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies*, July 2010.

¹⁶⁸ As quoted by M.R Masani in his statement in Parliament, *Indian Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.6, No. 40, July 15, 1967, cols. 12132-38.



policy, it alleged, was conditioned by the ruling party's obsession with the communal vote¹⁶⁹.

The fifth reason for opposing India's West Asia policy arose from the misplaced 'fear of the Government that if India displeased the Arabs, the latter would take the side of Pakistan and will eventually support Pakistan's demand for Kashmir¹⁷⁰. Finally, it was argued that the Arabs and the Palestinians had made a historic 'mistake' in rejecting the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which paved the way for the partition of the British-ruled mandate Palestine. This was admitted none other than Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority in a recent interview to an Israeli TV channel¹⁷¹. That rejection was meant a Jewish state was created while the Palestinians were left without a state. Palestinian and Arab leaders had then called for resisting Resolution 181; with Arab neighbours invading Israel at the declaration of the latter's independence in May 1948, threatening to occupy the entire Mandate territory. At the end of that war, the Arab armies stood defeated and Israel had increased its land area by half as much as its original allotment. Thereafter, the Arabs had

¹⁶⁹ As quoted in Gopal and Sharma, *op. cit.*, No. 75, pp. 200-01.

¹⁷⁰ See *Janata*, Vol 12, No 21, 11 June 1967, p. 1 and Vol. 12, No 33, 25 June 1967, p. 14. Also *Organiser*, Vol. 19, No. 33, 3 April 1966, p. 3.

¹⁷¹ "State of Recall: Why Mahmoud Abbas's Regret on Palestinian's 1947 Stand is Historic", *Indian Express* editorial, November 1, 2011.

aggravated the situation in the Middle East by following a policy of “no recognition, no negotiation and no peace with Israel”¹⁷²

Although it is difficult to dismiss all the points mentioned above, now the question is had India not followed a pro-Arab policy as it did over the years what would have been the consequences? According to Girilal Jain, the consequences of a change of policy would have been highly adverse for India. It would have earned the hostility of all Arab countries irrespective of their internal differences including India’s trade relationship and oil imports from the region, confirmed the unhappy and erroneous impression in the Soviet bloc that India had for all practical purposes abandoned the policy of non-alignment, facilitated the task of Pakistani and Chinese diplomacy in isolating India in the Third World, created an anti-Soviet alliance of the Muslim countries of West Asia by the West with Pakistan cast in a leading role which would have acquired strong religious and therefore anti-India overtones and alienated the Muslim intelligentsia at home¹⁷³.

Even if it is conceded in numerous instances that the Arabs had been unfriendly, policy makers in New Delhi cannot afford to withdraw into their shell and sulk. India is inextricably tied to the Muslim world and cannot be disinterested in its fortunes. It would be highly unrealistic for India to expect the Arabs to choose between New Delhi and Beijing and New Delhi and Islamabad. The Arabs have ties of religion and culture with Pakistan which they cannot be

¹⁷² K.R Singh, *The Arab League and Israel*, Melkolte Ram ed. *Regional Organisations: A Third World Perspective*, Sterling, New Delhi, 1990, p.159.

¹⁷³ Girilal Jain, *Times of India*, *op cit.*, No. 159.

expected to ignore. The pro-West Arab governments also tend to be pro-Pakistan. It is instructive to note that all Arab countries sided with India on various issues relating to the abortive second Afro-Asian summit at Algiers in the summer of 1965¹⁷⁴.

However, the situation in West Asian witnessed a sea change when Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. It was during this period the Soviet Union was disappearing from the world map marking the era of unipolar world dominated by the United States, the remaining Super Power. In the meantime, the P.L.O. lost its political leverage on account of its support to Saddam Hussain. The United States took the initiative of holding international Middle East Peace Conference immediately after expelling Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991. This marked new era in West Asia due to different varieties of diplomatic manoeuvring. As a consequence to these developments, India also made drastic changes in its policy towards West Asia. It established full diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992, after 40 years it recognized that country.

From the above analysis, it is evident that India's posture towards Palestine had gone through several phases. First, India considered the Palestine problem as a continuation of the colonial question and sought its elimination by way of ending British mandate and the creation of an

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

independent state of Palestine, as a major and fundamental issue. At the same time, India considered the Jewish question as a minority problem and as such sought its settlement by providing minority rights and safeguards to the Jews. Hence in the first phase, India's opposition was against the imperialist forces and their evil designs. This is mainly because India had identified the British motive of exploiting the Arab-Israel differences to perpetuate its hegemony over Palestine. Here, India's opposition was backed by her sentimental problems and historical background, which also turned against Israel.

The second stage began with the large scale migration of Jews from central and Eastern Europe to Palestine between 1935 and 1947. In this phase, though India was sympathetic to the plight of the Jews, she had opposed to the Jewish claim of a separate state in Palestine. Hence, in the moral and ideological ground, India stood for the Palestinians, which in effect, was politically against the Zionists interests.

The third phase started with the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and India's recognition of it in 1950. From the very time of recognition, India's approach to the Palestine cause was conditioned to the reality of the existence of Israel. No doubt, India endorsed Israel's right to exist as a free and independent state. However, right from the Suez crisis of 1956, the expansionist and aggressive tendencies of Israel prevented

India from coming closer to the Jewish state which indirectly cemented the political and diplomatic understanding with the Arab world. Even then, during this phase, India's Israel policy was something different from that of the Arab states, which never recognized Israel as a state and resorted to extreme options to liquidate the Jewish state. India was against this and stood for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the Jews and the Palestinians. However, the absence of an Arab consensus towards the role and status of the PLO led India to support Arab countries on Palestine rather than to directly deal with the PLO.

In the fourth phase, especially after the 1973 Arab Israel war, India gradually moved away from the policy of supporting individual Arab countries on Palestine to back the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by its Chairman Yasser Arafat in its struggles for an independent homeland. This was mainly because the PLO was recognised as the 'sole representative of the Palestine people' by the 1974 Rabat pan-Arab summit. Such an Indian posture has been proved right in the context of the Oslo Peace Treaty (1993) and the ongoing peace initiatives between Israel and Palestinians.

In the fifth phase, the India had accorded diplomatic recognition to Israel in 1992. This policy shift of the Indian government was heralded by major changes in international political scenario and its due reflection in her policy priorities and interests. This development has created new doubts on India's commitment to the Palestine cause which is analysed in the third chapter.

Chapter Three

India's Diplomatic Relationship with Israel: Impact on Palestine

India formally announced its decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel on January 29, 1992 under the Prime Ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao. The move in this direction was undertaken in mid-1980 when Rajiv Gandhi, known for his non-ideological approach to foreign policy, assumed office in October 1984 following the assassination of his mother Indira Gandhi. In September 1985, for instance, Rajiv Gandhi met his Israeli counterpart Shimon Pares during the annual UN General Assembly session¹⁷⁵. A few months later Israel was allowed to post a regular vice consul in Bombay to replace Yossef Hasseen who had been expelled in June 1982 for his controversial interview to the Indian media. In 1988, after a gap of six years, the Israeli representation was elevated to the pre-1982 position of consul.

Rajiv Gandhi and the Normalisation of Relationship with Israel

During Rajiv's tenure both countries also played the quarter-final of the Davis Cup Tennis Tournament in July 1987. The match generated a lively public debate in India on the question of normalisation of relationship with

¹⁷⁵ P.R Kumarswami, "Israel- India Relations", *op cit.*, No. 167, p. 264.

Israel¹⁷⁶. The nascent normalisation gained momentum in June 1988 when during his visit to the US, Rajiv Gandhi met a group of Jewish leaders to discuss the issue. Towards the end of that year, India formally extended the jurisdiction of the Israel consul to the south Indian state of Kerala which has a significant number of Jewish populations¹⁷⁷. During the special session convened in Geneva, the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, K.K Tiwari, headed the Indian delegation. Despite the event of the Palestinian uprising and the denial of a visa by the US to the PLO Chairman, Yasser Arafat to address the General Assembly in New York, Tiwari refrained from denouncing Israel. Earlier, condemning Israel and holding it responsible for escalating tension in West Asia had been the conventional part of Indian speech in the UN. Not only that, India also recognised Israel's right to exist "in peace and security within internationally recognised boundaries"¹⁷⁸. In January 1989, India hosted an-Anti Defamation League delegation as well as US Congressman Stephen Solarz. The question of normalisation figured prominently during

¹⁷⁶ C. Subramaniam, a former Cabinet Minister under Indira Gandhi, joined for instance with Israel's traditional supporters. He sought to break the popular tendency of linking Israel with apartheid South Africa and publicly asked: "[Do] we need to be more Arab than Egypt?" The issue dominated the front pages of Indian newspapers for well over four months. Rajiv Gandhi eventually gave the games the green light. For more see P.R Kumarswami, *India's Israel Policy*, Columbia University Press, 2010 available at <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-15204-4/indias-israel-policy/excerpt>

¹⁷⁷ Kumarswami, "Israel- India Relations", *op cit.* No. 167.

¹⁷⁸ *National Herald*, December 18, 1988.

their discussions with Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao and other senior government officials¹⁷⁹.

However, a number of impediments prevented Rajiv Gandhi from normalising relationship with Israel. The outbreak of the intifada in December 1987 significantly eroded Israel's international standing and India was not immune to that process¹⁸⁰. Moreover, Israel's involvement in the Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, especially its military-intelligence cooperation, was viewed with suspicion and anger in India. It was feared that Israel's involvement in the conflict would strengthen Colombo's determination to impose a military solution on the ethnic conflict and thereby undermine India's interests in the region¹⁸¹. Furthermore, other factors such as rapid erosion in his domestic popularity especially due to the allegations of bribery in arms deals followed by the electoral reversals of the Congress party in 1989 Lok Sabha elections, the era of political uncertainty resulting in two minority governments in quick succession which were preoccupied with their survival rather than offering any substantive foreign policy initiatives and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi himself by the LTTE guerrillas in 1991 prevented normalisation of relationship with Israel.

¹⁷⁹ They included Alfred Gonsalves, Secretary and P.K Singh, Joint Secretary, MEA. For more see *Hindu*, January 6, 1989.

¹⁸⁰ Kumarswami "Israel- India Relations", *op cit.*, No. 167.

¹⁸¹ For a detail account see P.R Kumarswami, "The Israeli Connections of Sri Lanka", *Strategic Analyses*, Vol. 11, No. 11, February 1987, pp. 141-55.

P.V Narasimha Rao became India's new Prime Minister on June 21, 1991. Within days after Rao's assumption of office, a group of Israeli tourists were kidnapped and attacked by the terrorists (The Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front) in Jammu and Kashmir¹⁸². Following this, the government declared that normal consular restrictions would not impede the handling of a humanitarian problem. Prime Minister Rao agreed to the visit of a senior Israeli diplomat, Moshe Yegar, to coordinate the release of the Israeli nationals with Consul Giora Becher. After days of hectic behind-the-scenes negotiations, the militants released the Israeli tourists¹⁸³. On 16 December 1991, India voted with the majority of UN members in repealing the 1975 General Assembly Resolutions equating Zionism with racism¹⁸⁴. As one of the original supporter of the resolution, this marked a significant departure from the past and the voting was considered as a sign of pragmatism in India's foreign policy.

Domestic Discourse and the Normalisation of Relationship

During this time, the Indian media, both electronic and print, started what could be termed as a concerted campaign for normalization of

¹⁸² Bernard Weinraub "Kashmir Rebels Kill Israeli Tourist, Marking New Phase in Conflict", *New York Times*, June 28, 1991 at <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/28/world/kashmir-rebels-kill-israeli-tourist-marking-new-phase-in-conflict.html>

¹⁸³ Kumarswami, "Israel- India Relations: Seeking Balance and Realism" *op cit*.

¹⁸⁴ Bansidhar Pradhan, "Establishing Ties with Israel: Prudence or Pressure?", *Link*, Vol.34, No. 23, January 19, 1992, p. 29.

relationship with Israel¹⁸⁵. Spearheaded by the well-known strategic expert-turned-academic C. Raja Mohan, the pragmatists saw normalization within the context of the emerging post-Cold War global order¹⁸⁶. They argued that the earlier justifications for an anti-Israeli policy had crumbled and urged India to recognize and capitalize the new Middle Eastern reality opened up by the 1991 Gulf War that dispelled any doubts as to where the loyalties of the oil-rich Arab monarchies laid, in spite of their many grievances against the United States and the Madrid Peace Conference. The country's opposition parties also maintained a pro-Israeli stand and kept a constant pressure on the government to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. From the BJP side, Pramod Mahajan spearheaded this demand. He was supported by Yashwant Sinha (Samajwadi Janata Party) while Subramanyam Swamy (Janata Party) and R.K. Karanja (nominated) wanted a more humane approach towards Israel. Pramod Mahajan pointed out that both China and Pakistan had occupied large parts of Indian territory yet there were full diplomatic links with them¹⁸⁷. Yashwant Sinha similarly maintained that India's foreign policy should be based on national interest. By being pro Arab all these

¹⁸⁵ In November 1991, the Indian Television network *Doordarshan* (which reaches 87% of the Indian population), for instance, dedicated an entire program to the Middle East peace process and Indo-Israel relations. Most of the interviewees on the program (mostly opponents of the ruling Congress party) likewise favoured full diplomatic relations.

¹⁸⁶ For more on this debate see Kumarswami, *India's Israel Policy op cit.*, No. 167.

¹⁸⁷ *Statesman*, November 26, 1991.

years, India was not able to get the support of the Arab countries during critical times and that most of these countries had been consistently pro-Pakistani¹⁸⁸.

The pragmatists and the pro-Israeli elements put forward three main arguments in support of their view¹⁸⁹. First, by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, India would be in a better position to engage itself in the West Asian peace process and thereby influence the Israel policy in favour of the Palestinians. The continued refusal to establish diplomatic relationship with Israel limited India's role as a possible peace-maker between the Arabs and the Israelis¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁸ *Financial Express*, November 28, 1991.

¹⁸⁹ It is a cardinal principle of the "realist" theory of International Relations that the foreign policy of a sovereign nation state ought to be in pursuit of the "national interest" (Hans Morgenthau, "In Defence of the National Interest", 1951). Any deviation from this course in response, for instance, to the pressures of domestic religious or ethnic minority groups, is fraught with peril and may lead to the defeat and even extinction of the state. For excellent arguments in the Indian context, see C. Rajamohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy*, Delhi: Penguin, 2003 and his paper "Rethinking India's Grand Strategy" in N. S. Sisodia and C. Uday Bhaskar (eds.), *Emerging India*, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Prime Minister Rao, for instance said "India would play a constructive, even-handed role in the peace process"; According to Ali Khan, contacts between India and Israel would have an influence on Israel's policy towards the Palestinians, making it more accommodating of Palestinian aspirations. Moshe Yegar, former Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry stated that Israel made it quite clear that countries who refused to have normal diplomatic relations with her while having such relations with the Arab countries would be barred from the Madrid conference. It seemed that the Ministry of External Affairs of India did not like the idea of staying out, especially when the PRC, Russia, the United States, and even Syria would be in. Itzhak Gerberg argued that in the absence of diplomatic relations with Israel it could not be a fully active player in UN activity in general and the Middle East peace process in particular. For more on this see Itzhak Gerberg, *India-Israel Relations: Strategic Interests, Politics and Diplomatic Pragmatism*, Israel National Defence College, IDF, February 2010. See also *Times of India*, January 25, 1992, "Israeli Terms on India's Role"; *Hindustan Times*, January 22, 1992; also see Maqsoodul Hasan Nuri, "The Indo-Israel Nexus", *Regional Studies*, Vol. X11, No. 3, Summer 1994, p. 10.

Second it was argued that in concrete terms, there were many advantages for India in establishing ties with Israel in specific areas like military modernisation, agricultural innovation and global Jewish investment. J.N Dixit, for instance argued that Israel's agricultural experiences in dry farming, desert irrigation, agro-industries and agricultural cooperatives could prove beneficial to India¹⁹¹. Ali Khan similarly argued "India could set the ball rolling for transfer of technology for agricultural and other purposes"¹⁹².

India could also benefit in combating terrorism in the states of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir from the Israeli experience and expertise in this regard¹⁹³. The type of terrorism that both India and Israel faced came not only from disaffected groups within their territories but it was also aided and abetted by the neighbouring states, mostly under non-democratic regimes, increasingly capable of transferring weapons of mass destruction to the terrorist organizations. States such as Pakistan in South Asia, or Iran and Syria in Middle East, had long used terror as an

¹⁹¹ J. N Dixit, *My South Block Years: Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary*, UBSPD, New Delhi, 1996.

¹⁹² Cited in Gerberg, *India-Israel Relations op cit.* No. 190, p.16. Also see C. Raja Mohan, "A Source of High Technology," *The Hindu*, 22 July 1997.

¹⁹³ J. N Dixit for instance argued that Israel's knowledge and experience in countering terrorism would be of an immediate relevance to India and dealing with secessionist movements in different parts of the country. For more see his book *My South Block Year op cit.* Similarly, on 23 February 1992, less than one month after the Indian announcement on diplomatic relations with Israel, the then Indian Defence Minister, Sharad Pawar, openly stated that normalization paved the way to drawing on Israel's successful experience to curb terrorism.

instrument of their foreign policies. Moreover, the tactics used by the Israeli Defence Forces [IDF] in the guerrilla and urban warfare could be fruitfully adopted by the Indian security forces in countering insurgency. These tactics have even been found useful by the U.S. forces in Iraq who had to learn IDF strategy of urban warfare to tackle growing insurgency there. There were, thus, distinct structural similarities in the kind of threat that India and Israel faced from terrorism. It is also important to note that when the extremist mullahs call upon their followers to take up arms in support of an Islamic jihad, their topmost exhortations have always been the “liberation” of all of mandatory Palestine, Kashmir, and the annihilation of the United States¹⁹⁴. Third, the emergence of an Islamic bloc in world politics made it essential for India to move closer to Israel¹⁹⁵. Martin Sherman, for instance argued that “An alliance between India and Israel openly endorsed by the U.S. would create a potent stabilizing force in the

¹⁹⁴ Salah Uddin Shoaib Choudhury, “Indo-Israel Relation Is Blessing for Both”, *Times of Assam*, November 9-10, 2011.

¹⁹⁵ For this line of argument see Gerberg, *India–Israel Relations op cit.*, p.62. Also see Richard L. Benkin, “An India-Israel-United States Alliance: The Last Great Hope for Humanity.” Arvind Ghosh Memorial Lecture, Chicago November 1, 2008 at: <http://www.freechoudhury.com/Arvind%20Ghosh%20Memorial%20Lecture.pdf>; Richard L. Benkin, “India-Israel Relations: The Imperative and the Challenge”, *Foreign Policy Research Centre Journal special issue on India Israel Relations* at: <http://www.fprc.in/J-5.pdf>, No. 5, 2011 ; Mike Marqusee, “Fateful Triangle: India, Israel and the US”, *Palestine News*, July 2006; Address by Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser of India at the American Jewish Committee Annual Dinner, *Embassy of India*, Washington, DC, 8 May 2003 at: <http://www.indianembassy.org/inews/2003/summer.pdf>; “Unwritten, Abstract US-India-Israel Axis to Fight Terror”, *Indian Express*, September 11, 2003 and B. Gautam, “India, Israel Ally against Islamic Terror”, *Japan Times*, Sept. 18, 2003.

region, which together with like-minded regimes such as Turkey, could contribute significantly towards facing down the force of radical extremism so hostile to American interests in Western and Central Asia"¹⁹⁶. Finally, it was argued that there were a lot of commonalities that hanged these two countries together - both shared a historical background as ancient civilizations, administered as colonies by Great Britain, established less than a year apart (India in August 1947 and Israel in May 1948), became democracies and survived in a sea of hostility, surrounded by implacable adversaries and a heavily militarized security environment. In addition, both nations fought wars in nearly every decade of their existence and suffered too much at the hands of state-sponsored Islamic jihadi terrorism¹⁹⁷. Finally, despite what conspiracy theorists might say, neither country had a quarrel with Islam—both house Muslim populations that enjoy more rights than their co-religionists in many other places¹⁹⁸.

The traditionalists who strongly opposed any diplomatic move towards Israel and favoured status quo on moral and humanitarian grounds put forward equally powerful counter-arguments in this regard. Challenging the realist contention that by establishing diplomatic relations

¹⁹⁶ Martin Sherman, "From Conflict to Convergence: India and Israel Forge a Solid Strategic Alliance", *Jerusalem Post*, February 28, 2003.

¹⁹⁷ Gerberg, *India-Israel Relations op cit*, No. 190, pp. 14-15.

¹⁹⁸ Sadanand Dhume, "India Fumbles on Palestine", *Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2011 at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203914304576628572684660598.html>.

with Israel, India would be in a better position to involve itself in the West Asian peace process, Bansidhar Pradhan argued that these people were probably living in a make believe world. He is of the view that to what extent India has been playing this role in this regard ever since its full diplomatic relations with Israel is there for everyone to see. Even if one accepts this argument, there are other ways and means by which India could have been involved in the peace process. Moreover, it may not be an exaggeration to say that even the US which has been a constant source of support—diplomatic, political, military and economic—to the continued existence of Israel from the beginning at times found it difficult to influence the Israel government beyond a point. This is for a country from which Israel receives billions of dollars in foreign aid annually. In view of this, it sounded ridiculous to expect that India could influence Israel's policy even nominally¹⁹⁹. Sreekantan Nair similarly argued that the justifications and reasons advanced by India in not making relationship with Israel, at the time of recognition, could be seen and felt in the present context as well. Therefore, the linking of India's diplomatic relation with Israel to the developments in West Asian peace process sounds futile in essence²⁰⁰.

As for the concrete benefits, the traditionalists noted that had this been the case, India could have established diplomatic relations with Israel

¹⁹⁹ Pradhan, "India's Policy Towards the PLO", No. 148, pp. 74-75.

²⁰⁰ Nair, *Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed op cit.*, No. 31, p. 119.

and benefited from its expertise in combating terrorism when the problem was at its peak during the 1980's. The claims about the gains of Indo-Israeli cooperation against terrorism seemed to be over stated because of the following reasons. First, at the conceptual level, there are fundamental differences between the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the Palestine issue. India is fighting against Pakistan which is not only occupying almost one third of Jammu and Kashmir but also using the territory as a springboard for terrorist operations to subvert international acclaimed democratic process there. Israel on the contrary, is in occupation of Palestinian land and the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza are resisting the illegal occupation²⁰¹. Second, the Israeli success in combating terrorism is at best dubious. The fact that the Israelis today are more insecure than ever before speaks enough about the effectiveness of the Israeli approach to terrorism. As Harsh Pant argues, "Israel's tough policy toward contentious neighbours and the Palestinians has not brought peace and security, but has rather served to entrench hatred in the Arab world". This is not to deny that Israel can be of some help to India in terms of sullyng sophisticated weaponry to fight terrorism. Third, India has handled its counter-insurgency operations in a much restrained manner than Israel²⁰². Finally, at the policy level, India's so called common cause with Israel in

²⁰¹ Pradhan, "Changing Dynamics of India's West Asia Policy", *op cit.*, No. 5, pp. 81-83.

²⁰² Salman Haider's interview with Onkar Singh at *Rediff News*, September 9, 2003 available at <http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/sep/09inter.htm>

fighting terrorism may send a wrong message to other important allies in the region with which India has substantial relations in diverse fields. Iran is one such country which is concerned with the growing Indo-Israeli strategic cooperation. Similarly Pakistan is sure to exploit the anti-terrorism front between India and Israel by giving it a religious colour. As A.K Pasha has rightly remarked "India has both the capacity and the experience to overcome all threats from Pakistan without outside help and 'to give an impression that India would tackle this threat with (Israel's) expertise or experience sends the wrong signal to many people both at home and abroad"²⁰³.

Third, the pragmatists argued that the emergence of an Islamic bloc in world politics made it essential for India to move closer to Israel. According to Bansidhar Pradhan, the talk of the emergence of an 'aggressive Islamic bloc' is basically an American projected new horror in the post-Cold War politics²⁰⁴. After the unexpected disintegration of the Soviet Union, the American Military-Industrial complex was looking for a rationale to preserve its predominant role in US foreign policy making and

²⁰³ A.K Pasha, *India and OIC: Strategy and Diplomacy*, Centre for Peace Studies, New Delhi, 1995, p. 42. Nabil Sha'ath, the Palestinian Foreign Minister, in an interview to *The Hindu* on the eve of Prime Minister Sharon's visit to India similarly argued that "Israel would like to make it look as if all Palestinian resistance was terrorism. Identifying with that puts you (India) in a position of being anti-Palestinian when there is no need to do so."

²⁰⁴ Pradhan, "India's Policy Towards the PLO" *op cit.*, No. 148, pp.77-81.

a talk of a new source of threat serves its interest well. Moreover, the American threat perception had been deliberately blown out of proportion which is not in tune with the ground realities. The Muslim world has never been a monolithic bloc nor is it in the process of becoming one. It is too diverse, both in terms of systemic and economic indicators, to reject it as a coherent, unified group so as to command decisive leverage in international politics. The eight year Iran-Iraq war had shown that the Muslim countries like any other modern state are guided more by their national interests and domestic political considerations at a given time than by religious considerations. Finally, it is absurd to think that the entire Islamic bloc will gang up against India on Pakistan's plea simply because they are Muslim countries. Pakistan has been trying this ever since 1947 but only with limited success. India has been able to maintain fairly cordial relationship with the Muslim countries over the years²⁰⁵.

As far the commonalities between India and Israel are concerned, the traditionalists argued that India is a pluralist secular democracy while Israel prides itself on being an exclusivist and semi-theocratic Jewish state²⁰⁶. In other words, while Israel "unabashedly defends the rights of

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ For more see *Hindu*, "India's Stake in the Palestine Cause" available at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/04/05/stories/2002040501151000.htm>

Jews over all others, India (as a state) has never claimed religious exclusivism for its Hindu citizens.

However, with the change of the international scenario caused by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the called pragmatists got an upper hand in the foreign policy debate as the Government began negotiations with Israel over normalisation of ties with the Jewish state. Within days of the UN vote, 'preliminary discussions were held between a senior Indian diplomat in Washington and the visiting head of the Israeli foreign Ministry²⁰⁷. On 29 January 1992, India formally announced its decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel, considered by some as one of the most important steps in Indian diplomacy²⁰⁸.

Factors That Contributed to Normalisation

Since it is widely accepted that India's decision to normalise relations with Israel was taken against the backdrop of sweeping changes at the international, regional and national levels, it would be appropriate to briefly focus on those changes and these impacted India's decision.

The first was the end of the Cold War which dealt a severe blow to ideological opposition towards Israel. Even though India's anti-Israeli policy

²⁰⁷ Kumarswami, "Israel- India Relations", *op cit.*, No. 167, p. 265.

²⁰⁸ J. N Dixit considered India's establishment of diplomatic relations with South Africa and then with Israel as the most significant among developments in its foreign policy, which occurred during his tenure as Foreign Secretary. For more see his book *My South Block Years op cit.*, No. 191.

had not evolved in the Cold War, the East West divide provided a strong ideological basis for it. Israel's exclusion and isolation from the Third World, NAM, G-77 and a host of other such forums were the result of perceived Israeli identification with the West as well as due to the ideological opposition of the East²⁰⁹. Now the end of the Cold war weakened the Non-Aligned Movement and reduced the ideological hostility towards Israel. This exerted a direct influence on the change of the Indian attitude to Israel in 1992.

The demise of Soviet Union in 1991 not only changed the world strategic balance and power structure in favour of the US but also created a security crisis for India. This is because India and the Soviet Union had been close allies for several decades and above all, the Soviet Union was meeting nearly 80 percent of India's military needs²¹⁰. Now with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became imperative for India to find itself new partners and most importantly, new military suppliers. Improving relations with Israel seemed to be a convenient option, especially in the field of defence since the Jewish country had emerged as a growing source of advanced military technology and hardware in the world and possessed excellent relations with the USA. Moreover, the shared Indian

²⁰⁹ Gopal and Sharma, *India and Israel, op cit.*, No. 75, pp. 264-65.

²¹⁰ For more on Soviet Union's arms supply to India see Upendra Choudhury, *Security in a Period of Strategic Uncertainty: A Study of India's Ballistic Missile Programme*, Unpublished Ph D Thesis, CPS/SSS, JNU, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 56-60.

and Soviet security and geopolitical outlook coincided with the anti-Israel policy of both until 1991. Cold War politics and Soviet anti-Israel policy, among the chief factors keeping India distant from Israel in the past, ceased to be relevant, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's active participation in the Middle East peace process. This also led India to reconsider its policy towards Israel.

With the collapse of socialist system of economy led by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation became the triple slogans of change in the global economic scenario. Unlike the Cold War period where 'divisions were created and alliances formed along ideological lines', during the post-Cold War era, 'economic competition' drove 'international relations' leading to an intensification of competition over access to "vital economic assets" like oil and natural gas²¹¹. The Rao government faced critical choices. On the one hand, there were the Congress traditions of Nehruvian socialism (mixed economy), non-alignment and anti-imperialist thrust in foreign policy. On the other hand, there was the "dramatic worldwide trend towards market reforms" and the necessity to integrate with the world economy. India had to either adapt to the new reality by embarking on the path of economic

²¹¹ Michael T. Klare, "The New Geography of Conflict", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No.3, May June 2001, p. 50.

liberalisation and moving closer to the US or risk being isolated²¹². Dithering in a deep economic crisis and acute foreign exchange shortage²¹³, the Rao government preferred the first option. Thus, the compulsions of globalisation and India's subsequent acceptance of the path of economic liberalisation made it more dependent on the US as the latter exercised a decisive say in international financial agencies like the IMF and the WB. The success of the market economy depended heavily upon financial investments and technological cooperation from the West, especially the USA. So the US factor has played a major role in influencing India's foreign policy orientation in the post-Cold War era²¹⁴. Second and no less important, the majority of India's political establishment understood in the immediate post-Cold War period that it was imperative for India to build sound relations with the United States, the sole hegemonic power in the changed international system for a number reasons including to overcome the propaganda unleashed by Pakistan on Kashmir situation. Indian leaders came to assume that normalization with Israel would facilitate India's rapprochement with the United States, since they believed

²¹² Bansidhar Pradhan, "Globalisation and the Shift in India's Palestine Policy" in Anwar Al-Ali ed. *India and West Asia in the Era of Globalisation*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2008, p. 288.

²¹³ During this period, GDP growth was sluggish, inflation had reached double digits, the budgetary deficit was surging upward, and the economy was in tatters. Foreign exchange reserves had fallen to little more than US\$1 billion, a mere two weeks' worth of imports, and the foreign debt had climbed to more than US\$70 billion.

²¹⁴ Pradhan, "Globalisation and the Shift in India's Palestine Policy" *op cit.* No. 212, p. 289.

that the American Jewish lobby had a very significant influence on the foreign policy decisions of Washington²¹⁵. As Mohammed Ali Khan argued, "Normal relations with Israel could help turn pro-Israeli lobbies in the US to show at least a modicum of leaning towards India"²¹⁶. Indian Prime Minister Rao, in particular, was convinced that normalization with Israel was necessary to improve India's standing vis-à-vis the American Jewish community and the U.S. political establishment²¹⁷. It is to be noted that India announced its decision to formally establish relations with Israel on the eve of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to the US.

The PLO's policy had also changed. Its decision at the Arab League meeting in Cairo on August 10, 1990 of siding with Iraq²¹⁸ undermined the unity of the PLO as an entity²¹⁹ and alienated Arafat from the principal

²¹⁵ The Jewish minority in the United States, which is just 2% of the total population, has enjoyed unparalleled economic mobility coupled with disproportionate academic and media influence during the past two generations. This has enabled it to organize the most powerful lobby in Washington: AIPAC (American Israel Political Action Committee). For more on this see John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007.

²¹⁶ Mohammed Ali Khan cited in Gerberg, *India Israel Relations*, op cit., No. 190, p. 24.

²¹⁷ Arielle Kandel, "India Israel Relations in the Post-Cold War Period", *The Weekly Blitz*, February 21, 2010 available at <http://www.weeklyblitz.net/535/indo-israeli-relations-in-the-post-cold-war-period>

²¹⁸ Rashid I. Khalidi, "The Palestinians and the Crisis", *Current History*, Vol. 90, No. 552, January 1991, p. 18 and Mitchell Bard, "The Gulf War" available at: http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Gulf_War.html

²¹⁹ Salah Khalaf, a PLO leader and many others argued that the Palestinians were vulnerable and as such should not take side in inter-Arab conflicts because Kuwait was always the supporter of the Palestinian cause and was always ready to absorb Palestinian labours. Khalaf was assassinated at the start of the Gulf war. The extreme HAMAS and Islamic Jihad too demanded

players in the region such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt. This led to the marginalization of the Palestinian issue in Middle Eastern politics and severe erosion of the PLO's economic base since the PLO depended on the Arab world's diplomatic, financial, and military support to survive and to fight against Israel²²⁰. These developments compelled the PLO to abandon its strategy of armed struggle against Israel and seek a negotiated political settlement with the Jewish state.

The PLO recognised Israel's existence and made a plea for initiating the peace process. The USA's recognition of PLO on the eve of Madrid Conference accentuated the latter's status. The Israeli Parliament Knesset responded to this change by adopting a 'new peace initiative' with the Palestinians²²¹. Within the PLO, there were groups who advocated for change of policy in tune with the changing world. The aspiration of this group was reflected in the Palestine National Council programme of September 1991 to participate in the USA-USSR sponsored peace process which was held on October 30, 1991 at Madrid²²². The conference

the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. For more see Muhammad Muslih, "The Shift in Palestinian Thinking", *Current History*, Vol. 91, No. 561, January 1992, pp.23-24.

²²⁰ Barry Rubin Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the Arab States Mideast Security and Policy Studies, No. 36, January 1998 available at: <http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/books/36pub.html> and Daniel Lieberfeld, "Secrecy and "Two-Level Games" in the Oslo Accord: What the Primary Sources Tell Us", *International Negotiation* 13 (2008) 133-146 available at: http://www.duq.edu/policy-center/_pdf/lieberfeld-inter-neg.pdf

²²¹ Don Peretz, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising*, Boulder; Westview Press, 1990, p. 153.

²²² Muslih, "The Shift in Palestinian Thinking" *op cit.* No. 219, p. 27.

was attended by delegations from Israeli, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. There was also a Palestinian-Jordanian delegation comprising Palestinian delegation and Jordan delegation²²³. The conference did not yield any tangible result. But it was not without significance. The conference symbolised the desire of both parties to seek a political solution to the protracted Arab Israeli conflict through direct negotiations²²⁴. In certain ways, the Palestinian willingness to coexist with Israel vindicated India's desire for a peaceful and amicable resolution of the conflict. Moreover, the Arabs, who did not recognise Israel, sat with the Israelis for negotiation. This was a de facto recognition of Israel as a state by them.

Furthermore, as a precondition for co-hosting the Madrid conference, the USSR restored full diplomatic ties with Israel on 18 October 1991. Even China discovered the virtues of the Jewish state and began moving towards normalization on 24 January, 1992. These developments in the Middle East forced India to recognise a new reality: that the Israeli-Palestine conflict was not a zero-sum game and it was

²²³ G. Harms and T. Ferry, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction* Canada: Pluto Press, 2005, p 153. Also see "The Madrid Peace Conference", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Winter 1992, p. 117.

²²⁴ Thomas R. Mattair, "The Arab Israeli Conflict: The Madrid Conference and Beyond", *American Arab Affairs*, No. 37, Summer 1991.

possible to maintain close and cordial relations with both the parties to the conflict²²⁵.

India's decision to normalise relationship with Israel was made possible due to another development: India delinking Pakistan from its Middle East policy. Since the time of Nehru, India feared that Pakistan would make political capital out of ties with Israel. This could be one reason preventing New Delhi from establishing full diplomatic ties Tel Aviv soon after its recognition in 1952. However, the post-Madrid developments in favour of Israel greatly nullified Pakistan's ability to score 'brownie points'. Arab endorsement of a political settlement through direct negotiations with Israel weakened any arguments against India talking to Israel, especially when there were no bilateral disputes between the two countries to settle²²⁶. India recognised that excessive focus on Pakistan or demanding its interlocutors to choose between the two South Asian neighbours was not always effective. Demanding third parties to minimise their commitments to Islamabad might even impede these countries from taking India seriously.

Apart from the Pakistan factor, the terrorism factor also played an important role in normalising Indo-Israel relations. The 'Islamisation of

²²⁵ P.R Kumarswami, "Looking West 2: Beyond the Gulf" in David Scott ed. *Handbook of India's International Relations*, London: Routledge, 2011, p. 186.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Palestine resistance movement with the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah compelled India to reconsider its West Asian policy. Being a country worst affected by Pak sponsored cross-border terrorism, India saw Israel and the US as viable partners to tackle the Islamic fundamentalist threat generating from West Asian, North African and some Central Asian states²²⁷. India viewed that experience of Israel in handling the cross-border terrorist incursions would be greatly helpful to her.

India's domestic politics also played a role. The Indian National Congress lost the 1989 elections and did not form a coalition government until after the June 1991 national elections. Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, the Indian Left was used to taking 'inspiration' from Moscow in their reading and assessment of international developments. The willingness of Moscow to normalize relations with Israel just days before the inauguration of the Madrid Peace conference in October 1991 and the sudden disappearance of the USSR left them rudderless. This was important because the Indian left had close relationship with the Congress party and provided a strong ideological foundation for its pro-Palestinian policy²²⁸. On the contrary, the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a powerful force in Indian politics in early 1990s removed some hesitations about Israel. To the BJP, with its nationalist Hindu outlook, the

²²⁷ Vincent, "Cultural Determinants of India-Israel Relations", *op cit.*, No. 86, p. 172.

²²⁸ Gopal and Sharma, *India and Israel op cit*, No. 75, p. 265.

Jewish state was not so much a diplomatic burden as a potential ally against Pakistan and radical Islam and it demanded establishment of full relations with Israel. There was also a realisation in India that India's largely pro-Arab stance in the Middle East had not been adequately rewarded by the Arab world. India had received no worthwhile backing from the Arab countries in the resolution of problems it faced in its neighbourhood, especially Kashmir. There had been no serious attempts by the Arab world to put pressure on Pakistan to reign in the cross-border insurgency in Kashmir. On the contrary, the Arab world had firmly stood by Pakistan using the Organisation of Islamic Conference to build support for Islamabad and the jihadi groups in Kashmir²²⁹.

Thus, a host of international, regional and domestic factors influenced India's decision to establish full diplomatic relationship with Israel in January 1992. Summing up the whole issue, J.N Dixit, the former Foreign Secretary, who was involved in the entire process of India's decision to establish diplomatic relationship with Israel wrote in his memoirs that "three important developments

²²⁹ The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was founded in 1971. Traditionally the OIC was critical of India's international politics, in particular regarding Kashmir. In 1991 a conference of the Foreign Ministers of the OIC member-states in Karachi set up a fact finding mission and proposed that it be sent to Jammu and Kashmir to report on the situation there. India's refusal to allow the mission into the country earned it condemnation by the OIC summit conference for violation of human rights in Jammu and Kashmir; this encouraged Pakistan to engage in a more active Islamic anti-Indian foreign policy. The OIC consistently supported Pakistan against India over the Kashmir issue. India's frustration with the Arab countries was described by Dixit at a briefing with Arab Ambassadors at New Delhi (after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel). In his memoirs J.N Dixit says that he decided to take the bull by its horns. He told the assembled envoys that "India had not received any reciprocity on the Kashmir issue despite our long standing support to several Islamic countries". For more see Dixit, *My South Block Years op cit.*, No. 191.

caused India to establish diplomatic ties with Israel: first – the Gulf War of 1991; second – the general attitude of the Arab states toward the problem of Kashmir; and, third – the conclusion of a peace agreement between the PLO and Israel²³⁰. However, it is pertinent to mention here that although India established diplomatic relationship with Israel, the Indian embassy is in Tel Aviv and not in Jerusalem because it considers the status of the city as disputed.

International & Domestic Reactions

However, the response and reaction to this decision was different in different quarters. The commencement of diplomatic relationship was greeted both by the US and Israel. Stephen Solarz, the former Democratic Congressman, described India as ‘the largest democracy’ and Israel as ‘the most stable democracy in West Asia’ which have much in common²³¹.

In Israel, the news made headlines for the whole day on radio, television and in all the major newspapers which wrote lead editorials welcoming the move. Commenting on the ties, Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Pares said “For us India is not a country but a culture in which many of our children were educated from Tagore to Gandhi. We have been waiting for the moment to meet India diplomatically, economically and otherwise and we shall cooperate as friends at all possible levels²³²”.

²³⁰ J. N. Dixit, *My South Block Years*, *op cit.* No. 191, pp. 309-312.

²³¹ *Times of India*, January 31, 1992.

²³² *Hindustan Times*, September 24, 1992.

Benjamin Netanyahu, a Cabinet minister in the Yitzhak Shamir's Government said "It will benefit both countries. We have much to offer India in the fields of agricultural technologies, irrigation of drought-prone areas and health programmes. Similarly, India has a vast and advanced pool of scientists and the two countries can cooperate in numerous projects of mutual interests"²³³. Moshe Yegar, former Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, wrote "The establishment of diplomatic relations with two huge countries – China and India, which together are home to about half of the earth's population– within one week, is no mean achievement. It is doubtful if any similar development has taken place in the annals of Israel's diplomacy, except for the events of the first days after the achievement of statehood, when the United States, the Soviet Union and other countries announced their recognition of Israel one after the other"²³⁴.

The premier English daily *Jerusalem Post* in an editorial "India Joins the World" wrote "The argument that the Islamic world would side with Pakistan if India moves closer to Israel does not carry much weight. Islamic countries would naturally favour Pakistan under any

²³³ Cited in Shekhar Gupta, "Indo-Israeli Relations: A Pragmatic Peace", *India Today*, February 29, 1992, p. 168.

²³⁴ Moshe Yegar, "The Normalization of Relations between India and Israel: II", November 16, 2010 available at: <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/geopolitics/The-normalization-of-relations-between-India-and-Israel-II.html>

circumstances"²³⁵. David Gross, the Editor of the *Jerusalem Post*, wrote 'the progress in Indo-Israel relation was the result of developments in Kashmir during the last six months when an Israeli tourist was killed and others were kidnapped by Kashmir militants'²³⁶.

In an article appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, Yaacov Shimoni, Director General for Asian Affairs in the Israeli Foreign Office wrote 'the Indian decision to carry out diplomatic business with Israel was 44 years late' which he thought was not an important flaw. He however felt that the important flaw of the Indian policy on Israel was that it did not stem from a 'change of heart towards Israel' but from the compulsion of the changed world scene. The primary Indian motivation in his view was to 'improve relation with the US and join the Middle East peace process instead of leaving the initiative to China'²³⁷. In addition, many Jewish governmental and academic circles attributed to the change in India's attitude to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the advice of the US and quiet persuasion of some West European Powers together with the sophisticated diplomacy persuaded by the Israeli Foreign Ministry²³⁸.

²³⁵ Quoted in Gopal and Sharma, *India and Israel op cit.*, No. 75, p. 273.

²³⁶ Cited in L.K Sharma, "US Influenced India's Move", *Times of India*, January 31, 1992.

²³⁷ Quoted in *Telegraph*, May 29, 1992.

²³⁸ Sharma, "US Influenced India's Move" *op cit.*, No. 236.

The Arab press greeted the news with a mute reaction mentioning that it was not 'unexpected and dramatic' since efforts had been building up in that direction over the last few months. Almost all newspapers in the region carried the news in the front page without making any specific comments. But, no Arab country had openly criticised India's move. There could be two reasons for this. First, the changed behaviour of the Arab states on the eve of Madrid Conference does not provide any scope for criticising India. When they themselves were willing to accept Israel's existence and conduct negotiations with the Zionist state, how could they criticise India. Second, most of them must be suffering from the guilt conscience because of their pro-Pakistani stance on Kashmir as was evident from the proceedings of the OIC conferences on a number of occasions²³⁹.

²³⁹ Mustafa El-Feki, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Egyptian Parliament, and a former Egyptian ambassador to India, in an article in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, for instance wrote. "First, we have made the error of viewing the Indian-Pakistani conflict from an Islamic perspective. We have tried to "Islamise" the ongoing conflict in South Asia, posing as protectors of Islam and custodians of the international community. And we have overlooked the regional role of India, with Arab leaders showing up in New Delhi much less frequently than before. Second was the rejection of India's application for membership of the OIC. "A country with 120 million Muslim citizens applied for membership and what happened? Islamic countries, in typical naiveté, rejected the Indian application, imagining this would please Pakistan and teach India a lesson," he said. Making a strong case for an even-handed Arab approach towards India and Pakistan, the former ambassador to India recalled that during his time in India, the Palestinian ambassador to New Delhi enjoyed the privilege of meeting the Indian prime minister at any time he wished to do so. But as the Islamic phenomenon spread and some Arab policies acquired a religious tint, India grew visibly suspicious of the Arab and Islamic worlds. To make things worse, Arab diplomacy in India was lackadaisical over the past two decades... We have lost India so far for no good reason, I should say... It is time we mend this error. It is time to bring Arab countries closer to both India and Pakistan, rather than take one side or keep our distance altogether. I believe the Arabs have only themselves to blame for India's change of heart on the Palestinian question". For similar critique of the Arab world's policies towards India, see Abdullah Al Madani, "Indo-Israeli Ties: Arabs have None but Themselves to Blame," *Gulf News*, September 14, 2003 and Sudha

However, in India, the reaction was mixed. The External Affairs Minister, Madhav Singh Solanki defended India's upgradation of ties with Israel and said it formed the culmination of the recognition extended in 1950 and in no way constituted a reversal of its foreign policy²⁴⁰. The BJP leader A.B Vajpayee welcomed the decision and hoped that India would now play a more meaningful role in solving the West Asian crisis and begin the process of close cooperation between the two countries²⁴¹. The party president, Murli Manohar Joshi, welcoming the decision, observed that there was no reason for withholding the decision given the fact that even Egypt had accepted and accorded full diplomatic recognition to Israel 15 years back and argued that the real reason for the delay 'was the apprehension of Muslim votes in India'²⁴². In an article to *Indian Express*, L.K Advani wrote, "We in the BJP have long been of the view that India's attitude towards Israel has been unrealistic and not having diplomatic relations with that country does not serve any purpose. We kept putting pressure to establish full-fledged relations with Israel"²⁴³. Likewise Shiv Sareen, President of All India Hindu Mahasabha hailed the decision and

Ramachandran, "India Straddles Middle East Divide" *Asia Times*, March 30, 2007 available at: <http://www.lebanonwire.com/0703MLN/07033023AT.asp>

²⁴⁰ *Hindustan Times*, February 5, 1992.

²⁴¹ *Statesman*, January 31, 1992.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ L.K Advani, "Should Indo-Israel Ties be Strengthened? A Defence Tie Up Will Benefit India", *Indian Express*, May 24, 1993.

said that it was necessary to counter the influence of Islamic bloc on India²⁴⁴. The Indian Jews were similarly jubilant and their various associations hailed the decision.

Majority of the national dailies also hailed the move²⁴⁵. In an editorial "Shalom Israel", *Times of India* for instance wrote "Though it is infuriatingly belated, India's decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel is all the same of a truly historic import. It fees New Delhi's West Asia policy from the clutches of dogma and fear. The dogma, deriving from India's close rapport with the former Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, led New Delhi to espouse the Palestinian cause with a zeal not shared even by some Arab countries. The fear related to the possible loss of Arab support for New Delhi's stand on Kashmir and to the alienation of Muslim opinion at home. Given the Western and especially American tilt in favour of Pakistan, the attitude towards Israel was by no means without merit. It appeared to be all the more credible in view of Israel's occupation of Arab territories, its policy of creating Jewish settlements on them and its brutal suppression of Palestinian dissent. All this however, did not explain and much less to justify, ostracising Israel" especially after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. "New Delhi's reluctance to make the move seemed quite bizarre, especially after China had done so,

²⁴⁴ *Statesman op cit.*, No. 241.

²⁴⁵ For the response of some leading Newspapers see *National Herald*, January 31, 1992, *Hindustan Times*, January 31, 1992.

none other than Saudi Arabia was willing to consider a similar step and not the least, after Mr Arafat, had given the nod"²⁴⁶.

Welcoming the decision, K Subramanyam, a prominent member of India's strategic community and former Director of the New Delhi-based IDSA observed that the decision did not reflect any change in India's West Asia policy. The decision was in fact long overdue as the existence of Israel had been accepted by India in 1950. He also said that it was a question of extending full diplomatic recognition, the absence of which was a handicap for India in espousing the Palestinian cause. India had no first-hand knowledge of what was happening in the Israeli-occupied territories²⁴⁷. According to Shyam Saran, the shift in India's position with the changing international environment was a 'prudent act'²⁴⁸. To Gursharan S. Dhaujal, it was a step that was inevitable²⁴⁹.

However, a section of India's population was highly critical of the move. Senior Cabinet Minister Arjun Singh warned that this decision would affect Muslim support for the Congress party and would be a departure

²⁴⁶ *Times of India*, January 31, 1992.

²⁴⁷ *Statesman*, January 31, 1992.

²⁴⁸ Remarks made at IDSA Book Discussion Forum on India's Israel Policy on March 9, 2011, New Delhi available at: <http://www.idsa.in/event/IndiasIsraelPolicy>

²⁴⁹ Gulshan S. Dhaujal, "Indo-Israeli Ties: Is the Honeymoon Over"? *Financial Express*, August 16, 1992.

from the Nehruvian framework of India's foreign policy²⁵⁰. Partly due to similar concerns, the former Prime Minister V.P Singh also registered his opposition to normalisation. Chaturannan Mishra, the CPI National Secretary and M.P commented that it was 'a step in haste'²⁵¹. The Janata Dal MP, Syed Shahabuddin, said the decision at this juncture was 'neither morally nor politically defensible'²⁵².

Prominent Muslim leaders also criticised the decision. Maulana Syed Mohammed Musavi, Naib Imam of Jama Masjid and Syed Ahmed Bukhari flayed the Indian Government for establishing full diplomatic relationship with Israel and declared it as 'ill timed and hasty'²⁵³. Again, Jawed Habeeb, a member of All India Babri Masjid Committee said that all aspects should have been taken into consideration before making the decision and that the US also should recognise PLO in return²⁵⁴. The Student Union of the Aligarh Muslim University also criticised the Rao Government's decision²⁵⁵.

Members of the academia also criticised the move but they were not unanimous in their stand. For some, the move to normalise relations with Israel was a hasty, unnecessary and avoidable exercise. Bansidhar

²⁵⁰ Dixit, *My South Block Years*, *op cit.*, No. 191.

²⁵¹ Nair, *Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed* *op cit.*, 31, p. 132.

²⁵² *Statesman*, January-31, 1992.

²⁵³ *Indian Express*, January 31, 1992.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Statesman*, February 3, 1992.

Pradhan, for instance argued India 'should have followed a cautious and go slow policy in establishing full diplomatic ties with Israel. It should have waited till the ground realities in the West Asian theatre changed substantially so as to remove the very basis of its decades-old anti-Israeli policy. Israel's mere attendance of the Madrid Peace Conference in no way reflected a substantial policy change on its part towards the occupied territories and the Palestinians living under military occupation, in gross violation of established international law²⁵⁶.

Krishan Gopal and Sarabjit Sharma similarly argued 'If India were to make a decision primarily on the criterion of Israel's West Asia attitude, there was and there still is no case at all for establishing diplomatic ties. True, all of them have begun talking but Israel continues to hold out and is in illegal occupation of an entire country and parts of others. It is getting what was denied to it without an inch or an ounce of concession²⁵⁷. According to Shamir Hasan, "the establishment of diplomatic relations has diluted India's commitment to the high ideals of non-alignment, which had been the guiding force of our foreign policy. Israel represented all that was anathema to NAM, and a betrayal of NAM's struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism, racism and for the rights of small countries to determine and shape their own destiny. For him, the establishment of ties with Israel

²⁵⁶ Bansidhar Pradhan, "India's Policy Towards the PLO" *op cit.* No. 148, p. 73.

²⁵⁷ Gopal and Sharma, *India and Israel op cit.* No. 75, p. 272.

meant that India was now distancing itself from NAM, instead of reinforcing the movement to cope with the emerging international order"²⁵⁸.

Many criticised the Government's move for its 'improper', 'undemocratic' and 'immature' way of arriving at a significant political decision. They were especially sceptical on the way India took a decisive decision, which was done not by the Foreign Minister but by the Foreign Secretary, that too on the eve of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to the US²⁵⁹. In their view, instead of making a 'secret' 'hide and seek' and covert manner of making decision and declaration, the Government of India should have taken the Parliament into confidence and gone into a bold manner of open declaration and decision to establish ties with Israel²⁶⁰.

Others criticised the move because it was taken under USA pressure. M.S Agwani, for instance, remarked that although the establishment of 'full diplomatic relations with Israel was a correct decision [...] to do so under American pressure was unwise'²⁶¹. To Ramtanu Maitra,

²⁵⁸ Shamir Hasan, "The Evolution of India's Palestine Policy: A Fall from the Heights?" *Social Scientist*, Vol. 36, No. 1-2, January February, 2008, p. 88.

²⁵⁹ See for Instance A.P Venkateswaran, *Hindustan Times*, January 31, 1992.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ M. Agwani, 'Inaugural remarks', in K.R. Singh (ed.), *Post-War Gulf Implications for India*, New Delhi, 1993, p.3.

New Delhi's decision on the Israel-Palestine issue was made in the US, though not necessarily by the Bush Administration²⁶².

Some others saw the decision as 'opportunistic'. According to Punyapriya Das Gupta, there took place 'slippage from the vaulted moral foundation of India's Foreign Policy' where the gap was filled by the motives of real politik²⁶³. To Sajad Ibrahim, the traders and business lobby in India and Israel played a crucial role in fostering the ties between the two countries for promoting mutual interests. The Indian business lobby was not interested any matters regarding the case of Palestinians since Palestine has little to offer financially or technologically, while Israel can sell to India what the US refuses to it²⁶⁴. Shamir Hasan regretted that India's course of action was guided by a peculiar perception of self interest rather than any sense of sympathy for Palestine²⁶⁵.

²⁶² Ramtanu Maitra (2003), "Palestinians Pay for Indian Ambitions", *Asian Times Online*, September 10, 2003 available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/E110Df03.html, retrieved on 25-09-2008.

²⁶³ Punya Priya Dasgupta, "Betrayal of India's Israeli Policy" *op cit.*, No. 92.

²⁶⁴ K M Sajad Ibrahim, "India's Collaboration with Israel: A Policy of Opportunism", *FPRC Journal* (New Delhi) No.5, 2011, pp.139-151

²⁶⁵ Shamir Hasan, "The Evolution of India's Palestine Policy", *op cit.* No. 258, p. 91.

Others viewed normalisation as a betrayal of the traditional Indian commitment to the Palestine cause²⁶⁶. Some portrayed the decision as an anti-Muslim alliance, if not a conspiracy²⁶⁷.

Although not everyone was happy with normalization, it had ceased to be a contentious issue in India and even parties which initially opposed normalisation such as the Communist Parties and *Janata Dal*, slowly recognised the need to engage and cooperate with Israel. The veteran Communist leaders such as the then Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu and Somnath Chatterjee even visited Israel in the summer of 2000²⁶⁸.

Impact of India Israel Relationship on India's Support to Palestine

Although India's relation with Israel started at a low profile during the Congress regime, the relations between the two countries reached new heights during the BJP led National Democratic Alliance regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). During the Kargil War of 1999 when

²⁶⁶ Punyapriya Dasgupta, "Betrayal of India's Israel Policy" *op cit.* No. 92, pp. 767-72; Mani Shankar Aiyar, 'Chutzpah', *Sunday*, (Calcutta), 6 June 1993, pp.14-17 and 'Betrayal of the Palestinian cause', Editorial, *People's Democracy*, (New Delhi), 13 January 2002 available at: http://pd.cpim.org/2002/jan13/01132002_edit.htm.

²⁶⁷ Indian left parties depicted Indo-Israeli ties as a conspiracy against Muslims. Also see Bansidhar Pradhan, "India's Policy Towards the PLO" *op cit.*, No. 148, p. 81.

²⁶⁸ In summer 2000, the Chairperson of the India Israel Parliamentary Friendship League, Somnath Chatterjee, a leader of the Communist party in India (CPI) who became the Speaker of Lok Sabha in 2004, visited Israel, accompanied by the former Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu. This visit was interpreted that even the Indian Left wing and Communist Parties were no longer opposed to ties with Israel. For more this visit see Subodh Ghildiya, 'Jyoti, Somnath visited Israel', *The Pioneer*, (New Delhi), 9 June 2004.

Pakistani intruders had taken up positions on the higher reaches of the Kargil mountains, Israel responded quickly to India's requests for arms and sent Heron and Searcher unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, to locate and identify the Pakistani-held positions. It also supplied ammunition for the Bofors field guns and night vision equipment, both of which played key roles in the conflict²⁶⁹. Thereafter, the Indian Home Minister, L.K.Advani and External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh visited Israel in quick succession in May 2000 and June 2000 respectively followed by the state visit of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September 2003²⁷⁰. In addition to this, India's National Security Advisor, Brijesh Mishra and Services Chiefs had also visited the Jewish country underlining the growing strategic

²⁶⁹ Ramananda Sengupta, "India Walks a Tightrope in its Relations with Israel, Arab Nations", Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, July 2010.

²⁷⁰ A series of bilateral visits between Indian and Israeli political leaders took place starting in 1992. This included: The Israeli Finance Minister Shimon Peres in May 1993; President Ezer Weizman in January 1997; Finance Minister Shimon Peres in January 2002; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in September 2003; Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom in February 2004; Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade, Industry and Labor Eliyahu (Eli) Yishai in December 2006; Minister of Transport and Road Safety Shaul Mofaz in March 2007; Interior Minister Meir Sheetrit in November 2007; and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Shalom Simchon in January 2008.

Significant visits by Indian leaders included the following: Home Minister L. K. Advani in June 2000; Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh in July 2000; Minister of State of Science and Technology and Minister of Earth Sciences Kapil Sibal in May 2005; Minister of State for Housing and Tourism Kumari Selja in September 2005; Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar in November 2005; Minister of Commerce and Industry Kamal Nath in November 2005; Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar in May 2006; Minister of State of Industry Ashwani Kumar in August 2007; Minister of State for Railways R. Velu in December 2007; former Indian President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam in February 2008; Chief Justice K. G. Balakrishnan in December 2008; Chief Minister of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal and the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Shri Prem Kumar Dhumal in November 2009; Minister of Commerce Jyotiraditya Scindia (to discuss a free trade agreement) in February 2010. For more see Embassy of India, Tel Aviv website at <http://www.indembassy.co.il/India-Israel%20Bilateral%20relations.htm>

cooperation between the two countries²⁷¹. When the United Progressive Alliance Government under the Congress leadership came to power in mid-2004, it decided to follow the same line of the policy adopted by the earlier NDA regime but without compromising India's traditional support to Palestine²⁷².

At present, India is Israel's closest ally with strategic, defence and intelligence cooperation growing rapidly between the two countries. India has become the biggest market for Israeli arms. Israel provides India with missile radar, border monitoring equipment and other similar high-tech military hardwares. In addition, several thousand Indian soldiers have been provided with "anti-insurgency training in Israel"²⁷³. These growing ties between India and Israel which some have dubbed as a 'strategic

²⁷¹ Subhash Kapila, "India – Israel Relations: The Imperatives For Enhanced Strategic Cooperation" South Asia Analysis Group Paper available at: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers2%5Cpaper131.html>

²⁷² The new UPA coalition Government was formed by the Congress party in May 2004, the following proclamation, as part of the Common Minimal Program of the UPA, was made: "The UPA Government reiterated India's decades-old commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people for a homeland of their own". (*The Pioneer*, 21 June 2004) Natwar K. Singh the new Minister of External Affairs summarized this policy in a newspaper interview in New Delhi: "We greatly value our relationship with Israel but this will not and should not affect our relations with Palestine" (*Times of India*, 12 July 2004).

²⁷³ For an excellent piece on this see "Indo-Israel Military Relations" available at: <http://www.stopthewall.org/downloads/pdf/Indo-Israel-D.pdf>. Also see Ahmed Abdel Halim, "The Indo-Israel Military Relationship and its Impact on the Arab World", Middle East Round Table, Edition 18 Volume 1 - November 20, 2003 available at: <http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/previous.php?opt=1&id=18#72>

partnership²⁷⁴ and its consequent effect on New Delhi's posture towards Palestine have generated another lively debate in the country. There are two different viewpoints on this issue. According to one view, India's growing ties with Israeli has neutralised its traditional support to the Palestine issue. The other view argues that India's friendship with Israel has not affected its support to the Palestinian cause.

Those who subscribe to the first viewpoint argue that there has been a discernible shift in India's Palestine policy since 1992. They charge the Government for injecting a serious distortion to India's position on West Asian crisis by ignoring the beleaguered Palestinians and their just cause for building up a 'special relationship' with Israel. This they believe is a negation of national sentiment and a shameful interlude in India's longstanding traditional relations with West Asian countries. The new approach they think has reduced India's stand on Israel-Palestinian conflict to a state of voiceless impotence.

The Indian response to the PLO after the commencement of the diplomatic relation with Israel is cited to validate this argument. In this regard, it is argued that while there are hectic activities for strengthening of relationship between India and Israel, the same is not done with regard to

²⁷⁴ P.R. Kumaraswamy is one of them. See his policy paper for more, *India and Israel: Evolving Strategic Partnership*, Mideast Security and Policy Studies, No. 40, September 1998 available at <http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/publications/40pub.html>

Palestine. It is also pointed out that in the light of the emerging tempo of relationship between India and Israel, the Indian policy makers have failed to keep themselves in tune with the negative developments in the Israeli-PLO negotiations. The Hebron massacre, the inordinate delay in starting autonomy process, frequent and long time closure of Israeli borders, non-release of the Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails and reluctance in starting election process in the occupied territories, are instances of Israeli non-compliances with the letter and spirit of the Oslo Peace Accord signed in September 1993. India's non-response to these developments is contrary to its earlier activist stand on Palestine. Hence, India's Palestine policy, in its present phase, has turned to be, in effect, a 'no policy' at all.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, a senior Congress leader and a Member of Parliament thinks that a strong relationship with Israel deviates from the Nehruvian foreign policy of un-stinted support to the Palestinians. He argues that in 1947, India was the only country which stood against the partition of Palestine. Yet, today's Indian establishment is opposed to what India has historically stood for, vis-a-vis the Palestinian issue²⁷⁵. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Harkishan Singh Surjeet, thought that the government had reversed the national consensus that characterised India's foreign policy. The Communist Party

²⁷⁵ Ravish Tiwari and D.K. Singh, "Aiyar's Latest Revolt: UPA Depends on Israel, Is Ignoring Palestine Justice," *Indian Express*, September 25, 2010

of India leader A.B. Bardhan regretted that "the Government of India had let down an old friend" (Palestine)²⁷⁶. According to Prakash Karat, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) who succeeded Surjeet, India's deep military ties with Israel has undermined its pro-Palestine policy. In his view, "We have to break the strong collaboration with Israel, stop the tilt, reverse the ties and restore India's independent foreign policy." "Ties with Israel, which are harmful, have to be reviewed," he mentioned, calling on the government to "come clean" and "spell out its stand on Palestine"²⁷⁷.

Jayati Ghosh lamented there was a time when India was seen, internationally, as an originator and major force in the Non-Aligned Movement, a leader of the developing world, and generally a bulwark against imperialism. Much has changed since then²⁷⁸.

According to Bansidhar Pradhan 'even though it would be an extreme statement to maintain that India has totally abandoned the

²⁷⁶ Cited in John Cherian, "India's Changing Stand", *Frontline*, Volume 17, Issue 22, Oct. 28 - Nov. 10, 2000.

²⁷⁷ Prakash Karat, 'Palestine: The Bush-Sharon axis of evil', *People's Democracy*, 12, May 2002, http://pd.cpim.org/2002/may12/05122002_palestine.htm and Prakash Karat's interview to *Frontline*, 1-14 March 2003, <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2005/stories/20030314007001600.htm>.

²⁷⁸ Jayati Ghosh, 'The Dubious New Alliance', *Frontline*, 7-20 June 2003 available at: <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2012/stories/20030620005411900.htm>.

Palestine cause subsequent to the high profile and fast developing robust partnership between Israel and India, there has been an evident dilution in India's traditional consistent, unequivocal and strong political support for the Palestine struggle against Israel. From one of total identification with the Palestinian struggle for their legitimate rights to an independent statehood by unequivocally opposing Israeli policies against the Palestinians at every multilateral forum during the Cold War period, India has come to adopt the so called policy of equidistance in the Israel Palestine conflict during the post-Cold War era. Even this policy has often been marked by a subtle tilt towards Israel especially during the BJP-led NDA regime on the grounds of internal security and anti-terrorism cooperation. In a way the dilution of India's Palestine policy has been built into the very logic of the growing strategic relationship between India and Israel²⁷⁹.

Malik Tauqir Ahmad Khan is of the view that India has managed a comfort level with Israel which signifies the substantive recession in India's interest in the Palestine question. Indian vocal posturing on Palestine issue during pre-independence and post-independence Nehruvian period has virtually ceased after the end of Cold War with official pronouncements

²⁷⁹ Bansidhar Pradhan, " Globalisation and the Shift in India's Palestine Policy" *op cit.* No. 148, p. 291.

leaning more towards the restoration of peace in the region than an active call for recognizing Palestinian rights²⁸⁰.

Aijaz Ahmed points out how the position of the leadership of the Indian National Congress on Palestine has changed over the decades. Gandhi had unambiguously recognised the rights of Palestinian people on their land, a view which was later championed by Nehru and his followers in the Non-Aligned Movement. However, the official Indian position has shifted since the 1990s towards closer ties with Israel. He linked the shift with the emergence of Hindutva and neo-liberalism and fall of the socialist block²⁸¹.

Shamir Hasan blames the NDA Government for breaking free from all the earlier constraints, including the earlier close ties with the Palestinian movement, in pursuing its close friendship with Israel. He accused India's policy on Palestine as 'deceptive' and the UPA Government's commitment to Palestine cause as a 'paper commitment'²⁸².

Syed Sultan Mohiddin argues that having been in the forefront of support for Palestinians' freedom fight for decades, India's lukewarm response to Israel's massive Gaza offensive is an indication of strategic

²⁸⁰ Malik Tauqir Ahmad Khan "Palestine Question and India's Israel Policy" *Journal of Research (Humanities)* Vol. 27, 2007, p.31.

²⁸¹ Remarks at the Conference on "A Just Peace for Palestine" 22nd and 23rd September, 2010 at New Delhi available at http://www.cpimwb.org.in/document_images/archive_international/Conference.pdf

²⁸² Shamir Hasan, "The Evolution of India's Palestine Policy" *op cit.* No. 258, p. 90.

shift in the country's foreign policy. He blames India's 'enlightened self-interest' with Israel as the main reason for this shift²⁸³.

Sushil J. Aaron is of the view that India has moved from a very publicly orchestrated pro-Arab, pro-Palestine policy during the Cold War to a translation of backchannel interactions with Israelis into an unstated but discernible alliance. That India has attained a comfort level with Israel to contemplate inviting Sharon for a visit, despite its negative symbolic import for proponents of a free Palestine in the region signifies the substantive recession in India's interest on the Palestine question. He alleged that Indian posturing on the Palestinian question has virtually ceased, with official pronouncements leaning more towards the restoration of peace in the region than an active call for recognizing Palestinian rights, with the latter being a rhetorical fallback position rather than a notion that permeates official discourse as was the case during the Cold War²⁸⁴.

C Rajamohan writes, "for nearly four decades, India could find nothing right about Israel. Now it seems New Delhi cannot say anything

²⁸³ Syed Sultan Mohiddin, "Palestine Conflict and India's Response", *Radiance Views Weekly*, November 14, 2010.

²⁸⁴ Sushil J. Aaron, *Straddling Faultlines : India's Foreign Policy toward the Greater Middle East*, Centre De Sciences Humaines (CSH) Occasional Paper, July 2003 available at: <http://www.csh-delhi.com/publications/downloads/ops/OP7.pdf>

critical about Tel Aviv"²⁸⁵. K.M.Sajad Ibrahim states that India's changed policy since 1992 is a blatant contradiction to its avowed policy of supporting the Palestinian cause. To him, the current phase of India's relation with Israel goes beyond the level of normalcy and reached a stage of much clandestine cooperation for defence and strategic purposes. He concludes that the new diplomatic initiatives of India target only its vested interest against the traditional principle of solidarity with the third world countries²⁸⁶.

According to Sunaina Maira, India and Israel's new honeymoon reversed India's historical stand of support for the Palestinians who were still living under occupation and apartheid and ignored India's own experience with colonization. This is despite the fact that Israel continues to maintain its military, political, and economic stranglehold on Palestinians who still do not live in a fully sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza, or in a truly democratic nation in Israel.²⁸⁷

Pointing to the shift in the Indian policy on Palestine, Zafarul Islam Khan, the editor of *Mille Gazette* says that India's commitment to the struggle of the Palestinians had now remained confined to paying just lip service. Commenting on the increasing business and military ties between India and Israel, he

²⁸⁵ C. Raja Mohan, "India's West Asian stakes", *Hindu*, October 16, 2000.

²⁸⁶ "India's Collaboration with Israel: A Policy of Opportunism" available at: http://sajaddomain.sulekha.com/blog/post/2008/11/impact-of-india-s-partnership-with-israel-major-implications.htm#_edn29

²⁸⁷ Sunaina Maira, "India Loses Her Palestinian Heart and Gains a Calculating Israeli Mind" available at": <http://wakeupfromyourslumber.com/node/8522>

mentions that nobody is averse to the procurement of military supplies for country's defence but having Israel as a supplier is a morally incorrect choice²⁸⁸.

According to Kapil Komireddi, India was once considered as a bastion of pro-Palestinian sentiment. Now there has been a dramatic shift in its policy from Palestine to Israel. He cites three principal reasons behind the shift in India's attitude. The first is the belated realisation that no amount of deference to Arab sentiment could alter Muslim opinion in the Middle East in India's favour: when it came to Kashmir, Shia and Sunni united in supporting Pakistan's position. The second owes itself to the collapse of the old world order: the death of the Soviet Union meant that India had to seek out new allies. The third factor that contributed to the deepening of Indo-Israeli ties is less well-known: the rise of Hindu nationalism in India²⁸⁹. The Indian chapter of the Asian People's Solidarity for Palestine (APSP) is disappointed because there have been a marked shift in India's approach to the Palestinian issue in the last several years as it moves closer to Israel. Though India's official position still supports the Palestinians'

²⁸⁸ "Indian Muslims Observe Quds Day" article available at:
<http://www.jamaateislamihind.org/index.php?do=category&id=40&blockid=40&pageid=140>

²⁸⁹ Kapil Komireddi, "India and Israel: a friendship deepened by prejudice", *Guardian*, October 25, 2011 at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2011/oct/25/india-israel-friendship-prejudice-muslim?newsfeed=true>

cause, the alliance claimed the India's policies were favouring the Israelis with their "strategic partnership" specially in defence and security deals²⁹⁰.

CPI Deputy General Secretary, S Sudhakar Reddy thinks that the Indian government run by Manmohan Singh departed from the path of non-alignment policies and started toeing the pro-American policies, which is a complete deviation of India's foreign policies founded by their own leader Jawaharlal Nehru. The CPI leader D Raja deplores the dual role played by Indian government by saying, "One side it is supporting the Palestine cause but on the other side it is promoting ties with Israel. India should follow an independent foreign policy. The government must display a positive political role in finding a solution to the conflict in the region, which has deprived independence of Palestine"²⁹¹.

The above perception is, however, not shared by many others. Congress President and the ruling UPA Chairperson, Sonia Gandhi during a speech at Oxford University in November 2002, for instance, stated that "growing economic and strategic cooperation between India and Israel does not make (the party) insensitive" to "the reality of the legitimate

²⁹⁰ "In Solidarity for Palestine, Asian Activists Announce Aaravan to Gaza", *The Milli Gazette*, October 9, 2010 at: <http://www.milligazette.com/news/112-in-solidarity-for-palestine-asian-activists-announce-caravan-to-gaza>

²⁹¹ Quoted in C Adhikesavan, "CPI Hails Palestinian Cause", *New Age Weekly*, December 2, 2011 at: <http://www.newageweekly.com/2011/12/cpi-hails-palestinian-cause.html>

concerns of the Palestinian people”²⁹². Outlining the policy of the new UPA Government, President A P J Abdul Kalam in his address to the joint session of the Indian Parliament said, ‘Our relations with Israel, which have developed on the basis of mutually beneficial cooperation, are important, but this in no way dilutes our principled support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people’²⁹³.

Indian officials similarly insist that the relationship with Israel and the symbolic neglect of Palestine will not affect relations with the Arab world. One official confidently affirms that “The Arab world also knows that national interest is supreme. Our close ties with Israel do not affect our equally warm relations with the Arab world”²⁹⁴. Pointedly, Ministry of External Affairs officials make the comparison with China’s engagement of the Middle East. “The Arabs have had no problem with China’s defence ties with Israel”. In the words of one analyst, “India sees China’s Middle East strategy of close ties with the Arabs and the Israelis as an approach from which it can learn”²⁹⁵.

²⁹² “Conflict and Coexistence in Our Age” speech by Smt. Sonia Gandhi at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies Oxford University, on Friday, 29th November, 2002 available at : <http://www.congresssandesh.com/november-2002/speech/3.html>

²⁹³ President Abdul Kalam’s address to the Joint Session of Parliament, 7 June 2004, Office of the President of India, New Delhi available at: <http://presidentofindia.nic.in/scripts/palatest1.jsp?id=6>.

²⁹⁴ “Israel ‘gifts’ India infantry weapons,” *Indian Express*, July 5, 2002.

²⁹⁵ Sudha Ramachandran, “India and Israel United in Defence,” *Asia Times*, June 26, 2002, <http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/DF26Df02.html>

According to Yashwant Sinha, the former Indian Foreign Minister, Palestinians are not in any doubt about Indian policy. "The problem arises only with those people inside India and outside India who are more Palestinian than the Palestinian themselves"²⁹⁶.

Muchkund Dubey, the former Foreign Secretary, advocates that "India has over the years established a very meaningful relationship with Israel, which is admirably serving its interests. Israel has been more than forthcoming in response to India's several requests for cooperation and has not always sought strict or instant reciprocity. He suggests that India should take a nuanced position on issues affecting Israel and take positions after judging issues on merits. Its reaction needs not be automatic or on the same pattern all the time on all issues".²⁹⁷

According to Kumarswami, the Indo-Israeli relations have not undermined the traditional Indian support for the Palestinians. It is still committed to the full realization of the political rights of the Palestinians and endorses their demand for full statehood and sovereignty. It views the formation of two sovereign states in the erstwhile Mandate Palestine as the only just and viable solution to the problem. It disapproves of any unilateral moves or solution and urges both parties to seek a comprehensive peace

²⁹⁶ Cited in Ramananda Sengupta, "India Walks a Tightrope in its Relations with Israel, Arab Nations", Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, July 2010.

²⁹⁷ Muchkund Dubey, "West Asia: India's Neighbouring Region", *Journal of West Asian Studies*, Vol.15, 2001, pp. 1-11.

through negotiation. On a number of key issues such as border, refugees, security fence, settlements, water or Jerusalem, India's positions are at variance with Israel. It has publicly disapproved harsh Israeli measures such as targeted killings, civilian casualties, prolonged border closures, house demolitions and land confiscations directed against the Palestinians. Even while criticizing terror attacks against Israeli civilians, India was equally critical of Israeli actions against the Palestinians during the Gaza conflict (2008-09). At the bilateral level, India continues to recognize the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority as the legitimate Palestinian representatives. Since the late 1980s it had accorded the honours of a head of state to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Following his death it bestowed similar treatment to his successor Mahmoud Abbas. It maintains a diplomatic mission in the Palestinian territories. Its limited political leverage does not prevent New Delhi from offering medical, material and education-related aid and assistance to the Palestinians. Thus, he concludes that India's burgeoning ties with Israel has not come at the cost of its support for Palestinians²⁹⁸.

Shalu Malik maintains that India's relations with the people of Palestine and their just cause to regain their lost territories remains an

²⁹⁸ P R Kumaraswamy, "The Friendship with Israel: India Squares the Circle", Middle East Institute, New Delhi, Occasional Paper, Issue No. 12, 26 July 2010 at: <http://www.mei.org.in/front/cms/publicationsDetail.php?id=MT11&cid=Ng==>
Also see his "Looking West 2: Beyond the Gulf" *op cit.* No. 225, p. 185.

everlasting aspect of India's foreign policy. Changes may be perceived in her foreign policy postures in view of the fast changing global environment and international scenario, however, these changes are mere aberrations and purely temporary. The spirit of anti – imperialism, fight against exploitation and voluntary discrimination is completely ingrained in the bone and marrow of Indian body politic: as such any deviation from the just cause of Palestinian peoples will be a negation of the fundamentals of India's governing culture²⁹⁹.

According to Shashank, a former Foreign Secretary of India, India's position on Palestine has not undergone any significant change in the wake of growing India-Israel relationship. He argues that although India-Israel had recognized each other for a long time yet there was no diplomatic relationship between the two countries for a long time, so it is only natural that their relationship would catch up. So while the growing India-Israel relationship is there, there is no change in India's dialogue or relationship with Palestine. India has a representative in the Palestinian territories and now that it is also member of the UN Security Council, its views are welcomed by all the Arab counties and the Israelis also. So, he thinks that India's position perhaps has become a little bit more normal because now India can interact with the Palestinians, with the Arab

²⁹⁹ Shalu Malik, *Continuity And Change In Indo Arab Relations : A Study Of Israel As A Factor*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science, Jamia Millia Islamia University, 2008 available at: http://old.jmi.ac.in/2000/Research/ab2008_pol_sc_shalu.pdf

countries as well as Israel³⁰⁰. Palestinian Ambassador to India, Osama Musa is of the opinion that India's ties with Israel benefits Palestine in some cases. "India sent aid worth USD 2 million to Palestine. It's not easy to get the medicines across to Palestine, because India has to take them through Israel. They can't do it if they don't have good relationship with Israel" he added³⁰¹.

A careful examination of the whole discussion makes two things clear: First, since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the world has changed dramatically and so also the perception and attitude of Arab countries towards Israel. This is evident in their recognition of Israel and participation in the Middle East peace process. India's changed posture towards Israel was the result of these altered circumstances. Second, there is a tendency to interpret everything through a zero-sum approach i.e., Palestine's gain is Israel's loss and vice versa. Palestinians would not get anything if India condemns Israel all the time and completely disengages the Jewish State. What is actually important is to use India's leverage vis-à-vis Israel and work towards a just and fair solution of the Palestine problem. Moreover, it is also important for India to politically and economically help the Palestine people in their quest for a separate homeland.

³⁰⁰ Interview with *Foreign Policy Research Centre Journal*, New Delhi, Volume-5 at: http://www.fprc.in/fprc_journal5.php

³⁰¹ "India's Ties with Israel Benefits Us in Some Cases: Palestine", *Zee News*, February 12, 2007 <http://www.zeenews.com/news353767.html>

Chapter Four

INDIA PALESTINE RELATIONSHIP, 1992-2012

After establishing diplomatic relationship with Israel in 1992, India continued to support the cause of Palestine and undertook necessary steps towards the attainment of this objective. India's policy towards Palestine since 1992 can be discussed at two different levels: political and economic. While at the political and diplomatic level, India provided strong support to the people of Palestinian in their quest for a sovereign, independent and viable state, economically India provided both material and technical support to the Palestinian government and its people in their search for nation-building.

Political & Diplomatic Support Through Bilateral Visits

India continued to extend its consistent and unwavering support to the Palestinian cause from time to time. This was evident from the high-level political contacts between the Indian and Palestinian leadership from time to time.

On January 19-20, 1992, the Palestinian President Yasser Arafat paid an official visit to India. Welcoming Arafat, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao reiterated India's consistent and unequivocal support for Palestine and the inalienable right of its people to self determination. The Prime Minister assured Arafat of extending all support to the Palestinians in whatever way possible to achieve the

twin objective of establishing peace in the region and 'helping our Palestinian friends'³⁰².

Welcoming the initiation of the peace process in the Middle East, Rao hoped that the peace process would be a suitable means of achieving the aims and objectives of the Palestinian people as well as the means of restoring stability to the Middle East. He further underlined that as a neighbouring region, India had a vital interest in the success of this process, as the security and stability of the region impinged directly on its own security environment.

Arafat on his part gave a brief assessment of the peace talks. He expressed his strong conviction that India's participation in the third round of West Asia peace talks, scheduled to be held in Moscow towards the end of January 1992, was essential. Eduardo Faleiro, the Minister of State for External Affairs also met the Palestinian President. During the meeting, Arafat discussed the continuing expansion and establishment of new settlements in the occupied territories which could vitiate the peace process. Faleiro emphasised that India had consistently expressed its firm opposition to the building or expansion of settlements in the occupied territories³⁰³.

On the question of India's diplomatic relationship with Israel, Arafat in his press conference in New Delhi stated that 'Exchange of Ambassadors and recognition (of Israel) are acts of sovereignty in which I cannot interfere'. "I

³⁰² *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1 January, 1992 at <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1992.pdf>, p. 31

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

respect any choice of the Indian government”³⁰⁴ he further added hoping that such a change would not affect Indo-Palestine relationship which was so strong³⁰⁵.

India's sympathy and support to the Palestinian people were reiterated by Prime Minister when he met President Yasser Arafat during his one day stopover in Tunis on 20 November 1992 on his way to Dakar to attend the G-15 Summit. President Yasser Arafat briefed Prime Minister on progress in the Middle East Peace Process, especially in the Israel-Palestinian dialogue. Solidarity with the Palestinian people was expressed at a function organized by the ICCR to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity. The Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri Eduardo Faleiro, who was the Chief Guest, reiterated India's consistent and unequivocal support to the Palestinian cause³⁰⁶.

Arafat's Foreign Minister, Farouq Kaddoumi, visited India from April 5 to 7, 1993. He briefed the Prime Minister Rao on the expulsion of 415 Palestinians by the Israeli authorities as well as the outcome of the rounds of discussions held in Washington. The Prime Minister expressed deep concern at the expulsion and urged the Government of Israel to withdraw the expulsion order and implement

³⁰⁴ *Times of India*, January 22, 1992. Also see *Ministry of External Affairs Annual Report, 1992-93* (hereafter *Annual Report*), Government of India, New Delhi at: <http://mealib.nic.in/?2020>, p.6.

³⁰⁵ Zikrur Rahman, the Indian Representative to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, told the London-based *Al-Haqeq* Newspaper on 12 May 2007 that “When we recognized Israel and normalized relations with her, we did that after taking the approval of the Palestinian leadership; we said, after you agree we’ll recognize (Israel)... The Palestinian leadership told us: There are signed accords between us (and Israel) and we are now talking to the Israelis; your establishing relations with Israel help us. For more see Ramananda Sengupta, “India Walks a Tightrope in its Relations with Israel, Arab Nations”, Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, July 2010.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Resolution 799 of the Security Council. He also recalled India's traditional support for the Palestinian cause and reiterated that India would continue to stand by the Palestinians. Kaddoumi also met External Affairs Minister, Dinesh Singh, and Minister of State for External Affairs R. L. Bhatia and briefed them on bilateral matters and the developments in West Asia & the Gulf³⁰⁷.

In October 1994, Yasser Arafat was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin, for their efforts to create peace in the Middle East³⁰⁸. Congratulating Arafat for the Peace Prize, the Indian Prime Minister stated "This was well deserved re-cognition of the initiatives taken by you and your bold leadership in the peace process which had been launched for the cause of the just and legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people"³⁰⁹.

In a major policy decision, the Ministry of External Affairs informed the Palestinian National Authority on July 11, 1995 that the Government of India had decided to recognise the passport/ travel documents issued by the PNA. This was also conveyed to the Embassy of the State of Palestine in New Delhi³¹⁰.

Yasser Arafat, the President of the State of Palestine was elected as the Ra'ees (Chairman) of the Executive Authority of the Palestinian Council in first

³⁰⁷ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1 January, 1993 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1993.pdf>, p. 167.

³⁰⁸ See the press release "The Nobel Peace Prize 1994" at: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1994/press.html

³⁰⁹ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XL No. 1 January, 1994 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1994.pdf>, p. 316.

³¹⁰ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLI, No. 1 January, 1995 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1995.pdf>, p. 285

democratic elections in January 1996³¹¹. Congratulating Arafat, Prime Minister Rao said that India's unequivocal commitment and support for the Palestinian people remained firm. He further stated that "India strongly supported the Middle East Peace Process and was ready to provide moral, material and technical support for furthering the economic development of the region"³¹².

Following the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DoP) in Washington between Israel and the PLO in 1993, India established a Representative Office to the Palestine National Authority which was opened on 24 June 1996 with the arrival of the Acting Representative, T. S. Tirumurti, First Secretary, along with his team. India hoped that this Office would contribute to further strengthening the close friendly relations between India and the Palestinians, and help promote, expand, and diversify these relations in economic, commercial, cultural, and other fields³¹³. This office was later shifted to Ramallah in the West Bank in 2003. It is important to mention that the Indian Mission to the Palestinian Authority reports directly to the foreign office in New Delhi and not to the Indian embassy in Israel located in Tel-Aviv.

President Arafat attended and addressed the 12th Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Movement at New Delhi on 6-8 April, 1997. During his visit, he called on the Indian President, Vice President, Prime Minister, and External

³¹¹ For more on this election see *Global Security* online article "Palestine Liberation Organisation" at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/plo.htm>.

³¹² *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLII, No. 1 January, 1996 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1996.pdf>, p.26

³¹³ *Foreign Affairs Record* Vol. XLII, No. 1 January, 1996 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1996.pdf>, p.163

Affairs Minister. The Indian leaders expressed deep concern at the developments in West Asia, maintaining that "unilateral steps not in conformity with the agreements and understandings hindered the peace process and vitiated the atmosphere of mutual confidence essential to progress the peace process further"³¹⁴. An Indian official delegation visited the Palestinian self-rule areas in May, 1997 and called on President Arafat in Gaza. Important bilateral and regional issues were figured in the discussion.

India's traditional friendly relation with Palestine was given a new momentum by the state visit of President Yasser Arafat to India from 19-22 November 1997. Arafat held discussions with President K.R Narayanan, Prime Minister I.K Gujral, and others. On the occasion, a Memorandum of Understanding in Bilateral Economic Cooperation was signed between the two sides. The MoU provided a structured framework for cooperation in diverse areas like commerce, trade, science, technology, industrial collaboration, information and broadcasting. Arafat also laid down the foundation stone of an auditorium to be built by the Arab League in Hyderabad³¹⁵.

The PLO's Executive Committee member, Sulaiman Najjab, visited India to participate in a seminar on "Prospects for Peace in the Middle East," organised by the United Nations' Department of Information on 3-4 February 1998. The Director General of the Palestine Election Commission also visited

³¹⁴ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLIII, No 1 JANUARY 1997 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1997.pdf>, p. 84.

³¹⁵ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 JANUARY 1997 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1997.pdf>, p. 185.

India in February, 1998 to get a first-hand experience of the election process in India. The Palestinian Minister of Housing and Energy, Abdel Rahman Hamad, visited India in April, 1998 to attend another seminar organised by the Council of Arab Ambassadors. During the visit, he called on the Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas and the Minister of External Affairs. A Member of the Executive Committee of Al-Fateh, in charge of foreign relations and a member of the Palestine National Council, Hani Al-Hasan, also visited India as a representative of the PLO to attend the 17h Congress of the Communist Party of India (CPI) held at Chennai from 18–20 September 1998. He also met the Minister of External Affairs³¹⁶.

India's solidarity with the Palestinian people was further expressed by her gesture in organising a special function in New Delhi by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations on 18th December 1997 to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian people.

In December 11, 1998, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Preacher of Al Aqsa Mosque, Sheikh Ekrima Sa'id Sabri visited India on a goodwill mission. He met the Prime Minister and the Vice President and discussed the situation in the region and developments in the peace process. The Mufti was assured of India's

³¹⁶ *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* article on "India–Palestine relations" at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India%E2%80%93Palestine_relations

consistent moral, political and economic support to the brotherly people of Palestine³¹⁷.

President Yassir Arafat arrived in India on an official visit from 9-10 April 1999. He was accompanied by Palestine National Authority Minister for Planning and International Cooperation, Nabeel Shaath, Chief Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Ereket and Advisor to the President, Nabeel Abu Radneih. During the visit, President Arafat called on the Indian President and held detailed discussions with the Prime Minister Vajpayee. During these meetings, the Indian leadership underlined the country's consistent and unwavering support to the Palestinian cause and emphasized that "a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region could only be based on relevant UN resolutions and the principle of "Land for Peace"³¹⁸. The two sides also discussed broader prospects of Indo-Palestinian cooperation and agreed to intensify their bilateral ties in diverse fields.

Additional Secretary (Foreign Affairs) and Joint Secretary (WANA) visited Gaza in May 1999 for a review meeting of Indian aided projects. Advisor to President Arafat on Human Rights, Advocate Ibrahim Abu Dagga, visited India from 2-7 November 1999 in connection with an International Conference on

³¹⁷ *Foreign Affairs Record*, 1998, Vol. 1995 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1998.pdf> p. 275.

³¹⁸ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLV, No. 1, January 1999 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1999.pdf> p. 62.

Human Rights. He had also a meeting with Member, National Human Rights Commission Virendra Dayal³¹⁹.

A function was organised at Tagore Hall of Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 7 December 1999. Nareshwar Dayal, Secretary (E), Ministry of External Affairs, Khalid El Sheikh, Ambassador of the State of Palestine, Abdul Halim, the Speaker of West Bengal Legislative Assembly and President, World Federation of United Nations Association (WFUNA) were the distinguished persons who spoke on the occasion³²⁰.

Lal Krishna Advani, the Union Home Minister, visited Palestine in June 2000. During his meeting with Yasser Arafat, he assured the Palestinian leader that the decade's old friendship between India and Palestine would continue and hoped that the Palestinian leader would succeed in his struggle for peace³²¹. Arafat stated to the visiting Indian leader that his relationship with India was stronger than friendship. In his own words, "It is not friendship, it is brotherhood, it is very old"³²².

Within few days after Advani, Jaswant Singh, the External Affairs Minister, paid an official visit to Palestine in July 2000. Inaugurating the Mahatma Gandhi Library and Jawaharlal Nehru Library in the Gaza City, he said "the best way that

³¹⁹ MEA Annual Report 1999-2000 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50045719>, p. 44.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 129.

³²¹ *Hindu*, June 14, 2000.

³²² *Times of India*, June 19, 2000.

India could do to the friendly people of Palestine was to help them in the field of education. This was the best investment for future that could be made and there was no greater cooperation than cooperation in the field of learning". Speaking on the West Asia peace process, he said "New Delhi's position toward the Palestine was clear and explicit and India would not alter its stated position supportive of the rights of the Palestine people for them to have a settled and internationally recognised territory". He also mentioned India's desire to open up its fast emerging information technology and knowledge-based industry to the people of Palestine to help them achieve economic and political aspirations³²³.

In August 2000, the Palestinian leader Arafat and the Israeli Leader Shimon Pares (then Israel's Minister for Regional Development) visited New Delhi in quick succession. The ostensible reason behind their visits was to appraise the Indian leaders of the developments about the West Asian peace process. But the real issue was the Palestinian ultimatum to unilaterally declare Palestine an independent state on September 13, 2000 if peace talks with Israel continued to remain deadlocked. Arafat sought India's support in favour of such a step while Pares tried to impress upon India about the dangers involved in such a declaration.

Ariel Sharon's (the then Likud Party opposition leader) controversial visit to Al-Aqsa, the holiest Muslim shrine in Palestine (known to the Jewish people as

³²³ *Tribune*, July 2, 2000.

Temple Mount) led to the outbreak of the second *intifada* in September 2000³²⁴. This Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule in the occupied territories was much more violent than the *First Intifada* of December 1987. Within days after the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the largest of the Left parties, demanded that India should seek a meeting of the UN Security Council where Israel should be condemned for 'sponsoring' violence in the occupied territories³²⁵. Joining the chorus against the 'silence' of the NDA government, the Congress, the principal opposition party, also criticized Israel for its 'unwarranted and deplorable' actions against the Palestinians³²⁶. CPI-M General Secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet castigated the Indian government for 'reversing' the national consensus on the Palestinian issue and condemned the government for letting 'down an old friend'³²⁷. In December that year, at meeting organized by various Left parties and groups the leaders wanted the Vajpayee government to 'take a clear and forthright stand condemning Israel's latest atrocities and antihuman actions.' It also called for a halt to 'harmful policy' of security cooperation with Israel and demanded that the government adopt a 'clear, forthright and measurable practical support to the Palestinian cause'³²⁸.

³²⁴ For more on this see Aijaz Ahmad, "Israel's Killing Fields", *Frontline*, Vol. 17, Issue 23, November 11 - 24, 2000 at: <http://www.hindu.com/fline/fl1723/17231080.htm>

³²⁵ "India Should Condemn Israel for Violence: CPI (M)", *Hindu*, October 15, 2000.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ Quoted in John Cherian, 'India's Changing Stand', *Frontline* (Chennai), 28 October–10 November 2000, <http://www.Frontlineonnet.com/fl1722/17220140.htm>

³²⁸ V Sridhar, 'An Expression of Solidarity', *Frontline*, 23 December 2000–5 January 2001 at: <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1726/17260600.htm>.

External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh during a visit to Cairo in February 2001 met Arab League Secretary-General, Esmat Abdel Meguid and reiterated India's historical commitment to the Palestinian cause and the U.N. resolutions for an independent Palestinian homeland within recognized international borders. The Arab League official thanked the Indian Foreign Minister for supporting the Palestinian and Arab causes³²⁹.

President Arafat came to Delhi on a working visit on 23 August 2001. He called on the Prime Minister and briefed him on the security situation in the region. He sought India's help to get the peace process re-started. As New Delhi had good relations with both Israel and Palestine, the Palestinian leader felt India could play a useful role in getting the peace process on track. Later, the Palestine leader also called on Congress President Sonia Gandhi and exchanged views on ties between the two countries and the West Asia situation³³⁰.

Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh spoke to President Arafat in August and December 2001 to enquire about the situation in the region and to convey Indian Government's solidarity with the people of Palestine³³¹.

Special Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs visited

³²⁹ "Jaswant Singh Reiterates Support for Palestinian Homeland", *Times of India*, February 3, 2001.

³³⁰ "Arafat, Vajpayee discuss West Asia situation", *Times of India*, August 23, 2001.

³³¹ *MEA Annual Report, 2001-02* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50046684>, p. 42-43.

Ramallah on 5 January 2002. He called on President Arafat and delivered to him a letter from the Prime Minister³³².

In September 2003, the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon paid an official visit to India. The Sharon visit was highly controversial in India. Editorials in leading newspapers criticized it and political parties as well as private organizations held rallies in protest³³³. The Indian government, while welcoming Sharon, made it clear that it would neither dilute its traditional support for the Palestinian cause nor abandon Yasser Arafat as the leader of the Palestinians³³⁴.

In May 2004, the United Progressive Alliance led by the Congress party came to power. The new government expressed its will to maintain India's relations with Israel, especially military cooperation, but at the same time made it

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ The opposition parties which protested against the visit include: the Communist Parties, the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Janata Dal (S). The opposition Congress party had not joined in the protests but made it clear that the party's position of supporting the Palestine cause and an independent state of Palestine remained undiluted. However, Sonia Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition called on the Israeli Prime Minister. Similarly, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, the Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind, the All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawart, the All-India Milli Council, the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and the Jamiat Ahle Hadith also protested against Mr. Sharon's visit. Demonstrations were held near Sharon's hotel and in other parts of the capital. They were also held in Calcutta and cities in the deep south, areas that Sharon not even visited. For more on this see "Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's India Visit Receives Nationwide Protests and Condemnation", *Alternatives International*, 10 September 2003 at: http://journal.alternatives.ca/eng/our-organisation/our-publications/analysis-and-articles/article/israeli-prime-minister-sharon-s?%3Flang=en&debut_articles_rubrique=210&lang=fr; K. Gajendra Singh, "Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's Indian Visit: Historical Perspective", *SAAG Paper*, No 782, September 9, 2003 at: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers8%5Cpaper782.html>, "Imam leads Muslims in Protest against Sharon's visit," *Times of India*, September 9, 2003. It may be mentioned that the opposition was not so much to the visit of the Israeli prime minister per se, but to the visit of Mr. Sharon, whose name is forever associated with the massacres of Sabra and Shatilla and who, in more recent times, had incarcerated Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in his quarters in Ramallah. To know more about this, see "Why Protest the First Ever Visit of Israeli Prime Minister?" *Janshakti* at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Janshakti/message/217>.

³³⁴ Harsh V. Pant, "India-Israel Partnership: Convergence and Constraints", *SAAG Paper*, No. 1279, March 4, 2005 at: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers13%5Cpaper1279.html>

clear that India's ties with Israel would not affect its relations with the Arab world and its traditional support for the Palestinian cause. In September 2004, the Manmohan Singh Government, in a symbolic gesture, sent Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed to visit the Palestinian Authority, as well as Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Ahamed met Yasser Arafat in his Ramallah headquarters and warned Israel against harming the Palestinian leader³³⁵. India also called for measures to lift the siege imposed by Israel around the headquarters of Yasser Arafat.

Following the sad demise of President Arafat on 11 November 2004, a multiparty official Indian delegation headed by the Minister of External Affairs, Natwar Singh, attended the funeral ceremony which was held at Cairo on 12 November 2004³³⁶. Condolence messages were sent from President, PM and External Affairs Minister to their counterparts in the Palestinian National Authority. The Parliament of India also adopted a long obituary honouring President Arafat. In a message, the Government described Arafat as a "towering and highly respected international personality who fought selflessly and courageously, at great personal sacrifice, for the Palestinian cause and an independent homeland for the Palestinian people, to which he dedicated his whole life". It further stated that "Arafat enjoyed great respect and admiration among the people and leaders of India, and would always be remembered as a

³³⁵ "Indian Minister Warns Israel Against Removing Arafat", *The Daily Star* (Beirut), September 18, 2004.

³³⁶ The delegation consisted of External Affairs Minister, K. Natwar Singh, Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, and the CPM leader Sitaram Yechuri.

sincere and steadfast friend of India”³³⁷. At a separate condolence meeting for Arafat, the Left parties demanded that the government sever the military ties with Israel that were ‘forged by the previous NDA government’³³⁸.

As a mark of support to the cause of democracy in Palestine and as the world’s largest democracy, India had sent, at the invitation of the Palestinian National Authority, a team of Election Observers to observe the Palestinian Presidential elections in January 2005.— the first to be held since 1996 — in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Voters elected PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas as the new President of the Palestinian Authority in a keenly contested election. India welcomed Mahmoud Abbas as the new President of the Palestinian National Authority and Arafat’s successor, who died in November 2004³³⁹.

In February 2005, Ambassador Chinmay R. Gharekhan was appointed India’s special envoy to West Asia and the Middle East Peace Process³⁴⁰. This post was devised by the UPA government in its desire to improve its relationship with the Arab world. The new Government also wanted to be portrayed as a true supporter of the Palestinian cause as well as the Palestinian quest for an independent state, in contrast with the previous Vajpayee led NDA government.

³³⁷ MEA Annual Report, 2004-05 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500410405>, p. 59.

³³⁸ “Sever Military Ties with Israel: Left’, *Hindu*, 24 November 2004.

³³⁹ MEA Annual Report, 2004-05 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500410405>, p.59.

³⁴⁰ “Gharekhan is Special Envoy for West Asia”, *Tribune*, February 4, 2005 at: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20050204/nation.htm#2>

As the new envoy, Gharekhan visited Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in February 2005. In Israel he met Vice-Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom; in Palestine, he met the newly elected President Abbas as well as the Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei. Since his appointment, Gharekhan used to regularly meet Mahmud Abbas, as well as many other top-level Palestinian officials.

On 19-20 May 2005, the new elected Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, accompanied by Foreign Minister, Nasser Al Kidwa, paid an official visit to New Delhi and met President Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the Congress President Sonia Gandhi. The Prime Minister conveyed to Abbas India's continued support to the Palestinian cause and promised to "do whatever could be to help the Palestinian people and the state". He also felt that the cycle of violence in occupied territories should end as it would be "counter-productive" for peace in the region. Winding up his first-ever visit here as President of Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas told reporters at Delhi Airport that the relationship between India and Palestine was "very close and very strong"³⁴¹.

³⁴¹ . "Mahmud Abbas Meets Manmohan", *Hindu*, May 20, 2005. Also see "India Gives Rs 65 Crore Aid to Palestine", *Times of India*, May 20, 2005 at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2005-05-20/india/27838694_1_palestinian-embassy-india-and-palestine-core-aid

In August 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from settlements in Gaza and the northern West Bank³⁴². The Government of India in a statement described it as a positive development and the beginning of a process that would culminate in a mutually acceptable, negotiated settlement in accordance with the roadmap and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. India hoped that this window of opportunity would be used by all sides in taking forward the negotiations that would lead, within a reasonable time frame, to the creation of a truly sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State within well-defined and secure borders, living side by side at peace with Israel³⁴³.

On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah militants attacked and killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others to Lebanon. This precipitated a major crisis in

³⁴² Israel's unilateral disengagement plan also known as the "Disengagement plan", was a proposal by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, adopted by the government on June 6, 2004 and enacted in August 2005, to evict all Israelis from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the northern West Bank. "Israel's Unilateral Disengagement Plan", *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel%27s_unilateral_disengagement_plan

³⁴³ *MEA Statement*, New Delhi, September 13, 2005. Also see "Speech by Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan" on 4th December 2005 at the International Institute of Strategic Studies, London at: <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-iiss-regional-security-summit/manama-dialogue-archive/gulf-dialogue-2005/plenary-sessions-and-speeches/day-two-plenary-sessions/ambassador-chinmaya-gharekhans-speech/>

the region and led to the Israel–Hezbollah War³⁴⁴. Within hours after the crisis broke, India expressed its condemnation of ‘the abduction of the two Israeli soldiers and called for their immediate release.’ It also condemned the ‘excessive and disproportionate’ Israeli military response³⁴⁵.

On July 31, 2006, the *Lok Sabha* passed a unanimous 246-worded government backed resolution that was highly critical of Israel. Without making any reference to the kidnapping, it ‘unequivocally condemned the large-scale and indiscriminate Israeli bombing of Lebanon’ and ‘killing and suffering of large number of innocent civilians including women and children’³⁴⁶.

³⁴⁴ The conflict began when militants from the group Hezbollah fired rockets at Israeli border towns as a diversion for an anti-tank missile attack on two armoured Humvees patrolling the Israeli side of the border fence. The ambush left three soldiers dead. Two additional soldiers, believed to have been killed outright or mortally wounded, were taken by Hezbollah to Lebanon. Five more were killed in a failed rescue attempt. Israel responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon that damaged Lebanese civilian infrastructure, including Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport, an air and naval blockade, and a ground invasion of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah then launched more rockets into northern Israel and engaged the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in guerrilla warfare from hardened positions. The conflict killed at least 1,200 people, mostly Lebanese citizens, severely damaged Lebanese civil infrastructure, and displaced approximately one million Lebanese and 300,000–500,000 Israelis. After the ceasefire, some parts of southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable due to Israeli unexploded cluster bomblets. For details see “2006 Lebanon War” *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza%E2%80%93Israel_conflict

³⁴⁵ *Statement of Official Spokesperson on the Tension at the Israel-Lebanon Border*, 13 July 2006, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, <http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2006/07/13pr01.htm>. Also see *MEA Annual Report, 2006-07* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500412689>, p.52.

³⁴⁶ *Resolution adopted by the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Indian Parliament) on 31st July, 2006 on Situation in West Asia*, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi at: <http://meaindia.nic.in/pressrelease/2006/07/31pr02.htm>. Also see “LS Condemns Israeli Attack on Lebanon”, *Tribune*, August 1, 2006 at: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060801/nation.htm#1> and P R Kumaraswamy, “India Sidesteps the Thorny Issue of Hezbollah”, *Asian Tribune*, August 8, 2006.

A few days after the crisis, the Prime Minister's special envoy to West Asia, Chinmaya Gharekhan went to the region to shore up support for the fragile ceasefire. He visited and met leaders of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and while in Amman, he also met Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas. Speaking from Amman, he declared that his visit to the region was aimed at expressing 'solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian masses in their hour of crisis and also to get first hand impression and assessment of the situation'³⁴⁷.

During February 20 and March 6, 2007, India issued two official statements supporting the agreement on the formation of the National Unity Government in the PA (the Mecca Agreement)³⁴⁸. Despite Israel's strong protest an Indian diplomatic representative to the Palestinian Authority met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniya. In May 26, 2007, India expressed concern over the escalating violence in Palestine and Israel, as well as the arrest of elected representatives of the Palestinian National Council (PNC)³⁴⁹.

³⁴⁷ Harinder Mishra, "Mideast Peace Does Not Exist Anymore: India", PTI Features, 24 August 2006 at: http://www.outlookindia.com/pti_news.asp?id=409483.

³⁴⁸ Hamas & Fatah Mecca Agreement is an agreement between Fatah and Hamas signed in the city of Mecca on February 8, 2007 after eight days of talks, agreeing to stop the military clashes in Gaza and form a government of national unity. Representatives from the Fatah side included the President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas and parliament member Mohammed Dahlan. The Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya and Khaled Mashal represented Hamas. "Hamas-Fatah Mecca Agreement" *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas-Fatah_Mecca_Agreement
For Govt. of India's official statements see MEA website, archival section: "Statement by Official Spokesperson on the Agreement in Mecca for the formation of the National Unity Government in Palestine", New Delhi, February 20, 2007 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290012408> and "In response to a question on the Mecca Agreement", March 06, 2007, New Delhi, <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290012437>

³⁴⁹ See MEA statement "In Response to a Question on Developments in Palestine and Israel", May 26, 2007, New Delhi at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290012862>

N. Ravi, Secretary (East) and Director (WANA), visited Palestine on 16 May 2007 and had a meeting with President Mahmoud Abbas and Deputy Prime Minister Azzam Ahmad. He also held delegation level meetings with the Deputy Foreign Minister, Ahmed Soboh on Indian support to the Palestinian institution building³⁵⁰. Within the framework of India's commitment to extend political, material and technical support to Palestine, Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed visited Palestine on 27 – 28 September 2007 and held talks with Ahmad Soboh, the Palestinian Deputy Foreign Minister, Rafiq Hussein, Chief of Staff of Presidency, Nimer Hamad, Chief Political Advisor to President, Shaikh Ahmad Hussein, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the Holy land of Palestine³⁵¹. In September 2007, India's Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee met Mahmoud Abbas (also known as Abu-Mazen), the Palestinian President, in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly summit. Special Envoy to the Middle East Peace Process, C. R. Gharekhan also visited the region twice during February and September 2007³⁵².

Mahmoud Abbas, the President of Palestinian National Authority paid a state visit to India from 6-9 October, 2008. During his three day visit, he met President, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, Vice President, M. Hamid Ansari, Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and the Chairperson of the United Progressive

³⁵⁰ MEA, *Annual Report, 2007-08* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500413902>, pp. 52-53.

³⁵¹ *Representative Office of India in Palestine* website article on "India Palestine Relationship" at: <http://www.roy-ramallah.org.ps/2010/india-palestine.html>

³⁵² MEA *Annual Report, 2007-08* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500413902> pp.52-53.

Alliance, Sonia Gandhi, the External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, and the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahamed. In the presence of the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, President Mahmoud Abbas laid the foundation stone of the Chancery-cum-Residences Complex of the Embassy of Palestine, built in New Delhi as a gift of the Government and people of India. The construction of the building was entirely funded by the Government of India as a gesture of Indian goodwill and friendship for the people of Palestine and as a proof of India's "unwavering solidarity and commitment to an independent Palestine"³⁵³. Appreciating India's gesture, President Abbas said: "relations between India and Palestine had always been good and that the two countries were making efforts to improve such relations". He also stated that "India was giving us support without us asking it"³⁵⁴. Singh and Abbas held wide-ranging talks, during which they discussed West Asia peace process, among other issues³⁵⁵. While talking about India's growing engagement with Israel, particularly in the field of defence, Abbas said, "India's relations with Israel are its sovereign decision. We are not going to interfere. We know very well that India is supportive of the Palestinian struggle for achieving its own independence"³⁵⁶. President Pratibha Patil hosted

³⁵³ MEA, *Annual Report, 2008-09* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500415091>, pp. 50-51.

³⁵⁴ Nilofar Suhrawardy, "India Stands Committed To Palestinian Cause", *Muslim Observer*, October 16, 2008 at: <http://muslimmedianetwork.com/mmn/?p=3049>.

³⁵⁵ "Palestine Authority President Meets PM", *Thaindian News*, October 7, 2008 at: http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/palestine-authority-president-meets-pm_100104477.html Also see "Palestine President Hails India's Role in West Asia Peace Process", *One India News*, October 7, 2008; "Abbas Lands, May Seek Larger India Role in Peace Process", *Indian Express*, Oct 07 2008.

³⁵⁶ Nilofar Suhrawardy, "India Stands Committed to Palestinian Cause" *op cit.*, No. 354.

a banquet in honour of Abbas³⁵⁷. In her speech, she recalled India's position on the Palestinian question and said its solidarity with the Palestine people had been unambiguously articulated since the days of its freedom struggle. "For India, commitment to the Palestinian cause has been an important part of foreign policy and has been manifested in the continuous and consistent support to its issues in the Non-Aligned Movement, in the United Nations and on other international fora"³⁵⁸, she said. A Memorandum of Understanding regarding construction and equipping of the Jawaharlal Nehru High School at Abu Dees ((near Jerusalem) was signed during the visit³⁵⁹. In a joint statement issued towards the end of the visit, India "called for an end to the expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine and for an early and significant easing of restrictions on the free movement of persons and goods within Palestine"³⁶⁰.

Following Israel's massive and brutal attack against the Hamas in Gaza Strip (Dec 2008 – Jan 2009, Operation Cast Lead)³⁶¹ which killed thousands of

³⁵⁷ "Palestinian President Meets President Pratibha Patil", *Thaindian News*, 08 October 2008
http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/palestinian-president-meets-his-president-pratibha-patil_100104708.html

³⁵⁸ *Speech by The President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil at The Banquet in Honour of the President of The Palestinian National Authority, H.E. Mahmoud Abbas on October 7, 2008 at:* http://presidentofindia.nic.in/banq_speeches.html

³⁵⁹ Nilofar Suhrawardy, "India Stands Committed to Palestinian Cause" *op cit.*, No. 354.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ The Gaza War, known as Operation Cast Lead in Israel and as the Gaza Massacre in the Arab world, was a three-week bombing and invasion of the Gaza Strip by Israel, and hundreds of rocket attacks on south of Israel which started on December 27, 2008 with a surprise air strike from Israel. Israel's stated aim was to stop rocket fire into Israel and arms import into the Gaza strip. Israeli forces attacked police stations and other Hamas government buildings in the opening

Palestinian civilians, a statement was issued by the Indian Government on the situation in Gaza on 27 December 2008. The statement admitted that India was aware of the cross-border provocations in the form of Palestinian rocket attacks against targets in southern Israel and urged an immediate end to the use of force against Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip that had resulted in large numbers of casualties³⁶². In a second statement on 29 December, India expressed its hope that the military action by Israel would abate and indicated that the continued use of disproportionate and indiscriminate force was unwarranted and condemnable³⁶³. On 2 January 2009, India urged an immediate end to the violence witnessed in Gaza and its environs; so that further casualties amongst civilians averted and an atmosphere for the peace process resumed³⁶⁴. On 4 January, it condemned the ongoing incursion into Gaza by Israel and urged an immediate end to military actions by all concerned³⁶⁵. On 9 January, India issued yet another statement on the situation in Gaza, calling for an early end to the

assault, striking in the densely populated cities of Gaza, Khan Younis and Rafah. For details see "Gaza War" *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War

³⁶² "Statement by Official Spokesperson on the Situation in Gaza", MEA, New Delhi, December 27, 2008 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290014593>

³⁶³ "Official Spokesperson's Statement on Situation in Gaza", MEA, New Delhi, December 29, 2008, at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290014596>

³⁶⁴ "Statement by Official Spokesperson about Assistance from Government of India in Response to Gaza Flash Appeal", MEA, New Delhi, January 2, 2009 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290014603>

³⁶⁵ "Statement by Official Spokesperson on Situation in Gaza", MEA, New Delhi, January 4, 2009 at: January 04, 2009 <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290014609>

suffering of the people of Gaza and a return to a dialogue and resumption of the peace process³⁶⁶.

The Communist parties and the regional parties in India singled out the Israeli operation in Gaza for criticism, as did Prime Minister Singh, who strongly condemned Israel's operation in Gaza, which, he said, had led to the needless loss of many innocent lives. These five official statements and the Indian media criticism were centred on the heavy destruction and civilian casualties in Gaza. According to Itzhak Gerberg, the Indian stand can be considered sober and balanced for two reasons: first, for New Delhi, there was only one Palestinian leadership, that of Mahmud Abbas, who remained silent when the Gaza Strip was literally on fire. Second, the Indian left-wing parties had generally weakened and their withdrawal of support for the UPA government over the Indo-US nuclear agreement diminished their political influence³⁶⁷.

The Prime Minister in his message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People stated that concerted and all round action was necessary to invigorate the peace process with the objective of achieving a durable, comprehensive and just settlement³⁶⁸.

President Mahmoud Abbas visited India in February 2010. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh met the visiting President on 11 February 2010 to exchange

³⁶⁶ "Official Spokesperson's Statement on Gaza Situation" MEA, New Delhi, January 9, 2009 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290014621>. Also see *MEA, Annual Report, 2008-09* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500415091> p 50-51.

³⁶⁷ Gerberg, *India-Israel Relations op cit.*, No. 190, pp.79-80. Also see P.R. Kumaraswamy, "India and Israel Evolving Strategic Partnership," Begin--Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, September 1998.

³⁶⁸ *MEA, Annual Report, 2009-10* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500415660>, p. 111.

views on the fresh efforts at initiating a peace process in the troubled region. The Russian proposal for the meeting of the 'Quartet' (the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the U.S.) was also discussed. Later Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs met President Mahmoud Abbas and reassured the visiting dignitary of New Delhi's support for peace and development in the Middle East³⁶⁹.

At a function at the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) to mark the 'International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People' which is observed on November 29, Minister of State for External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor remarked that "Palestine had always occupied a special place in the hearts of my countrymen". He went on to add that "India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its approach to the Palestinian question were guided by that apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi, and the struggle that he inspired for our independence"³⁷⁰.

On 31st May, 2010, ten peace activists aboard the Flotilla carrying humanitarian aid for people trapped in Gaza were shot dead and many more injured by the Israeli forces³⁷¹. As usual, India criticised the Israeli action. The

³⁶⁹ "Tharoor Meets Abbas, Assures India's Support to Palestine" February 13, 2010 at: http://www.ummid.com/news/2010/February/13.02.2010/tharoor_meets_abbas_palestine.htm

³⁷⁰ "India Seeks Revival of Peace Process in West Asia", *Hindu*, December 2, 2009.

³⁷¹ The Gaza flotilla raid was a military operation by Israel against six ships of the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" on 31 May 2010 in international waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The flotilla, organized by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), was carrying humanitarian aid and construction materials, with the

External Affairs spokesman Vishnu Prakash told reporters that "India deplored the tragic loss of life and the reports of killings and injuries to people on the boats carrying supplies for Gaza. There can be no justification for such indiscriminate use of force, which we condemn"³⁷².

Nabeel Shaath, former Foreign Minister of Palestine visited India from 23-25 August 2011 as Special Envoy of the Palestine National Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. He called on External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna and also met Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed. He handed over messages from PNA President addressed to President and Prime Minister of India. He sought India's support for the Palestinian cause especially during the UN General Assembly session in September 2011. The External Affairs Minister reiterated India's strong and unwavering support to the Palestinian cause and assured that India would continue to adhere to its principled stand on Palestine³⁷³.

The Prime Minister in his message on the occasion of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People reiterated India's unwavering support for the Palestinian people's struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital living within secure and

intention of breaking the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip. For details see "Gaza Flotilla Raid", *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_flotilla_raid

³⁷² "Statement on Incident Involving Boats Carrying Supplies for Gaza", MEA, New Delhi, May 31, 2010 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290015819>. Also see Ninan Koshy, "India: Israel and Palestine", *Foreign Policy Research Council Journal*, (New Delhi) No.5, 2011, pp.139-151. For a different view see Nitin Pai, "The Palestinian Card", *Yahoo News India*, June 08, 2010.

³⁷³ "Palestine Seeks India's Support for Statehood", *Thaindian News*, 24 August 2011 at: http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/palestine-seeks-indias-support-for-statehood_100558934.html

recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Arab Peace initiative, Quartet Road map and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions³⁷⁴.

External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna visited Palestine on January 11, 2012, the first ever visit by an Indian Foreign Minister in over a decade after Jaswant Singh. He met Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and reiterated India's strong support to the Palestinian cause. The Minister also held bilateral talks with his Palestinian counterpart Riyad al-Malki and attended a wreath laying ceremony on the Mausoleum of Yasser Arafat³⁷⁵. On the conclusion of his visit, he said Israel and Palestine should continue with their talks and come out with a permanent solution to the long pending issue³⁷⁶.

Support at the International Forums

Besides supporting the cause of Palestine through bilateral visits, India also tried to build international opinion in favour of Palestine at various international forums such as the United Nations and NAM. India regretted the expulsion by Israel of more than 400 Palestinians from the occupied territories and urged Israel to rescind the expulsion order. India as President of the Security Council was instrumental in having UN Security Council Resolution No 799 of 18

³⁷⁴ *MEA Annual Report 2010-11* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500417371>, p.107.

³⁷⁵ "Krishna Arrives in Ramallah; To Meet Palestinian Leadership", *Hindu*, January 11, 2012.

³⁷⁶ "Negotiated Settlement of Palestinian Issue", *Indian Express*, January 12, 2012.

December 1992 passed, which inter alia condemned Israel for the expulsions³⁷⁷. Moreover, India also maintained its consistent support for the peace process in West Asia. India's Permanent Representative to the UN, C R Gharekhan was appointed by the UNSG as his Special Representative for West Asia beginning 1993. This appointment was welcomed by all the States in the Middle East Peace Process³⁷⁸. India repeatedly expressed its concern at the continued escalation of violence which derailed the peace process and strongly condemned the Israeli attacks against the offices of President Arafat and other Palestinian institutions³⁷⁹. India stressed that nothing should be done to undermine the authority of President Arafat, who in his person embodied the Palestinian struggle which India had supported for decades as a cardinal principle of foreign policy. Minister of State for External Affairs U.V Krisnam Raju represented India at the NAM Ministerial Conference on Palestine held in Pretoria on May 3, 2001. During his stay, Raju called on President Arafat and reiterated to him India's consistent and unwavering support to the Palestinian cause³⁸⁰.

³⁷⁷ *MEA Annual Report 1992-93* at: <http://mealib.nic.in/?2020>, p.45.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 84.

³⁷⁹ Israeli ground forces attacked Yasir Arafat's compound in Ramallah on June 6, 2006, surrounding his offices with tanks, after 17 Israelis, including 13 soldiers, were killed in a Palestinian suicide attack on a bus in northern Israel. James Bennet, "Mideast Turmoil: The Overview; Israel Attacks Arafat Compound in Swift Response After Palestinian Suicide Bombing Kills 17 in Bus", *New York Times*, June 06, 2002 at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/06/world/mideast-turmoil-overview-israel-attacks-arafat-compound-swift-response-after.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

³⁸⁰ *MEA Annual Report, 2001-02* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50046684>, pp. 42-43

In the recent past, India co-sponsored the draft resolution on “the Right of Palestinians to Self-Determination” during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly (8 September to 18 December 1998 at New York) and voted in favour of it. India also voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the security wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard³⁸¹. At this time⁶, there was media report that the Israeli government was contemplating for expelling or physically liquidating Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. India's Permanent Representative in the United Nations, Vijay Nambiar, told an open meeting of the U.N. Security Council in September, 2003 that removing Arafat from the scene "would be indefensible in international law. It represents an affront to the Palestinian people and the international community at large and must attract the severest condemnation worldwide." Nambiar also emphasised that India "condemns all acts of terrorist violence and reiterates its position that there is no justification whatsoever for attacks against unarmed civilians, women and children"³⁸².

India participated at the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine held at Putrajaya, Malaysia on 13 May 2004 which decided to establish a Ministerial delegation to be led by the Malaysian chair, to interact with the

³⁸¹ Representative Office of India in Palestine website article on “India Palestine Relationship” at: <http://www.roi-ramallah.org.ps/2010/india-palestine.html>

³⁸² John Cherian, “A Visit and its Aftermath”, *Frontline*, Volume 20 - Issue 20, September 27 - October 10, 2003

Quartet (UN, EU, US and Russia) and the P-5, to facilitate forward movement in the Middle East peace process. Reiterating its solidarity with the Palestinian cause and expressing concern at the grave political and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories and the unravelling of the peace process, the meeting also urged the U.N. Security Council to authorize an international presence and establish a UN Peacekeeping Mission in the occupied territories; convene a special meeting on Palestine on the sidelines of the next UNGA and further mobilize international public opinion and civil society. India also supported adoption, by the General Assembly, of the NAM resolution entitled "Reaffirming the Central Role of the United Nations in the Maintenance of International Peace and Security and Promotion of International Cooperation" on 5 August 2004³⁸³.

The situation in the Middle East was a matter of continued debate in the UN in 2004. The Tenth Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly on the Situation in the Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory was reconvened on 16-20 July 2004 to consider the item on the "Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory". India made a statement at the meeting and voted in favour of the resolution which, inter alia, acknowledged the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 150 votes in favour, 6 against and 10 abstentions. Consideration of Agenda Items on the situation in the Middle East and the Question of Palestine was taken up at the

³⁸³ MEA Annual Report, 2004-05 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500410405>, p.110.

General Assembly on 29-30 November 2004. Several countries, including India, participated in the debate on these items. While expressing regret and condolences over the death of President Arafat, most speakers called upon the parties concerned to put an end to violence and resume political dialogue through implementation of the "Quartet" Roadmap³⁸⁴. Many delegations were of the view that elections scheduled in the Palestinian Authority and Israel's disengagement plan offered new opportunities to fulfill the vision of two States living side by side within secure and recognised borders. India voted in favour of the traditional resolutions under the above agenda items. India also participated in an open debate of the Security Council on the item 'The situation in the Middle East'³⁸⁵.

Anand Sharma, Minister of State, led the Indian delegation to the first Human Rights Council's session held in Geneva from 19-30 June 2006. The Council, inter alia, adopted a Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People as well as Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. India participated actively in deliberations of the Council, including in the Special Sessions convened in July, October, November and December, 2006 to

³⁸⁴ The Roadmap, which is a performance-based plan for a permanent two-state solution – Israel and Palestine – to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, was presented by US President George W. Bush and officially published by the USA, Russia, the EU and the UN ("The Quartet") in April 2003 as an outline to renew the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The first phase of the roadmap refers to the end of terror and violence against Israel and the normalization of the situation on the Palestinian side, which will be followed by Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian territories taken over since the beginning of the second Intifada (September 2000) and a freeze of all Israeli settlement activities on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Phase two focuses on efforts to establish a Palestinian state with provisional borders. Phase three includes an international conference to discuss and work out a permanent status agreement between the two countries (*Reuters*, 30 April 2003).

³⁸⁵ *MEA Annual Report, 2004-05 op cit.*, No. 383.

discuss issues relating to crisis in Palestine, Lebanon and Darfur. The UNGA adopted by consensus two Conventions entitled 'International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' (13 December 2006) and 'International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance' (20 December 2006)³⁸⁶.

The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh led the Indian delegation to the 14th Summit meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Havana from 11-16 September 2006. Stressing the need for a durable peace in West Asia, Prime Minister said "I would recommend that we constitute a suitable high level group for West Asia. The group could undertake a sustained mission to promote understanding in the region and assist in the implementation of the agreed roadmap towards a comprehensive peace. The international community must address more fully its responsibility to resolve this issue and bring to an end once and for all the long years of suffering of the Palestinian people"³⁸⁷.

India remained engaged in the UN's consideration of the Middle East issue in the UN General Assembly, and where feasible, at the Security Council. India's views on the need for a return to the process of dialogue, and for an early end to the cycle of violence and counter-violence had been underlined repeatedly at various fora. Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed made a statement on agenda item: 17 and 18 'The Situation in the Middle East' and

³⁸⁶ MEA Annual Report, 2006-07 op cit., No. 345, p. 108.

³⁸⁷ "Statement by the Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh at The XIVth Summit Of The Non-Aligned Movement, Havana, Cuba", MEA, New Delhi, September 15, 2006 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290011851>. Also see MEA, Annual Report 2006-07 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500412689>, p. 114.

'Question of Palestine' at the 62nd Session of UNGA on 30 November 2007. Statements were also made by the Indian delegation during consideration of issues relating to the Middle East in the Fourth Committee³⁸⁸. Meanwhile, the External Affairs Minister also participated in the NAM Ministerial Committee on Palestine, held on 25 September 2007 on the margins of the UN General Assembly session³⁸⁹.

India participated in the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership Ministerial Conference on Capacity Building for Palestine at Jakarta in July 2008³⁹⁰. In July 2008, at the ministerial meeting in Tehran of the NAM Committee on Palestine, India's Minister of External Affairs, Pranab Mukherjee pledged to continue to work with other members of the committee in an endeavour to collectively support the Palestinian cause³⁹¹.

India remained engaged in the consideration in the UN of the Middle East issue in the UN General Assembly (both in the Fourth Committee and at the Plenary). India underscored its belief in the need for progress to be made in the bilateral Israel-Palestine dialogue process that was resumed by the Annapolis Conference in November 2007. Following Israel's military operations in Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009, the President of the 63rd UNGA called for the resumption of the Tenth Emergency Session of the UNGA in the third week of January 2009 which was suspended since December 2006, to

³⁸⁸ MEA, *Annual Report 2007-08* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500413902>, p. 90.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³⁹⁰ MEA *Annual Report, 2008-09* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500415091>, pp.50-51.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

press for an immediate ceasefire by Israel in line with the UNSCR 1860 of January 2009. India's statements continued to reflect the balanced position of the Government of India on the larger situation in the Middle East, and on the primacy of humanitarian concerns in the immediate context of the conflict in Gaza. India's long-standing, historic and consistent affirmation of support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people was underlined at all occasions, while reiterating its resolute opposition to all acts of terror and violence³⁹².

External Affairs Minister, S. M. Krishna led the Indian delegation to the NAM Ministerial meeting held from 13-14 July, 2009 just before the NAM Summit. He also participated in the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine held on 13 July, 2009³⁹³. Similarly, the Indian Prime Minister Singh raised the issue of Palestine in his address at the 15th summit of the NAM (11-16 July) at Sharm al-Sheikh in July 2009. He stated that "Meeting as we do on Arab soil, my thoughts turn to the people of Palestine, who have endured great suffering and hardship. Our Movement must do more to facilitate a comprehensive, just, lasting and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue"³⁹⁴.

India remained engaged in the consideration of the Middle East issue in the Fourth Committee as well as the Plenary of the 64th UNGA (September 2009). India's statements on the Palestinian issue reiterated its long-standing, historic and steadfast support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people

³⁹² *MEA Annual Report, 2008-09 op cit.*, No. 390, pp.50-51.

³⁹³ *MEA, Annual Report, 2009-10* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500415660>, p. 112.

³⁹⁴ "Statement by the Prime Minister at the XV Summit of the Non Aligned Movement", MEA, New Delhi, July 15, 2009 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290015039>.

including their right to live in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and UNSC Resolutions 1397 & 1515. India's statements also underscored its commitment to support Palestinian people in pursuit of their legitimate goals and their efforts aimed at economic and social development with dignity and self-reliance while reiterating its resolute opposition to all acts of terror and violence. Stressing on the primacy of humanitarian concerns in the Gaza Strip, India called for an end to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and easing restrictions on free movement of goods and persons within Palestine³⁹⁵.

India had voted in favour of a UN resolution (drafted by Arab and NAM nations) that was put to vote in the General Assembly on November 5, 2009 endorsing the Goldstone Report (also known as the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict) which required Israel and Palestine to investigate war crimes in the Gaza Strip³⁹⁶. Expressing support for the resolution, the Indian deputy envoy to the United Nations, Manjeev Singh Puri, said, "Our commitment to the Palestinian cause is complete"³⁹⁷. Meanwhile, India also expressed its

³⁹⁵ *MEA Annual Report 2009-10 op cit.* No. 393, p. 111.

³⁹⁶ Prepared by the UN Fact Finding Mission and headed by South African judge Richard Goldstone, the report accused both Hamas and Israeli forces of war crimes in the Gaza strip from December 2008 to January 2009. The Commission stated that Israel had used disproportionate force, targeted Palestinian civilians and destroyed civilian infrastructure. It was also critical of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups for mounting rocket attacks against Israeli civilian targets. The non-binding UN Resolution called for independent investigations by Israel and the "Palestinian side" on allegations of war crimes raised in the Goldstone report. Both Israel and Hamas rejected the allegations.

³⁹⁷ "India Backs UN Report on War Crimes in Gaza", November 6th, 2009 at liveLeak.com. Also see "India Expresses Reservations on Goldstone Report", November 05, 2009 at zeenews.com

reservations on the report, including on involvement of the International Criminal Court and the UN Security Council as well as on some of the procedures adopted by the Goldstone Report³⁹⁸.

Minister of External Affairs Shri S. M. Krishna participated in the NAM Ministerial as well as IBSA+Indonesia+ Palestine on 'Palestine' in New York on the sidelines of 65th UNGA in September 2010 during which India welcomed "direct talks" between Israel and Palestine³⁹⁹.

India co-sponsored and voted in favour of a draft resolution at the United Nations on February 18, 2011 that termed Israeli settlement policies 'illegal.' India's Explanation of Vote affirmed that India's decision was 'consistent with its long-standing position of solidarity with the Palestinian people and its position that the settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law...' That resolution was, however, vetoed by the United States – the first such veto by the Obama administration⁴⁰⁰.

Frustrated at a two-year deadlock with Israeli negotiators, the Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas had submitted an application to the UN to be recognized as a state. Supporting the Palestinian bid, Prime Minister in his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2011, stated that "The Palestinian question still remained unresolved and a source of great instability and violence. India is steadfast in its support for the Palestinian people's struggle

³⁹⁸ MEA Annual Report 2009-10, *op cit.* No. 393, p.111.

³⁹⁹ MEA Annual Report 2010-11 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500417371>, p.107.

⁴⁰⁰ S. Samuel C. Rajiv, "Palestine's Strongest Ally", *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2011.

for a sovereign, independent, viable and united state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognizable borders side by side and at peace with Israel". The Prime Minister also added that India looked forward to welcoming Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations and thought that the time was not far when Palestinians would realize their dream to have a state of their own and an honourable member of the international community⁴⁰¹.

Clarifying India's support of the Palestinians' statehood bid, India's Permanent Representative, Hardeep Singh Puri said that the Palestinians' membership application of the UN 'was not incompatible with, nor did it exclude, direct negotiations between the parties to resolve the final status issues'⁴⁰². It may be noted, direct talks between Israel and Palestine have been stalled since September 2010. While Palestine is not against talks with Israel, it is against pursuing them without a freeze on Jewish settlements.

In a significant advance for the Palestine cause, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

⁴⁰¹ "Statement by the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the General Debate of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", MEA, New Delhi, September 24, 2011 at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=290018311>

⁴⁰² "India Backs Palestinian Bid for UN Membership", *Indo Asian News Service*, September 30, 2011. Also see S. Samuel C. Rajiv, "India and the Palestinian Bid for Statehood at the UN", *IDSA Comment*, November 19, 2011 at: http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaandthePalestinianBidforStatehoodattheUN_sscrajiv_19091

despite strong opposition by the US and Israel had voted by 107 to 14 with 52 abstentions and 21 absentees to admit Palestine as a full member⁴⁰³. India along with Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa, and France voted in favour⁴⁰⁴.

Minister of State, E. Ahamed visited Palestine from November 18 – 19, 2011 for participating in the handing over ceremony of IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) Multipurpose Sports Centre at Ramallah. The Sports Centre is the first project completed with IBSA funding for the Palestinian National Authority and two more IBSA-funded projects are being proactively pursued: the rehabilitation of the 'Al-Quds Hospital' in Gaza; and construction of a 'Centre for People with Special Needs' in Nablus. During his inaugural speech, the Minister stated that "It is a gift of people of IBSA countries to the people of Palestine. The Government and the People of India remain committed to assist the Palestinian people in their exercise of nation building in all sectors, including areas of niche expertise"⁴⁰⁵. The Palestinian leadership expressed appreciation for the developmental and humanitarian assistance provided by the IBSA countries, as well as, for their support for Palestinian membership of UN and UNESCO. Along

⁴⁰³ The US voted against the move saying that the proposal was 'regrettable' and would undermine a just and lasting peace in the region. Directly after the vote, the US acted on a 1990s law requiring it end payments to any UN body that admitted Palestine. UNESCO would lose about \$ 70 million a month or some 22 per cent of its budget. Israel has stopped its 3 per cent contribution to the organisation and is accelerating settlement construction in the illegally occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. It has also frozen customs and other revenues of about \$ 100 million a month which it collects for the Palestinian Authority, as the latter has no control over its own borders. For more see "Punishing Palestinians". Editorial, *Hindu*, 10 November, 2011.

⁴⁰⁴ "UNESCO Membership for Palestine", *Hindu*, November 1, 2011.

⁴⁰⁵ "Speech by MOS (EA) at the inauguration of IBSA Sports Complex in Ramallah, MEA, Speeches and Statements, November 19, 2011 at: <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530118555>

with IBSA delegations, the Ahamed called President, Mahmoud Abbas and Foreign Minister. Riyad Malki. MOS reiterated Government of India's continued support to Palestine in their efforts to achieve a just solution to the Middle East conflict. He also assured the Palestinian leadership of India's support in their efforts in state building⁴⁰⁶.

Economic and Humanitarian Support for Nation Building

In addition to strong political and diplomatic support at the bilateral and international levels, India has also tried to help the Palestinians through economic, technical and humanitarian assistance, especially after the establishment of the PNA in 1994 in pursuance of the Oslo principles. The Indian Ambassador to Jordan A. K. Budhiraja met President Yasser Arafat on September 6, 1994 and conveyed Government of India's decision to send one million dollars of assistance to the Palestinian people. President Arafat appreciated India's gesture⁴⁰⁷.

In 1995, India first recognised the passport travel documents issued by the PNA. On June 1996, India's representative office in the PNA administered area (Gaza City) was opened. The office was aimed at 'further strengthening the close friendly relations' between India and the Palestine people and to 'promote, expand and diversify these relations in economic, commercial, cultural and other

⁴⁰⁶ "Visit of MOS Shri E Ahamed to Palestine and Jordan", MEA Press Release, November 21, 2011 at: <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530218556>

⁴⁰⁷ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XL, No 1 January, 1994, <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1994.pdf>, p.225

fields⁴⁰⁸. On its part, the PNA sought India's help and cooperation in the fields of infrastructure and technology.

At the Washington Donors Conference in October, 1995, India pledged, and met, US\$ 1 million for assistance to the Palestinian people. At the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January, 1996, India pledged another US\$1 million in assistance to the Palestinians, which was utilised for construction of a Library-cum-Activity Centre at the Palestinian Technical College in Deir-El-Balah and another Library at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza⁴⁰⁹.

In November 1997, during President Arafat's visit to India, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two sides. The MOU provided for promoting scientific, technical and industrial cooperation including provision of training facilities in specialised areas and undertaking of mutually agreed projects. The MOU further provided for promoting commercial and economic cooperation including institutional linkages between the Chambers of Commerce & Industry and exchange of business delegations. Further spheres included education, cultural cooperation and cooperation in the field of information.⁴¹⁰

Following a visit of a security delegation to India in March, 1997, led by the Head of the Palestinian Security Forces, Maj. Gen. Nasser Yussef, India offered

⁴⁰⁸ For more on Representative Office of India in Palestine see office website at: <http://www.roy-ramallah.org.ps/2010/india-palestine.html>

⁴⁰⁹ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLIII, No 1 JANUARY 1997 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1997.pdf>, p. 185.

⁴¹⁰ *Representative Office of India in Palestine website article on "India Palestine Relationship"* at: <http://www.roy-ramallah.org.ps/2010/india-palestine.html>

51 specialised security training slots to Palestinians in various disciplines during the year 1997-98, which accounted for an estimated expenditure of Rs. 55 lakhs. Indian Government beared all the expenditure on training cost, 'including boarding, lodging, study tours, books, uniforms, etc'⁴¹¹. India also continued to offer 8 scholarships under ICCR Schemes to Palestinian students for higher studies in India, while also offering several slots for training courses under the ITEC Programme⁴¹².

In June 1998, two MoUs and Agreed Minutes for the implementation of two Indian aided projects namely the Jawaharlal Nehru library at Al-Azhar University and the Mahatma Gandhi library at the Palestine Technical College in Deir Al-Albalah in Gaza Strip were signed. At yet another International Donors Conference in Washington DC on 30 November, 1998, India pledged another US\$1 million as assistance to Palestine⁴¹³. Out of the latter, a sum of US\$ 300,000/- had been disbursed to Al-Azhar University in Gaza for the construction of two additional floors to its library. The remaining amount was utilised for a Human Resource Development Programme. India added more than 50 training slots, at a cost of Rs. 40.63 lakhs, to Palestinian personnel for specialised training courses during the financial year 1998-99, where 58 Palestinian officers

⁴¹¹ *Foreign Affairs Record*, 1997 *op cit.*, No. 409, p. 185.

⁴¹² The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme was launched on 15th September, 1964 as a bilateral programme of assistance of the Government of India. It is the flagship programme of the Indian Government's technical cooperation effort, not only because of its wide geographical coverage but also for innovative forms of technical cooperation. Being essentially bilateral in nature, ITEC is about cooperation and partnership for mutual benefit. It is demand-driven and response-oriented. It is focused on addressing the needs of developing countries. For more see Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme at MEA website at: <http://www.itec.mea.gov.in/>

⁴¹³ *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. XLIV, No 1 January, 1998 at: <http://mealib.nic.in/far/1998.pdf> ,p. 275.

completed their training. During the financial year 1999-2000, 38 more Palestinian officers utilised the facilities for training⁴¹⁴.

India gifted medicines and food supplies worth Rs. 75 lakhs and hospital equipment worth Rs. 1.40 crores approximately to Minister of Health of Palestine Riad Zanoun. Joint Secretary WANA visited Gaza on 15 July 2001 to formally hand over the medical supplies to the Palestinian Ministry of health⁴¹⁵.

The volume of direct bilateral trade between India and Palestine which was US\$ 5.2 million in 1998 increased to US\$ 32 million in 2003. Products imported from India include fabrics, yarns, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather products, industrial tools and accessories, basmati rice, spices, vaccines and pharmaceutical products, sanitary wares, marble and granites⁴¹⁶.

E. Ahamed, Minister of State for External Affairs visited Palestine from 17-19 September 2004. During the visit, Minister of State for External Affairs formally handed over medicines and TATA Safari vehicles worth Rs. 2 crore as donation to the Palestinian National Authority. A special course for 10 Palestinian diplomats had been organized by Foreign Service Institute of the Ministry of External Affairs from 22 November to 17 December 2004⁴¹⁷.

⁴¹⁴ *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia*, "India–Palestine Relations" at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India%E2%80%93Palestine_relations

⁴¹⁵ *MEA Annual Report 2001-02* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50046684>, pp. 42-43.

⁴¹⁶ *Representative Office of India in Palestine website article on "India Palestine Relationship"* at:

<http://www.roi-ramallah.org.ps/2010/india-palestine.html>. Also see MEA document on "India-Palestine Relations", 2011 at: <http://mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50044508>

⁴¹⁷ *MEA Annual Report 2004-05*, *op cit.*, No. 383, p. 59.

On August 2, 2005, Prime Minister Ahmed Qrei' said India had earmarked \$15 million for different projects in Palestine and abroad. The projects included a Palestinian Embassy in Delhi, a college in Ramallah, a cardiology health centre in Nablus (Al Shifa Hospital), a new Prime Ministry in Ramallah and a school in Abu Abu Dees in Jerusalem, a Software Technology & Industrial Park in Gaza, a Centre for Indian Studies and Chair for Indian Studies at the Al-Quds University in Jerusalem and a park and zoo in Jenin⁴¹⁸.

India announced humanitarian assistance of Rs.10 crores (US\$ 2.3 million) on 13 May 2006 to Palestine, to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian people following the freezing of aid by US, EU countries and non-transfer of taxes amounting to over US\$50 million a month by Israel which it collects on behalf of Palestine, consequent on the formation of Government by Hamas after elections to Palestine Legislative Council in January 2006. As a part of the humanitarian assistance India sent life saving drugs identified by the Palestinian authorities. The first batch of medicines weighing 2500 kgs was handed over to the Palestinian authorities on 10 August 2006. The second batch of medicines weighing 8,500 kgs was handed over to the Palestinian authority on 28 September 2006. The third batch of medicines weighing 10,500 kgs was handed over to the Palestinian authorities on 14 November 2006. The fourth

⁴¹⁸ "Indian aid to Palestine", August 03, 2005 at: <http://www.defence.pk/forums/world-affairs/58459-indian-aid-palestine.html>

batch of medicines was handed over to the Palestinian Authority on 17 December 2006⁴¹⁹.

Younis Al-Khatib, Advisor to the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on health affairs who received the aid was highly appreciative of the timely supply of desperately needed life-saving drugs and profusely thanked the Government and the people of India for their unwavering support to the Palestinian people and lauded India's firm stand with the Palestinians at this critical time. The solidarity of the Government of India with the Palestinian people and to the Palestinian cause was reiterated on the occasion⁴²⁰.

India attended the International Donors' Conference on Palestine in Paris in December 2007 and pledged US\$ 5 million for Palestine for development projects. It also agreed to train 400 Palestinian officials under the ITEC programme⁴²¹. India also participated in the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership Ministerial Conference on Capacity Building for Palestine at Jakarta in July 2008. In this conference, India committed to provide 60 ITEC slots to the Palestinian people for training courses annually, which later were increased to 80 slots⁴²². Similarly, during the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas's state visit to India from 6-9 October 2008, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh announced a grant of US\$ 10 million as budgetary support to the Palestine National Authority

⁴¹⁹ *MEA Annual Report 2006-07 op cit.*, No. 345, p.59.

⁴²⁰ "On the Handing over of Humanitarian Aid to Palestine", MEA, New Delhi, August 11, 2006 at: <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/0211C212D9F59EAA852571C7005CBC57>

⁴²¹ *MEA Annual Report 2007-08 op cit.*, No. 388, p. 52-53.

⁴²² *MEA Annual Report 2008-09 op cit.*, No. 390, p. 50-51.

as well as an additional US\$ 10 million in project assistance for Palestinian development programmes⁴²³.

India enhanced its contribution to the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) during 2009 which was 60th anniversary year for its establishment for undertaking relief work in the occupied Palestinian territories from US\$ 20,000 to US\$ 1 million. The agency provides education, health, micro-finance and social services to more than four million refugees spread across Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. India also provided US\$ 10 million as budget support to the Palestinian National Authority after the International Conference to Support the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza held in Sharm-el-Sheikh in March 2009⁴²⁴.

Appreciating India's "timely help" of USD 11 million in budgetary assistance and humanitarian relief in the aftermath of Gaza war, the Palestinian Authority had said that New Delhi was a "true friend" of the Palestinians. It may be mentioned here that India was among the first to contribute the humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency after Israel wreaked havoc on the civilians there during the December 2008-January 2009 attacks. According to the PNA Foreign Minister Ahmed Soboh "It (India) has proved itself a true friend and well wisher of the Palestinian masses

⁴²³ *Ibid*

⁴²⁴ *MEA Annual Report, 2009-10 op cit., No. 393, p. 111.*

by being among the first ones to provide the Palestinian Authority (PA) with budgetary support"⁴²⁵.

India contributed US\$ 1 million to the United Nations Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for the year 2010⁴²⁶. Moreover, following President Mahmoud Abbas visit to India in February 2010, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced US\$ 10 million as untied budget support to the Palestinian National Authority⁴²⁷. In February 2010 during the visit of Hasan Abu Libdeh, Minister of National Economy, PNA a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation was signed between the Federation of Palestinian Chamber of Commerce, Industry & Agriculture (FPCCIA) and Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce Industry (FICCI)⁴²⁸.

The Minister of State for External Affairs visited Palestine from November 18 – 19, 2011 to participate in the handing over ceremony of IBSA Multipurpose Sports Centre at Ramallah. The Commissioner General of UNRWA, Filippo Grandi met the Indian Minister who handed over a cheque of US\$ 1 million as India's annual contribution to the UNRWA for 2011-12 to be utilized for 'providing daily supplement of food assistance to more than 76,000 students attending UNRWA schools in Gaza for 50 school days under the UNRWA's Emergency

⁴²⁵ "Indian Aid to Palestine Makes it a "True Friend": PA" May 8, 2009 at: <http://news.chennaionline.com/newsitem.aspx?NEWSID=c5d5619a-0b27-4805-b35a-78a7df5d4344&CATEGORYNAME=INTER>

⁴²⁶ *MEA Annual Report 2010-11* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500417371>, pp. 48-49.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*, p.107

⁴²⁸ *MEA Document on "India-Palestine Relations, New Delhi, July 2011.*

Programme in Gaza strip'. The Minister assured UNRWA Commissioner of the Government of India's continued support in its operations and in its efforts to alleviate the sufferings of Palestinian refugees⁴²⁹. India is also actively involved in two more IBSA-funded projects that are being proactively pursued: the rehabilitation of the 'Al-Quds Hospital' in Gaza; and construction of a 'Centre for People with Special Needs' in Nablus.

India's Support to Palestine: A Critique

While the Government of India claims that there has not been any change in its Palestinian policy and it continues to provide adequate political and economic support to the people of Palestine from time to time, this is challenged by a number of leaders, scholars, journalists and activists. They argue that at one time, India had a consistent and unwavering record of support to the Palestinian cause. But now it is reduced to mere statements, resolutions and occasional economic assistance. This is not even whole heartedly.

Criticising the Indian media for its partial coverage of Arafat's press conference during his 1992 India visit as a clear-cut-go-ahead signal from the PLO to India to establish ties with Israel, Bansidhar Pradhan has stated that Arafat explicitly emphasized that India's full diplomatic relationship with Israel was not a precondition for its association with the Peace process⁴³⁰. In other words, he argues that Arafat did not agree that diplomatic relations with Israel

⁴²⁹ MEA Press Release, "*Visit of MOS Shri E Ahamed to Palestine and Jordan*", November 21, 2011 at: <http://meaindia.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530218556>

⁴³⁰ Pradhan, "India's Policy Towards the PLO", *op cit.*, No. 148, pp. 72-73.

were the only way by which India could be involved in the West Asia Peace process. Ninan Koshy has similarly stated that when the PLO had started negotiations with Israel, it apparently had no objection to India upgrading its relations with India. But the PLO never thought that this would develop into a defence nexus detrimental to the cause of the Palestinians. The government of India has always claimed that its relations with Israel in no way affect its support for the Palestinian struggle for independence and statehood. But this, he thinks, is not true⁴³¹.

John Cherian has regretted that although India was among the countries that voted in favour of the United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning Israel's "excessive use of force" against Palestinian civilians during the second *intifada* in September 2000 yet New Delhi had not issued an official statement condemning Tel Aviv and categorically supporting the Palestinians in their struggle. It has instead made a token commitment, to supply medicines worth Rs.25 lakhs to Palestinians wounded in the second *intifada*.

Cherian also writes that when there was an escalation of violence, the Government of India issued several statements that urged both sides to restore normalcy. These statements apportioned blame to both sides equally. This meant, he deplored, that the victims and perpetrators of crime were treated with the same yardstick⁴³².

⁴³¹ Koshy, "India: Israel and Palestine", *op cit.*, No.372.

⁴³² John Cherian, "India's Changing Stand", *Frontline*, Volume 17 - Issue 22, Oct. 28 - Nov. 10, 2000.

The Left parties had been critical of the Vajpayee government's pro-Israel tilt. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Harkishan Singh Surjeet, said that the government had reversed the national consensus that characterised India's foreign policy⁴³³. The Communist Party of India leader A.B. Bardhan said that by not condemning the Israeli attack on unarmed Palestinians "the Government of India has let down an old friend"⁴³⁴.

According to Shamir Hasan, ever since Ariel Sharon became the Prime Minister, Israel accelerated the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, completely ignoring the Oslo Accords of 1993 but the Indian government's response to this act was completely unsatisfactory. He similarly deplores that when Arafat's residence and office were attacked by the Israeli forces, this evoked no protest from the Government of India. In fact, Omar Abdullah, Minister of State for External Affairs, blamed the Palestinians for spoiling their case by their resort to terror⁴³⁵.

Criticising heavily the NDA Government for the Sharon visit, John Cherian has written that at a time when Arafat was virtually imprisoned within his office in Ramallah, the BJP-led government thought it fit to invite Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for a state visit to India. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in the banquet speech in honour of his Israeli counterpart, did not even mention Palestine or the plight of its people. He, instead, went on to say: "No cause can

⁴³³ Cited in *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ Hasan, "The Evolution of India's Palestine Policy" *op cit.*, No. 258.

justify the use of violence" - words the Israeli side wanted to hear. This, he thinks, signifies Indian political support for Israel's policy of occupation and aggression against the Palestinian people". Moreover, the failure of the Indian government to issue a strong statement condemning the Israeli government's decision of expelling or physically liquidating Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has only strengthened the suspicions of the international community about India-Israeli relations⁴³⁶.

In another article, Cherian has remarked that in the last couple of years, New Delhi had virtually forgotten the Palestinian leader and the sufferings of his people as a result of Israeli policies. Sharon, for all practical purposes, has junked the two-state theory to which the international community, including India, stands committed. The inhuman Israeli policies towards Palestinians, the targeted assassination of Palestinian leaders, and the building of the apartheid wall were all virtually glossed over by New Delhi during National Democratic Alliance (NDA) rule. Instead, military and strategic ties with Israel were given importance. The Palestinian envoy to India, Khalid Sheikh, one of the longest-serving diplomats, was virtually declared *persona non grata* by the NDA government. He was recalled by Arafat under pressure from New Delhi. In the last couple of years, Israel has emerged as India's second biggest supplier of defence weaponry.

⁴³⁶ John Cherian, "A Visit and Its Aftermath", *Frontline*, Volume 20, Issue 20, September 27 - October 10, 2003

Criticising the UPA Government for its Palestine policy, Cherian has mentioned that as Arafat was struggling for life at the Percy Military Hospital in Paris, the Indian government was busy preparing for the high-level political consultations with Israel that were to be held in the third week of November 2004. Despite the Common Minimum Programme and the protests from the Left parties, the UPA I Government seemed to have persisted with its special relationship with Israel. He deplored that when the South African and Indonesian Presidents attended Arafat's funeral, India was represented by External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh and Railway Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav⁴³⁷.

Regretting on the UPA Government's treatment to the newly elected Palestinian President, *Hindu* wrote in its editorial that "The Manmohan Singh government handled the visit to India of the Palestinian Authority President, Mahamud Abbas in rather low key. If this was because Mr.Abbas, a far less charismatic figure than his predecessor Arafat, preferred to shun the limelight it would be understandable. However it would be inexcusable if the lack of enthusiasm over the visit reflected any decline of interest in the Palestinian cause. The editorial also pointed out that the call for an end to violence was grossly inadequate. The official statement on the visit should have included a condemnation of the Israeli occupation, which is the primary cause for the strife⁴³⁸.

⁴³⁷ John Cherian, "A Breach of Trust", *Frontline*, Volume 21 - Issue 25, Dec. 04 - 17, 2004.

⁴³⁸ "Firm Up Support for Israel", Editorial, *Hindu*, 26 May 2005.

According to Ninan Koshy, recent statements or reactions from the Indian government of India on Israeli aggressions reflect more a calculated caution not to displease Israel in any way than a principled response to the developments or support to the Palestinian cause. He cites three instances to prove his argument: Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006, aggression on Gaza strip 2008-2009 and military attack on the flotilla of humanitarian goods to Gaza in 2010. He thinks that the language and tone of the statements on these occasions were carefully modulated so as not to invite displeasure from Israel or from the USA. He also mentions that there have been important developments on which India has kept silent. It has not criticized, let alone condemned, the Apartheid Wall that makes Bantustans in Palestine, though the Wall has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice⁴³⁹.

Sajad Ibrahim has similarly stated that on many occasions since 1992 India was not ready to condemn Israeli atrocities against the Palestinians by sticking to a passive stand of supporting a 'peaceful solution' to the crisis. Moreover, he also thinks that although India is in a commanding position of using its good offices to influence Israel, it never used it to pressurise Israel to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories. To him all this undermines India's values and principles⁴⁴⁰.

⁴³⁹ Koshy, *op cit.*, No. 372.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibrahim, *op cit.* No.264.

Criticising the UPA II Government for its stand on the Goldstone Report, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said "It is shocking that the Indian delegation has expressed its reservations on endorsing the findings and recommendations of the Goldstone report at a special session of the UN General Assembly. The Indian action in questioning the "recommendations" and raising doubts about "procedures" followed by Judge Goldstone, in the opinion of the party, is nothing but colluding with the US and Israel's other allies in getting them off the charges of war-crimes that Judge Goldstone has shown Israel has committed. The party suggested that the Government of India should stand up for Palestinian rights and reverse the shameful stand it has taken in the UN⁴⁴¹.

Prakash Karat, General Secretary of the CPI (M), has regretted that "The Indian government has condemned the attack on the flotilla but did not mention the name of Israel. He accused that Israelis are advising the Indian government in Kashmir⁴⁴². Praful Bidwai has similarly accused that the Indian government's statement on the flotilla massacre did not even mention Israel. He accused that the government has pursued a pusillanimous and collaborationist policy towards

⁴⁴¹ "India's Stand on Goldstone Report", CPI (M) Press Statement, New Delhi, November 6, 2009 at: <http://cpim.org/content/indias-stand-goldstone-report>

⁴⁴² Cited in the Report on the Two Day Conference on "A Just Peace for Palestine" held at New Delhi on 22-23 September 2010, *Pragoti*, September 24, 2010 at: <http://www.pragoti.in/node/4148>

Israel, led by a myopic and imprudent military-purchase relationship, and by intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism training⁴⁴³.

According to Harsh Pant, India is no longer initiating anti-Israel resolutions at the UN and has made serious attempts to moderate NAM's anti-Israel resolutions⁴⁴⁴. Another scholar has similarly remarked that although India expressed concern whenever there were setbacks to the peace process (for example, during the opening of the tunnel beneath the Temple Mount and the disturbances in the Har Homa neighbourhood) but, unlike in the past, it refrained from openly criticizing Israel. At the United Nations, India gradually stopped sponsoring anti-Israeli resolutions. Though there is no appreciable change in the voting pattern of the Indian delegation at the UN on the issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the content analysis of speeches made by Indian delegates certainly reflects a softening of the Indian position vis-à-vis Israel⁴⁴⁵. According to Achin Vanaik, India makes occasional noises about Palestinian suffering along with mildly worded criticisms about Israel, but Tel Aviv knows these are pro-forma objections that mean little to nothing. He thinks that with regard to the Palestinian struggle for justice, India— like the EU—does two things: it throws

⁴⁴³ Praful Bidwai, "Stooping Low, *Frontline*, Vol:27 Issue No.1319, June 19 - 2 July, 2010 at: <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=20100702271310900.htm&date=fl2713/&prd=fl2713&line&>

⁴⁴⁴ Harsh V. Pant, "India-Israel Partnership: Convergence and Constraints", *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 4, December 2004 available at: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers13%5Cpaper1279.html>

⁴⁴⁵ "India and Israel: Dawn of a New Era", Western Defence Organisation, May 21, 2002 at: <http://pakistanyouthmovement.com/Research-Reports/India%20Israel%20Ties.pdf>

money to Palestinian agencies and pays lip service to its cause. Nothing more"⁴⁴⁶.

Sashi Tharoor, a Lok Sabha MP and the former Minister of State for External Affairs has recently accused that the Government that India is not taking an active part in regional issues especially in West Asia. He criticised that India no longer has a special envoy on West Asia, which meant that India was absent at the United Nations quartet discussions on policy⁴⁴⁷.

Support to Palestine at the Non-Governmental Level

Besides the official Government support, the issue of Palestine remains popular in India. This is evident from the numerous campaigns and demonstrations against Israel's actions in Palestine by various organisations and movements in the country from time to time. Moreover, frequent seminars and conferences have been organised in the country in the recent past to raise awareness and garner support for the just cause of Palestine. During the Gaza war in 2008-2009 and attacks on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in 2010, for instance, several demonstrations were held against Israel by a large number of citizen groups and civil society organisations. Responding to the appeals from the Palestinian labour movement following the brutal attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, Cochin dockworkers had declared a blockade on Israeli cargo till. In a

⁴⁴⁶ Achin Vanaik, " Israel and India, Zionism and Hindutva", *Alternatives International*, November 9, 2009.

⁴⁴⁷ "Tharoor flays West Asia Policy", *Indian Express*, December 11, 2011.

unanimous decision, the dock workers unions – from CITU to INTUC and BMS - in Cochin dockyard had stopped unloading any goods coming from Israel⁴⁴⁸.

Moreover, there has been a concerted campaign to break India's military ties with Israel and buying of Israeli arms. During the Lebanese conflict of 2006, the CPI-M launched a campaign whereby 86 MPs belonging to different political parties called on the government 'to suspend' all military purchases from Israel and return to India's position of non-alignment and an independent foreign policy⁴⁴⁹. In 2009, a million signatures were submitted to the Indian Government by people all around the country calling for the break in security and military ties with the Jewish country⁴⁵⁰. In May 2010, several Indian academics and cultural figures had appealed to the well-known writer Amitav Ghosh to refuse the Dan David prize awarded jointly by the Dan David Foundation and Tel Aviv University to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution in the fields of science, technology, culture or social welfare. The appeal was made on the ground that the prize is administered by a university that is funded by the state and, more crucially, is a leading academic partner of the state in developing weapons and justifying war crimes⁴⁵¹. On July 13, 2010, seventy-six Indian academics, journalists and artists of the India Chapter of the *Palestinian Campaign for the*

⁴⁴⁸ Prabir Purkayastha, "New Anti-Apartheid Movement Grows in India Against Israel", July 9, 2010 at: <http://newsclick.in/international/committee-solidarity-palestine>

⁴⁴⁹ 'Suspend Arms Purchase from Israel: MPs', *The Hindu*, July 29, 2006.

⁴⁵⁰ Purkayastha, "New Anti-apartheid Movement", *op cit.*, No. 448.

⁴⁵¹ Open letter, "Amitav Ghosh, Don't Accept Dan David Prize", 7 May 2010 at: <http://boycottisrael.info/content/groups-amitav-ghosh-dont-accept-dan-david-prize>

*Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel*⁴⁵² which was formed in June 2010, have issued a call joining the on-going global academic and cultural boycott of Israel.⁴⁵³ In August 2011, five Bangalore-based Indian artists refused to participate in a major group show on Indian art called “Deconstructing India,” which is being planned for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in May 2012 saying that “their boycott is not against individuals as such, it is against the Israeli state”⁴⁵⁴.

In addition to the campaign for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel, meetings and conferences have also been regularly organised across the country to create awareness about the Palestinian struggle. For instance, Harmony India, an association promoting communal harmony, secularism and human solidarity, organised a well-attended meeting in Chennai on December 3, 2000 to express solidarity with the long-suffering people of Palestine. Nine other organisations, representing a broad spectrum of society⁴⁵⁵, co-sponsored the meeting which expressed support to the courageous uprising of the Palestinian people in what has been termed the second Intifada. The meeting urged the NDA Government not to deviate from the long-standing Indian position in support of

⁴⁵² The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel — PACBI – was launched in 2004 by a group of Palestinian academics and intellectuals. The campaign is supported internationally by John Berger and more than 90 leading authors, film-makers, musicians and performers. For more see <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=868>.

⁴⁵³ See full statement at: <http://newsclick.in/international/join-india-chapter-palestinian-campaign-academic-cultural-boycott-israel-icacbi>

⁴⁵⁴ Tripti Lahiri, “Israel Show Divides Indian Artists”, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2011 and Rana Siddiqu Zaman, “Indian Artists to Boycott Major Show in Israel”, *Hindu*, August 2, 2011.

⁴⁵⁵ They included the Islamic Foundation Trust (IFT), the Indian School of Social Sciences (ISSS), the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the Sisters of Islamic Society (SIS), the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), the Evangelical Church of India (ECI), the All India Lawyers Union (AILU), the Students' Federation of India (SFI) and the All India Insurance Employees Association (AIIEA).

the cause of Palestine⁴⁵⁶. A resolution passed at the end of the meeting called on the people of the country to 'demonstrate in various ways' that the Palestinian cause was their cause⁴⁵⁷.

On 12 -14 March 2007, a Conference was held at New Delhi on "War, Imperialism and Resistance in West Asia". In a resolution passed at the end of the three-day conference, the participants called for "an end to the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine and all other occupied territories" and appealed the India people "to build a campaign on the nature of the apartheid state of Israel and to ensure breaking of India's military and security ties with Israel". The participants also wanted the Government of India not only to oppose the continued occupation of Iraq and Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories but also use all its diplomatic leverage and international stature to take an immediate initiative for a serious peace process in West Asia⁴⁵⁸.

In another seminar on "Palestine: 1967 and After" organized by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and the mission of the League of Arab States (LAS) in June 2007 in New Delhi to mark the 40th anniversary of the June 5 war

⁴⁵⁶ Sridhar, "An Expression of Solidarity" *op cit.* No. 328.

⁴⁵⁷ *Hindu*, December 5, 2000.

⁴⁵⁸ "Resolution of the Conference on "War, Imperialism and Resistance: West Asia", New Delhi, 12 -14 March 2007.

leading to Israeli occupation of Palestine, the participants highlighted India's still unwavering historical support for the Palestinian people⁴⁵⁹.

In cooperation with the Palestinian Boycott, Divestments, Sanctions National Committee (BNC), a conference named 'A Just Peace for Palestine' was held at the India International Centre in New Delhi on 22-23 September, 2010. The Conference was jointly organised by the Committee for Solidarity with Palestine, Palestine BDS National Committee, All India Peace and Solidarity Organisation, India Chapter for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel and other like-minded organisations. During the two-day long conference, the speakers emphasised that until the Israeli oppression of Palestine people ends, the much sought after 'two-state solution' would never get realised. It called on the people to collectively work and build a solidarity campaign for the liberation of Palestinian lands from Israeli occupation, self-determination and equality for all Palestinians and the right of return of Palestinian refugees⁴⁶⁰.

On 5th October 2010, the Indian Life-line to Gaza forum in cooperation with the Asian People's Solidarity for Palestine (APSP), an alliance of peoples' organisations, social movements, trade unions, and civil society institutions of

⁴⁵⁹ Nasser, "Indian - Israeli Ties Could Neutralize Delhi's Palestinian Policy", *op cit.*, No. 439 and Nilofar Suhrawardy, "Palestinian Issue: Concern Voiced in India", June 28, 2007 Muslim Media News Service (MMNS) at: <http://muslimmedianetwork.com/mmn/?p=1122>

⁴⁶⁰ Dhananjay, Report on the Two Day Conference on "A Just Peace for Palestine", *Pragoti*, New Delhi, September 22-23, 2010 at: <http://www.pragoti.in/node/4148>; Also see "An Invitation to the Conference "A Just Peace For Palestine", Centre for Policy Analysis, New Delhi; "Karat Assails Deepening Military Ties with Israel", *Hindu*, September 25, 2010.

Asia, announced the launching of Asia to Gaza Solidarity Caravan in New Delhi. Around 500 civilian activists from 17 Asian countries including India launched a sea journey towards Gaza to break the Israeli blockade of the region. The month long "caravan" that was flagged off from New Delhi on December 2 spent few days in each of the 18 cities, meeting political activists, attending press conferences, doing road shows and other meetings and carried relief material for the besieged people of Gaza. Gautam Mody, the Secretary of New Trade Union Initiative said, "Palestine is emerging as a central geo-political issue and we resist the ethnic cleansing of Palestine...In view of Israel's ongoing collective punishment of Palestinians through illegal occupation and siege of Gaza, we started this movement"⁴⁶¹. Maulana Abdul Wahab Khilji, member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board stated, "People of India stand for the liberation of Palestine, though India's policy towards Palestine has changed"⁴⁶². Shahnawaz Ali Raihan of (Students Islamic Organisation of India) and Sandeep Pandey expressed their solidarity with the cause of behalf of the student community.

The India Palestine People's Solidarity forum held a public meeting in Mumbai in January 2011 on the occasion of "Palestine - Israel: 60 Years of the "Nakba - Catastrophe", Occupation & Resistance". Prominent social and political personalities who spoke on the occasion agreed that "Israel Palestine conflict remains as one of the most crucial and intractable problems of our age and in

⁴⁶¹ "In Solidarity for Palestine, Asian Activists Announce Caravan to Gaza", *The Milli Gazette*, Oct 9, 2010 at: <http://www.milligazette.com/news/112-in-solidarity-for-palestine-asian-activists-announce-caravan-to-gaza>

⁴⁶² *Ibid*

fact it is the central geo-political issue of our times". They regretted that although the "Intifada" or "the uprising" of the Palestinian masses continues to resist the might of the Israeli-US occupation and capture the moral imagination of the people of the world yet the Indian Government today is a willing junior partner of the US-Israeli axis and the largest buyers of Israeli weapons⁴⁶³.

On April 17, 2011, The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of India took part in a candle light vigil at New Delhi to support and express solidarity with the Palestinian people's struggle for peace and justice. The gathering, where participants lit candles and wore peace dove badges, was organised jointly by the India Solidarity Ecumenical Network (ISEN) and Kairos Palestine. Others who participated in the event were members and friends of various churches and faith-based organisations and Adli Sadeq, the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to India⁴⁶⁴.

From the above statements and facts, one can deduce the following: Although the Government of India claims that it continues to provide diplomatic and political support to the Palestinians in their effort to have a separate homeland and help them in "the reconstruction of their nation" through economic,

⁴⁶³ Asim Khan, "Palestine People's Solidarity", *JournoSpy*, January 19, 2011.

⁴⁶⁴ "The YWCA of India in Solidarity with the Palestinian Cause", April 27, 2011 at: <http://www.worldywca.org/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/The-YWCA-of-India-in-Solidarity-with-the-Palestinian-Cause>

technical and humanitarian assistance from time to time, this perception is not shared by a number of leaders, scholars, journalists and activists who on the contrary argue that India's support Palestine has now been reduced to mere statements, resolutions and occasional economic assistance. In other words, it is clear that India, under the given the circumstances, is no longer supporting the national struggle movements that it used to do in the past. In the garb of so called 'pragmatism', India is steadily getting sucked into the vortex of Western design and quagmire. Whether India is under the NDA or UPA rule, the Government has diluted the country's principled foreign policy for certain interests that are not going to pay it in the long run. Second, the Indian support to the Palestine cause is not just limited to the government. The issue remains popular at the broader societal level.

The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: Should India Play A Mediatorial Role?

India's political and economic support to the Palestine people in their search for a separate homeland is undoubtedly important and should be continued without any pause. But this alone would not solve the vexed Palestine issue. The problem can be amicably resolved only through a time-bound and result-oriented peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This chapter examines India's role in the Israel Palestine peace process including the possibility of a mediatorial role between the two parties to solve their long pending dispute.

Role Before 1991

Although India actively supported the Arabs against Israel both within and outside the United Nations and always stressed the need for the Arabs to seek a negotiated settlement with Israel on the Palestine issue yet the Indian leaders were not eager to play any mediatorial role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the eve of Israel's request for recognition Nehru, for instance, said, "India can play no effective part in this conflict at the present stage either diplomatically or otherwise"⁴⁶⁵. He perhaps realised that the demands of the Arabs and the Israelis were so irreconcilable that there was hardly any scope for meditation by

⁴⁶⁵ Quoted in G Parthasarathy ed. *Jawaharlal Nehru' Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-64*, Volume 1, London, 1985, p. 128.

anyone⁴⁶⁶. Similarly dismissing any role for India in the peace process, Rajiv in 1986 candidly admitted: "There are already so many parties involved, we would not like to add one more hand in the complicated situation. We prefer to watch for a while and see how things turn out before actively trying to take an interest in it"⁴⁶⁷. Second, the absence of diplomatic relations with Israel, a party to the dispute also limited India's role in the peace process. The Israelis made it clear that in order to play any meaningful role in the peace process; India had to first establish full diplomatic relationship with their country. Third, the absence of India's role can be explained on the Indian apprehension that its quid pro quo could provoke activism on Kashmir by the countries in the region⁴⁶⁸. Fourth, throughout the Cold War period, the India West Asia relationship remained one-sided. It was always India and Indians who were dependant on the region and not the vice versa. This also limited India's role in West Asian conflict. Last but not the least, any sincere and substantial peace process to resolve the Arab Israeli conflict started only after the Madrid Conference not before it. However, India's basic approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict during this period had been that the people of the region itself should decide and negotiate the problem. Therefore, India welcomed, for example, the Camp David agreements while stressing that all the people of the region have the right to self-determination and all states the right to exist within secure boundaries.

⁴⁶⁶ Punyapriya Dasgupta, "Betral of India's Israel Policy, *op cit.* No. 92, p.769.

⁴⁶⁷ Kumarswami, *India's Israel Policy op cit.*, No. 176.

⁴⁶⁸ Abhyankar ed. *West Asia and the Region op cit.*, No. 13, p. 54.

Role Since Madrid Conference

The Middle East Peace Process started with the Madrid Conference of October 1991 and India had played a limited role since then. It was invited to become a participant in the multilateral track of the Peace Process that began in 1991 and actively participated in all the five working groups discussing Middle East-Palestine question such as regional economic development, arms control and regional security and environment and water resources⁴⁶⁹.

The slow-paced Madrid talks which were leading nowhere were upstaged by a series of secret meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators hosted by Norway. These meetings produced the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between Palestinians and Israel, a plan discussing the necessary elements and conditions for a future Palestinian state "on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973)". The agreement, officially titled the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (DOP), was signed on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993 between Israeli Prime Minister and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. It provided for a two-phase time table. First was a five-year interim period during which Israel Defence Forces would incrementally

⁴⁶⁹ *MEA Annual Report 1992-93*, p. 6. The Middle East peace process is a complex web of international negotiations based upon the structure set up at the Madrid Conference that was held on 30 October 1991. There were two different but parallel negotiating tracks, a bilateral one and a multilateral one. The bilateral track consisted of four separate sets of direct negotiations between Israel, and Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. The multilateral track aimed at building confidence among the regional parties and at solving a number of complicated issues which were addressed in five different forums comprising representatives from states in the region as well as of the international community. The working groups of the multilateral negotiations were focusing on water, environment, arms control, refugees and economic development.

withdraw from Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, transferring administrative powers to a soon-to-be elected Palestinian National Authority. Second was the 'final status' negotiations, to begin at the start of the third year of the interim period. These negotiations would cover the remaining issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return of Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlements in West Bank and Gaza, security arrangements, final borders of the two resultant states, relations and cooperation with other neighbours and other issues of common interests⁴⁷⁰.

India expressed its happiness on the signing of the Oslo Accord. An Official Spokesman of the MEA said that India welcomed mutual recognition by the State of Israel & the PLO, and the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement on Palestinian self-rule. India stressed that these were the notable steps towards ensuring peace & stability in West Asia, which had been troubled by strife and discord for so many generations. India with her historic ties of friendship and socio-cultural links with the peoples of the region would continue to extend its support to further efforts that would be undertaken towards peace in West Asia, and would lend its good offices whenever required towards confidence-building measures in the area. India expected that these historic steps forward would lead to further positive developments aimed at achieving the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people⁴⁷¹.

⁴⁷⁰ "Oslo Accords", *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords

⁴⁷¹ *Foreign Affairs Record op cit.*, No. 307, p.438.

India welcomed the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement in Cairo on 4th May 1994 (also known as Gaza-Jericho Agreement) which marked the first stage of implementing the Declaration of Principles provisions dealing with the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area and the transfer of powers to the Palestinian National Authority⁴⁷². An Indian delegation led by the Minister of State for External Affairs, R.L Bhatia was present during the signing ceremony.

On 30th September 1995, the Oslo Interim Agreement (Oslo II) was signed between Israel and PLO in Washington D.C and was the second stage in the process begun with the Declaration of Principles. This agreement extended Palestinian self-rule to significant portions of the West Bank and made it possible to hold elections and set up the Palestinian National Authority that would negotiate a final settlement with the Israelis⁴⁷³. India greeted the agreement and reiterated the view that durable peace in the region was necessary to resolve all outstanding issues to the satisfaction of all concerned parties.

The signing of the Wye River Memorandum between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (after a lot of US pressure and personal intervention of President Bill Clinton on 23 October 1998) in Maryland which dealt with further Israeli redeployments in the West Bank,

⁴⁷² Peter Malanczuk, "Some Basic Aspects of the Agreements Between Israel and the PLO from the Perspective of International Law", 7 EJIL(1996) 485-500 at: <http://www.ejil.org/pdfs/7/4/1389.pdf>

⁴⁷³ For the text of the Oslo Interim Agreement see Mid East Web at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/meosint.htm>

security issues and other concerns⁴⁷⁴ provided some relief to India on the vexed issue. While terming the agreement 'an important milestone' in the stalled peace process, India supported its unconditional implementation⁴⁷⁵. The outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, however, put an end to the Wye River's understandings and goals⁴⁷⁶.

During the initial months of the second Intifada in September 2000, both the PNA as well as Israel sought India's intervention in ending the escalating Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was done formally through letters both from Ehud Barak, (the new Israeli Prime Minister since May 1999) and Arafat to Prime Minister Vajpayee. While Israel sought India's intervention in general terms—to exert its influence over the Palestinian leadership to 'end violence'—the PNA suggested three specific areas in which India could play a role in resolving the crisis. These areas included India's initiative for ensuring an expeditious functioning of the international fact-finding mission already set up in pursuance of the decision taken at Sharm-El-Sheikh, its influence in the creation of an observer force or protection force under the UN auspices and finally, India's efforts to ensure the implementation of the UN resolutions 242 and 338 on the

⁴⁷⁴ The text of the Wye River agreement see Mid East Web at: <http://www.mideastweb.org/mewye.htm>

⁴⁷⁵ Foreign Affairs Record, No. 10, October 1998, p. 150.

⁴⁷⁶ Difficulties in Wye Agreement, says Arafat, *India Express*, Aug 17 1999 at: <http://www.indianexpress.com/Storyold/115860/>

Israeli Palestine conflict⁴⁷⁷. Without tilting either way, India advised the two warring groups to give peace a chance in the embattled region⁴⁷⁸.

A summit meeting was held at the Sharm El Sheikh in February 2005 between Israeli and Palestinian leaders to end the 2000 Intifada and resume negotiations under the roadmap⁴⁷⁹. The Indian Trade and Industry Minister Ashwani Kumar participated in the summit. In a statement on 10 February 2005, the Government of India termed the meeting between the leaders of Israel and Palestine as “an important step in the resumption of the Israel-Palestine peace process which deserved the support of the international community”⁴⁸⁰.

The next significant step in the Israel Palestine peace process was the Annapolis Conference which was held on November 27, 2007 at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and U.S. President George W. Bush attended the meeting along with over 40 other invitees including the Arab League, the European Union and the United Nations. The conference for the first time accepted a two-state solution for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict⁴⁸¹.

⁴⁷⁷ Muchkund Dubey, “West Asia: India’s Neighbouring Region” in Mohammad Gulrez ed. *Settlements and Resistance in the Occupied Territories*, Publications Division, AMU Press, 2005, p. 10.

⁴⁷⁸ *Hindu*, November 30, 2000.

⁴⁷⁹ For details of Summit see *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia* at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharm_el-Sheikh_Summit_of_2005

⁴⁸⁰ *MEA Annual Report 2004-05* at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500410405>, p.59.

⁴⁸¹ For more about Annapolis Conference see the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/The+Annapolis+Conference+27-Nov-2007.htm>

India was invited as a participant in this conference and Kapil Sibal, the Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, represented the country at Annapolis. Sibal was accompanied by Ambassador Gharekhan, the Special Envoy for West Asia and met among others, Amre Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League who gave the Indian Minister his assessment to about the Israel-Palestine dialogue, the role of the Arab League and related issues including developments leading up to the Annapolis Summit. The Minister also met the Brazilian and South African Foreign Ministers and the three leaders were of the view that the Annapolis Summit was a positive development that needed support by the international community, in order to assist the peace dialogue between Israel and Palestine⁴⁸².

From the above discussion, it is evident that while during the Cold War, India has played no direct role in the Israeli Palestinian conflict; it had only a limited role in the Middle East peace process since Madrid Conference of 1991 to the Annapolis Conference of 2007.

⁴⁸² India to attend the Annapolis Conference for Peace in the Middle East, November 26-28, 2007, Annapolis, USA November 26, 2007, Indian Embassy, Washington, DC at:

<http://www.indianembassy.org/prdetail684/--%09--india-to-attend-the-annapolis-conference-for-peace-in-the-middle-east,-november-26-28,-2007,-annapolis,-usa>; "India Backs US-sponsored West Asia Peace Meet", *Rediff News* at: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/nov/28india.htm>, November 28, 2007; Saeed Naqvi, "India's Role in West Asia Peace Process, *Economic Times*, November 30, 2007.

Should India Play a Mediatorial Role in the Israel Palestine Peace Process?

In recent years, there is a growing perception that India should play a mediatorial role in the Israel Palestine Peace process. Before discussing this question, it is important to understand India's position on the Israeli Palestine peace process, whether India is actually interested for such a big role and if yes, how is India's new role perceived by the relevant countries in the region.

India's Position:

India's commitment to the Palestinian cause is an important component of its long established foreign policy. The country maintains following position on the Israeli Palestinian peace process.

- India considers the resolution of the Palestine issue as central to lasting peace in West Asia. As Vice President Hamid Ansari has recently said that "a primary cause of tension, instability and violence in the region is the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory"⁴⁸³.
- India shares the perception that the Israeli Palestinian conflict is essentially political in nature which can be resolved through political negotiations and diplomatic means, rather than through the use of force⁴⁸⁴.
- India believes that a comprehensive peace process within a definite timeframe with all the stakeholders in the region can address the key

⁴⁸³ India Supports Palestinian People's Right for State, *Deccan Herald*, October 12, 2011 at: <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/197550/india-supports-palestinian-peoples-right.html>

⁴⁸⁴ "India Seeks Revival of Peace Process in West Asia", *Hindu*, December 2, 2009.

issues of the dispute and lead to the establishment of a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestinian State, in accordance with the two-state solution⁴⁸⁵.

- India has consistently supported the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign, independent, viable and united Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.
- With this objective, India has supported the UN Security Council Resolutions (242⁴⁸⁶ and 338⁴⁸⁷), the NAM Declarations, the Israeli "Land

⁴⁸⁵ "India Says Has High Stake in West Asia Peace, Backs Arab Plan", *Daily News Analysis*, March 1, 2010.

⁴⁸⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (S/RES/242) was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on November 22, 1967, in the aftermath of the Six Day War. The preamble refers to the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in which every State in the area can live in security". Operative Paragraph One "Affirms that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles: (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force." Resolution 242 is one of the most commonly referred UN resolutions to end the Arab–Israeli conflict, and the basis of later negotiations between the parties. For more see "United Nations Security Council Resolution 242", Wikipedia Online Dictionary at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_242

⁴⁸⁷ The three-line United Nations Security Council Resolution 338, adopted on October 22, 1973, called for a ceasefire in the Yom Kippur War in accordance with a joint proposal by the United States and the Soviet Union. The resolution states: The Security Council, Calls upon all parties to present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy; Calls upon all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts; Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at

for Peace" principle⁴⁸⁸, the Quartet Road Map in April 2003⁴⁸⁹ (MEA Report) and the Arab peace plan under which Israel would withdraw to pre-1967 borders and that the state of Palestine would be established, but that this would have to be accompanied by recognition of Israel.

- India has delinked its bilateral relationship with Israel and Palestine from the progress in the Middle East peace process. This implies that even if the peace process does not make much headway in future, this would not affect its relationship either with Israel or with Palestine.
- India also maintains that "protracted negotiations over decades" have not achieved the national goals of the Palestinian people and have "fuelled disappointment and anger which is a matter of great concern to it."

Due to this anger and disappointment over the peace process, India is seriously considering for a mediatory role between the Israelis and the

establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East. For more see "United Nations Security Council Resolution 338", Wikipedia Online Dictionary at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_338

⁴⁸⁸ Land for peace is an interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242 which has formed the basis of subsequent Arab-Israeli peace making. The name Land for Peace is derived from the wording of the resolution's first operative paragraph which affirms that peace should include the application of two principles; Withdrawal of Israeli forces (Giving Up Land), and Termination of all claims or states of belligerency (Making Peace). Since the resolution stipulates that both principles should apply they can be viewed jointly as giving up land for peace, referred to more concisely as 'land for peace'

⁴⁸⁹ The 'roadmap for peace' is a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict proposed by a "quartet" of international entities: the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations. The principles of the plan, originally drafted by U.S. Foreign Service Officer Donald Blome, were first outlined by U.S. President George W. Bush in a speech on June 24, 2002, in which he called for an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace: "The Roadmap represents a starting point toward achieving the vision of two states, a secure State of Israel and a viable, peaceful, democratic Palestine. It is the framework for progress towards lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Palestinians to solve the Palestine issue. C.R. Gharekhan who served India's Special Envoy to West Asia, for instance, stated that India is willing to play the role of a mediator if it is asked to, though it would still maintain its stand on settling disputes bilaterally. Since India has good relations with Israel as well as Palestine, it can talk to both parties candidly without compromising on its own position, he added⁴⁹⁰. An indication of the new Indian strategic shift is the appointment of the veteran diplomat and former assistant to the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, C. R. Gharekhan, as India's Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process-- a development that proves that India is concerned about the Palestinian – Israeli peace process more than the struggle of the Palestinian people for liberation. Moreover, India is also viewed by both the Israelis and the Palestinians as a trustworthy intermediary. During the second intifada in 2000, for instance, both Israel and Palestine had requested India to help broker truce in West Asia and save the peace process from collapse. While Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak telephoned Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee twice in those days, Palestine leader Yasser Arafat had sought Delhi's intervention through its representative in the Gaza Strip⁴⁹¹.

During his India visit in October 2008, the Palestinian President Abbas made a request "to use New Delhi's growing influence for giving momentum to

⁴⁹⁰ "India Willing to Mediate in Israel-Palestine Peace Process", *Hindu*, March 4, 2005.

⁴⁹¹ "West Asia Warriors at India's Door", October 14, 2000 at: <http://www.paklinks.com/gs/world-affairs/53430-israel-and-palestine-request-indias-help.html>.

the West Asian peace process"⁴⁹². Similarly, the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has urged India to play an active role in the Middle East peace process since ""India has been one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement and has a sound recording of upholding democratic principles"⁴⁹³. Echoing the same voice, the Palestinian Ambassador to India, Osama Musa said that India should play a greater role in putting an end to Israeli occupation. "We want India, and the international community, to see that the Israeli tanks are out of our bedroom"⁴⁹⁴.

Israeli Ambassador to India, David Danieli said in an interview to PTI after electoral victory of Hamas that "India certainly can contribute by having a dialogue with Palestinians and with Israel. India maintains equally good relations with both. So the ears of both sides are certainly open to hear Indian views and advise"⁴⁹⁵. During a meeting in Jerusalem with India's Special Envoy to West Asia, Chinmaya Gharekhan, the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told, "India's voice carries weight in the international community. It is an important country and Israel attaches a lot of significance to its relations with India,"⁴⁹⁶. Speaking along

⁴⁹² "Abbas Lands, May Seek Larger India Role in Peace Process", *Indian Express*, October 7 2008.

⁴⁹³ Weak Leaks India Cable, 110122: "India Balancing Relations with Israel and Hamas", *Hindu*, March 15, 2011.

⁴⁹⁴ "Envoy Seeks Greater India Role in Palestine", *Indian Express*, March 13, 2008.

⁴⁹⁵ "India Can "Contribute" to West Asia Peace Process: Israel", *Outlook*, February 9, 2006.

⁴⁹⁶ India's Voice Carries Weight: Israel", Rediff News, September 3, 2007 at: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/sep/03india1.htm>

the same lines, Ahmed Salem Al-Wahishi, head of the League of Arab States mission, said "We are looking for a greater role for India in West Asia. India's expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian cause will help support peace process in the region"⁴⁹⁷. Hailing India as a supporter of the Arab cause, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has similarly said India can play a role in resolution of West Asia problem by using its "strong relations" with the US and Israel. As a "rising" country with important role in Asian and global affairs, India should not remain out of the West Asian peace process. To him "India has the credibility in the the West Asia peace process because of its objective position"⁴⁹⁸.

The Domestic Discourse on India's Role in the Peace Process

The domestic discourse on India's new role in the Israel Palestine peace process is sharply divided. There are four different discourses: the Radicals, the Nehruvians, the Pragmatists and the Status Quoists⁴⁹⁹. These categorisations are designed to provide an outline of the competing lines of argumentation about India's new role, rather than identify Radicals, Nehruvians, Pragmatists or Status Quoists per se. It is also important to note that it is difficult right now in India to associate these perspectives with particular political parties, think tanks, or ministries. Thus, these perspectives are individualistic and do not correspond to

⁴⁹⁷ "Envoy Seeks Greater India Role in Palestine", *Indian Express*, March 13, 2008.

⁴⁹⁸ "India Can Play Role in West Asia Peace Process' Syrian Prez Hail India as Supporter of Arab Cause, *Business Standard*, June 19, 2008 and Assad: India Can Play Role in Resolving West Asia Conflicts, *Indian Express*, June 20, 2008.

⁴⁹⁹ For a different categorization see Deepa Ollapally and Rajesh Rajagopalan, "The Pragmatic Challenge to Indian Foreign Policy", *The Washington Quarterly*, 34:2, Spring 2011, pp. 145_162 and Kanti Bajpai, "Indian Strategic Culture," in Michael R. Chambers ed. *Asia in 2020: Future Strategic Balances and Alliances*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2002, pp. 245—303.

particular organisations. They do, however, represent the views of important public intellectuals, policy analysts, academics, journalists, diplomats, and government officials on an important foreign policy subject.

The Radical Perspective:

Deeply perturbed by the inhuman conditions of Palestinians in the Israeli occupied territories and greatly influenced by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, the Radicals take a different viewpoint on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and India's role in this conflict. For them, the Israeli occupation of Palestine is the worst form of colonialism and the situation in the occupied territories represents apartheid in practice. According to Praful Bidwai, "the British exploited and oppressed India's people through systematic loot, despotic rule, and destruction of institutions and occupations. But they didn't come and grab your land, occupy your fields or steal most of your water. By contrast, Israel has confiscated 24 per cent of the area of the West Bank and Gaza and 89 per cent of East Jerusalem for settlements, highways, military installations, etc. It controls 80 per cent of the water resources of the occupied territories and also appropriates a large quantity, equal to one-third of its consumption, from the Jordan River. Fourth-fifths of the water from the West Bank's sole underground aquifer go to Israel"⁵⁰⁰.

⁵⁰⁰ Praful Bidwai, "The End of the Arafat Era", Transnational Institute, November 2005 at: <http://www.tni.org/es/archives/act/929>

The Israelis have not only illegally occupied the Palestinian territory; they are also practicing an apartheid policy in the occupied territories as was adopted by the white regime in South Africa. This is clearly evident from their strategy to change the facts on the ground through a number of measures like:

- Confining Palestinians to small pockets (Area 'A', defined by the Oslo accords of 1995-96 to be under the PA's full control, and Area 'B' under "joint" Palestinian-Israeli security), but keeping them out of the fully Israeli-controlled 'C' Area of Palestine.
- Obstructing the Palestinians' movement even within Areas 'A' and 'B', through closures, checkpoints, barriers, roadblocks, trenches, etc.
- Breaking up the West Bank into some 300 enclaves, separated from one another, and joined by roads to which most Palestinians have no access. By contrast, Israeli settlers enjoy full freedom of movement in these, with state protection.
- Imposing a tight system of work-and residence-permits, like South Africa's notorious "Pass Laws", which restrict people's liberties in respect of work and life.

- Erecting a 700-km-long "Separation Barrier" (almost five times longer than the Berlin Wall), and in places eight meters tall, although this has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice⁵⁰¹.

The Radicals resent that Israel has not only occupied the Palestinian and Arab territories in violation of international law, international opinion and numerous United Nations resolutions starting with 224 and 338 and inflicted every conceivable form of violence, injustice, ignominy and insult upon Palestinian civilians, it has also refused to stop the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem which shows its continued policy of delaying and obstructing the regional and international efforts in dealing with the peace process and negotiations." Quoting Sharon's senior adviser Dov Weisglass who openly said "When you freeze the peace process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state", the Radicals believe that the ultimate Israeli goal is to "severely harm the Palestinians" and end "the dream of a Palestinian state"⁵⁰².

Sitaram Yechury argues in this context that Israel and the U.S. have hatched a four-pronged conspiracy to obstruct peace in the region. The first element in the conspiracy is the annexation of Palestine after formally agreeing to concede annexed territories to Palestinians. The settling of Jews in the colonised areas is the second element of the strategy. This is being done to pre-

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.* For more on Israel's apartheid policy in Palestine see "Israel and the apartheid analogy", Wikipedia online encyclopaedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_and_the_apartheid_analogy

⁵⁰² Praful Bidwai, "Giving Arafat his Due", *Frontline*, Vol. 21, No. 24, 20 November 2004.

empt the territorial claims of Palestinians in future. The third aspect of the strategy is aimed at limiting and constricting the scope of effective Palestinian sovereignty by herding the people into Bantustan-like enclaves reminiscent of apartheid-era South Africa, surrounded by a hostile Israel. The fourth component of the strategy is to attack mercilessly with the most sophisticated of weapons those who offer any resistance. The fascistic dimension of the Israeli regime, said Yechury, is evident from the brutal manner in which youth and children are systematically targeted by the Israeli security apparatus. By doing this, he accused, the Israeli state wants to wipe out the future of Palestine⁵⁰³.

Describing Israel as a "rogue state" whose history is the history of violence and violations of human rights, the Radicals are sure that the Israelis on their own would never allow the Palestine state to become a reality. They therefore, think that growing international pressure on the Jewish state can bring it back to the negotiation table and make it fulfil its commitments towards Palestine. In this context, the Radicals are divided on what kind of role India should play in the Israel Palestine conflict.

Considering that no peace is possible in the world without solving the issue of Palestine, some Radicals want India to fully support the Palestine issue and end all cooperation with Israel. Ending cooperation with the Zionist country, to them, would serve at least three important purposes. First, any Indian alignment with the Jewish country not only means direct supports to its colonial

⁵⁰³ Quoted in Sridhar, "An Expression of Solidarity" *op cit.* No. 328.

and brutal apartheid regime imposed on the Palestinian people but also subsidises the cost of Israeli war efforts against the Palestinian national liberation movement. For instance, an appeal in 2008 by a number of non-governmental organizations related to Palestine to the “Indian people and its government” to “Stop arms Trade with Apartheid Israel” said, “The Indian government which continues to reiterate its commitment to a just solution of the Palestinian question in accordance with international law, has unfortunately emerged as the major broker of Israel’s arms industry. This is tantamount to financing continued, illegal occupation of Palestinian and Arab territory as it helps subsidize the occupation regime. India’s arms trade strategically contributes to the perpetuation of Israel’s occupation and apartheid system⁵⁰⁴”. Nilotpal Basu, a CPM Member of Parliament, has similarly argued that India is indirectly supporting the Israeli atrocities on Palestinians by strengthening its economy through weapons purchase⁵⁰⁵.

Second, India’s bilateral trade with Israel stands at approximately \$5 billion annually and its defense ties are estimated to be worth \$9 billion. India has become the largest client of Israeli military exports, with contracts totalling \$9 billion, including \$2.5 billion for the Air Force and several hundred millions in Ballistic Missile Defence systems⁵⁰⁶. Severing these ties with Israel will hurt its

⁵⁰⁴ Cited in Koshy, “India: Israel And Palestine” *op cit.*, No. 372.

⁵⁰⁵ “Need to Launch Public Movement in India to Support Palestine: Speakers” at: http://twocircles.net/2009dec23/need_launch_public_movement_india_support_palestine_speakers.html

⁵⁰⁶ Praful Bidwai, “Stooping Low”, *Frontline*, Volume 27 - Issue 13, June. 19- July 2, 2010.

economic interests and force it to come to the negotiating table. Third, Israel has used its military equipment, trade and other sources such as agricultural research, culture and academia, to increase its influence in India. Stopping all these would end Israeli influence in India which is detrimental to the Palestinian struggle⁵⁰⁷.

For some other Radicals, India should not only cut off all its ties with Israel but also boycott Israeli goods and services and call for a combination of global isolation, sanctions and external pressure against the Jewish country by the international community⁵⁰⁸. India must demand a complete cessation of military purchases and joint ventures with Israel, a boycott of Israeli goods and services beginning with those made in the occupied territories, and seek tough sanctions against the Jewish country. Just as it was in the case of the international call against South Africa in the apartheid years, they are confident that this boycott would be effective in contributing to international pressure on Israel to rein its colonisation and apartheid policy towards Palestine and implement the accords it has signed with the Palestinians leading to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestine state. The Radicals believe that these acts against Israel at this moment will have better impacts as the Jewish country is isolated world-wide

⁵⁰⁷ Achin Vanaik's Interview to Aditi Bhaduri at: http://www.himalmag.com/Why-not-Palestine_fnw85.html

⁵⁰⁸ "India must seek sanctions against Israel: Karat", *Hindu*, July 21, 2006.

for the “oppression and expulsion of the indigenous Palestine population through its military aggression, legal discrimination and economic persecution”⁵⁰⁹.

Other Radicals are however less optimistic that India which has developed such a close relationship with Israel over the years would easily reverse its policy and go for the international boycott of Israel. They think that India would cease its growing strategic and defence ties with the Jewish country only when a strong people's movement is launched in the country by all like-minded political parties, civil society organizations and intellectuals to pressurise the Government to reverse its Israel policy. This movement should also mobilize people against the brand Israel campaign for the boycott of both Israeli products and services and the Israeli academic and cultural institutions which are the major instruments of Zionist propaganda. The Asian Forum at its recent meeting in Delhi has passed a resolution to reinforce the boycott of Israeli products and financial divestment from companies directly implicated in the occupation and/or Israeli industries.

The Nehruvian Perspective:

The Nehruvian perspective traces its roots to India's traditional Cold War foreign policy. It is based on the view that ideas about universalism, liberal internationalism, and solidarity with fellow national liberation movements that influenced independent India's early foreign policy thinking should also guide India's present and future policy posture on international issues. On the issue of

⁵⁰⁹ “India Chapter Formed to Campaign against Israel”, *Hindu*, July 12, 2010.

Palestine, the Nehruvians want India to provide more vigorous support and play an active role in the Israeli Palestinian peace process because this is dictated by both principle and national interest. They argue that India should not forget its own history or abandon the high ideals of its foreign policy such as support to self-determination and anti-colonialism in the world on the basis of which it traditionally supported the Palestinian people.

Sharing the Radical concern that (a) Palestine is a just and humanitarian cause (b) there has not been any change on the ground situation in the occupied territories and (c) Israel continues its crimes against the Palestinian people (the brutal and continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, its inhumane siege of the Strip from time to time and the policies of ethnic cleansing and ghettoization of the Palestinian people) in violation of international law and morality, the Nehruvians argue that India has historically played a key role in garnering international support for Palestinian self-rule, the South African anti-apartheid struggle and other anti-colonial struggles. Now as the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, with its proud de-colonisation history, India should once again play a key role in the Palestinian struggle for justice and against Israel's occupation, colonization, and apartheid policies⁵¹⁰.

Bansidhar Pradhan argues that support for the Palestine cause is part of India's legacy of opposing the illegal occupation of someone else's territory in

⁵¹⁰ Call for the Conference on "A Just Peace for Palestine", New Delhi, 22-23 September, 2010 at: <http://www.focusweb.org/content/invitation-conference-%E2%80%9Cjust-peace-palestine%E2%80%9D>

violation of international legality and morality⁵¹¹. The *Hindu* writes, "given India's historical standing as a leader among the non-Western countries, New Delhi should do well to live up to its moral stature and offer vigorous support to the genuine Palestinian cause in spite of the growing warmth in official ties between India and Israel"⁵¹².

The Nehruvians deplore that there has been a decline in India's traditional support to Palestine due to India's growing ties with Israel but unlike the Radicals they don't prefer India to cut off all its relationship with Israel or isolate and impose sanctions against the Jewish country. They want India to have normal state-to-state relationship with Israel as distinct from the present close relationship and retain its earlier pro-Arab and anti-Israel policy as well as the Nehruvian tradition of bold support to the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination'. In other words, the Nehruvians want India to maintain relationship with Israel strictly to the extent that it contributes to the Middle East peace process and not to deviate it in any way for its strong traditional support to the Palestinians who are still living in the occupied territory and fighting for an independent state. For them, India should use all of relations in the Middle East toward the peace process, toward the end of the occupation, toward the peaceful settlement of all conflict. For this, they prefer India to play an intermediary role between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They cite the following reasons for this. First, as the leader of the Third World through the Non-Aligned Movement in

⁵¹¹ Pradhan, "Changing Dynamics of India's West Asia Policy" *op cit.*, No. 5, p. 87.

⁵¹² "India's Stake in Palestine Cause", *Hindu* Editorial, April 5, 2002 at: <http://www.hindu.com/2002/04/05/stories/2002040501151000.htm>

the General Assembly and the G77 in UNCTAD, India has acquired considerable respect as the 'voice of the voiceless' and the leader of the developing world⁵¹³. This image of India would help it to bridge the gulf between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Second, with its historic and cultural links with the Arabic world, Persia, Central Asia, East Asia and the Anglo-American west, India occupies a position of cultural confluence and can help bridge civilisational differences between states and societies. Considering India as a "bridging power", Sunil Khilnani writes "as India grows economically and its status rises in the global arena, it can play a balancing and bridging role in the world. It can bridge the divides and differences between rich and poor nations, east and west, powerful and less powerful"⁵¹⁴. Third, India has friendly relations with both Israel and Palestine and its views and positions on Middle East issues are carefully observed by all sides. These can be used in pushing the peace process forward. Fourth, India is one of the few countries which have relevant expertise to facilitate effective negotiations, especially through informal channels⁵¹⁵. India had historically demonstrated this capability in the days of super-power rivalry in Korea and the Congo, and earlier in the case of the transfer of power from the Netherlands to Indonesia. In more recent times, it stood bravely resisting the agenda of the West in the WTO, UN Climate Summits and many other

⁵¹³ Amrita Narlikar, "Peculiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation? Explaining the Negotiating Strategy of a Rising India", *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No.1, 2006, p. 75.

⁵¹⁴ Sunil Khilnani, "Bridging Identities: India As A Positive Power?" in *Through A Billion Voices: India's Role In A Multi-Polar World*, Foresight Group, Berlin, 2010, p 13-16 and his "India As A Bridging Power" in *India As A New Global Leader*, Foreign Policy Centre, 2005.

⁵¹⁵ M.L. Sondhi, "A Task For India, Israel And Syria", *The Pioneer*, September 24, 1997.

international forums. This hardline negotiating stance may have imposed some short-term costs on India, but it also helped build its reputation as a tough, credible and principled negotiator which can be used in West Asia. Finally, based on India's status as a leader of the Nonaligned crowned by its consistent support to the Palestinians, India has considerable political capital in West Asia built up over the Nehru years. Moreover, India's international standing as a non-interventionist nation and its image of having no regional hegemonic ambitions place it in a better position in West Asia than the Americans and Europeans. These countries' deep historical interventions and occupations in the region have led to perceptions of them being non-objective actors in the peace process. Also despite Israel's blatant contempt for international law and its continued crimes against the Palestinian people, the US and EU continue to hold out a shield of impunity for Israel and their aim is to permanently sustaining and deepening their dominance over the Middle East.

Shikha Bhatnagar writes in this context that "there may be an intermediary role for India across the continent that neither Europe nor the U.S. can employ as effectively. These countries' deep historical interventions and occupations in the region have led to perceptions of them being non-objective actors in the peace process. India has the unique ability to utilize its growing global and regional influence, strengthened alliance with Israel and its continued support for the Palestinians, to discreetly encourage further dialogue that helps push the two

sides closer to an acceptable compromise. This could lead to much needed, and thus far elusive, stability in the region”⁵¹⁶.

However, the Nehruvians caution that India should never expect reciprocity from Palestine for its support because while Israel is an independent state and that Palestine is yet to emerge as one. For them, what India would get for its support to the Palestine cause is the goodwill of the Palestinians and the entire Muslim world. In some cases, the Nehruvians agree that it would be beneficial for India’s interests. Pradhan writes that the continuation of the conflict due to Israeli intransigence is the fundamental source of instability in the West Asian region where India has huge stakes. Hence it would be in the interest of everyone to seek an end to it. Moreover, at a time, when religious extremism is sweeping through the region, a secure Palestine would serve India’s interests better. He suggests that the real challenge for Indian diplomacy lies in ending the occupation rather than providing mere economic and technological help to the already defunct PNA⁵¹⁷. Muchkund Dubey suggests that “India should support all resolutions which call for the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people and for a just and fair solution of the problem. This is not a matter of principle but also guided by wider political considerations relating to India’s relations with other countries and the sentiments of a vast segment of India’s own population”⁵¹⁸. In an editorial, the Hindu wrote “both principle and national

⁵¹⁶ Shikha Bhatnagar, “India-Israel: BFFs or Fair Weather Friends?”, *New Atlanticist*, August 1, 2011 at: www.acus.org/new.../india-israel-bffs-or-fair-weather-friends

⁵¹⁷ Pradhan, “Changing Dynamics of India’s West Asia Policy” *op cit.*, No. 5, p. 87.

⁵¹⁸ Dubey, “West Asia: India’s Neighbouring Region” *op cit.*, No. 297.

interest dictate that India should not dilute its traditional support for the Palestinian campaign for self-determination. This principled position will not hamper the development of relations with Israel over the long term. Many countries have interacted with Israel at a controlled pace in the hope that the peace camp could be strengthened. India too followed such a course over most of the 11 years since full diplomatic relations were established with Israel. Delusions about a new strategic equation, which would enable the two countries to dominate the geographical region between their territories, have brought about a policy imbalance that needs immediate correction"⁵¹⁹.

The Pragmatic Perspective:

The end of the Cold War led to new challenges and new debates about India's foreign policy. Some Indian strategists, referred here as the pragmatists, argued that India's traditional foreign policy was no longer relevant to the post-Cold War world, and pushed for the unabashed consideration of the Indian national interest rather than global justice, ethics or ideological positions. As Shashi Tharoor, India's former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, once put it, traditionally India "seemed to take greater satisfaction in being right than being diplomatic"⁵²⁰. More recently and controversially he criticized Nehruvian foreign policy for being a "moralistic running commentary"⁵²¹. Others believe that Indian

⁵¹⁹ "Strategic Delusions" (editorial), *Hindu*, September 11, 2003.

⁵²⁰ Shashi Tharoor, "Can India Afford an Ethical Foreign Policy?" *Times of India*, October 14, 2007 at: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/S_Tharoor_Ethics_and_foreign_policy/articleshow/2456205.cms.

⁵²¹ D. Vasudevan, "Tharoor Criticises Nehru's 'Moralistic' Foreign Policy," *Daily News and Analysis*, January 10, 2010 at: http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_tharoor-criticisesnehu-s-moralistic-foreign-policy_1332933.

policy is often geared toward consistency with past positions without recognizing India's changed circumstances. But as strategist C. Raja Mohan suggested, Indian foreign policy debates are so focused on semantics that "they have little time for the 'grammar' of global power politics"⁵²². He argues that this focus on semantics was understandable when India was weak, when "rhetoric compensated for power," but unnecessary for an India that has become far more consequential in global affairs.

The pragmatists admit that India's shift in its Middle East policy has reaped good dividends for New Delhi especially that the 'Israeli card' is becoming useful in dealing with the Arab states. It has helped India to assume an added importance for the Arabs, including the Palestinians. As the two sides compete to extract favorable statements from New Delhi during the crisis situations, India has a useful opportunity to carve out a role for herself in the volatile Middle East. Moreover, close relations with Israel could counter moves by those Muslim countries which were inclined to act against Indian interest if instigated by Pakistan. The pragmatists however caution that this new approach does not mean New Delhi to abandon its efforts to seek political support from the Arab world on Kashmir or a permanent seat in the UNSC. What it implies is that, unlike in the past when the Indian support for the Arabs was taken for granted due to its automatic support in their dispute with Israel especially at the United Nations and allowed them to influence India's policies in the region, India should now

⁵²²C. Raja Mohan, "India's Diplomacy: Between Semantics and Grammar," *Indian Express*, July 18, 2009 at: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/indias-diplomacy-between-semanticsand-grammar/491094/0>.

forcefully assert its interests in the Arab world conveying to the Arab leaders that in their dispute with Israel, they cannot take Indian support for granted, especially at the United Nations, unless they reciprocate by taking India's interests into consideration.

On Israel Palestine peace process, the pragmatists want India to play a leading role both for the sake of its own rising power profile and on the ground of national interest. The pragmatists argue that India's voice carries more weight today in global forums than in the past. The country has outgrown its Cold War role as a third world, non-aligned nation to exercise influence as an emerging power through global governance institutions—be it as part of the Five Interested Parties in the World Trade Organization (WTO); the Brazil, South Africa, India, and China (BASIC) group at the Copenhagen climate change negotiations of 2009; or the Group of 4 (G4) coalition of countries (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) demanding permanent membership in the UN Security Council⁵²³. Besides, several major countries like the United States, China, European Union, Russia, Japan etc have signed regional trade arrangements or bilateral strategic partnerships with India⁵²⁴. This is largely due to its enhanced economic power, political stability, and nuclear capability.

For the pragmatists, India's heightened profile at this juncture provides a golden opportunity for the country to play a competent leadership role in the

⁵²³ For more on this see Rohan Mukherjee and David M. Malone, "From High Ground to High Table: The Evolution of Indian Multilateralism", *Global Governance*, No. 17, 2011, pp. 311–329.

⁵²⁴ See for instance, Ummu Salma Bava, "New Powers for Global Change? India's Role in the Emerging World Order", *FES Briefing Paper 4*, Berlin, March 2007.

world and help in solving important global problems like Palestine. In other words, if India sees itself playing a larger role in the world, it has to increase its clout in its proximate or what the government calls the 'extended' neighbourhood⁵²⁵. As C Rajamohan argues that unlike in the past, India need no to be a mute spectator to the changes in the balance of power around it. It is in position to influence the direction and shape of the content of the structural change unfolding in Asia and elevate its own standing as a great power⁵²⁶. According to Bharat Karnard "to be recognised as a great power, India will have to do what other great powers have done throughout history: Think big, act big, take risks, and back up its diplomacy with force. To believe India will attain great power by lesser means is to be delusional"⁵²⁷. Dhruva Jaishankar is of the view that India is investing considerable diplomatic capital in its bid for a permanent membership of the UNSC, so it should be better attuned to the expectations which that privilege entails. Abstaining on key decisions is hardly a marker of leadership and weakens India's claims to what it sees as its rightful position on global affairs. Moreover, India's own growing security amid increasing regional instability means the possibility of India having to intervene in another country is today far greater than that of India being at the receiving end of such an intervention. With an eye on the future, setting a precedent for intervention on

⁵²⁵ David Scott, "India's "Extended Neighbourhood" Concept: Power Projection for a Rising Power", *India Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2009, pp. 107-143 at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14736480902901038>.

⁵²⁶ C Rajamohan, Tournament of Shadows, *Indian Express*, November, 17, 2011.

⁵²⁷ Bharat Karnard Endless delusion, *The Asian Age*, Sep 29, 2011.

dire humanitarian grounds may be prudent⁵²⁸. According to Rajiv Sikri, India's shyness in offering its mediation and good offices for playing a conflict-resolution role through the Non-Aligned Movement or directly in the areas of specific concern like Palestine do not augur well for its aspirations to play a larger global role⁵²⁹. P R Kumaraswamy writes "a seat in the UNSC is not about membership in an ivy-league or high-power body but it is about shouldering responsibilities, exhibiting maturity, evolving nuanced positions on sensitive issues and skilful use of diplomacy to minimize, if not resolve, major problems confronting the world. It is about working for a more peaceful world and in the process helping India and not other way around"⁵³⁰. He suggests that abandoning the temptations of high-sounding rhetoric, India needs to get down to the nitty-gritty of negotiations, compromises and bridging proposals. Bluntly put, foreign policy is not about ignorant rhetoric, simplistic worldviews and wishful thinking but about evolving a more detached and non-sentimental view of the world and its challenges⁵³¹.

Amrita Narlikar similarly argues that even after certain structural conditions are met, such as large market size and rapid economic growth, the rise of a country to a recognised great power is not automatic. Rather, the process

⁵²⁸ Dhruva Jaishankar, Rocky Road to Damascus, *Indian Express*, November 16, 2011.

⁵²⁹ Rajiv Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India's Foreign Policy*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2009.

⁵³⁰ P R Kumaraswamy India and the UNSC Responsibility, *Middle East Institute Dateline*, Issue No. 10, October 21, 2010 at: <http://www.mei.org.in/front/cms/publicationsDetail.php?id=NTQ=&cid=MTA=>

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

whereby a state's rise is negotiated matters, both in terms of recognition by other parties as well as the outcomes that the state is able to generate⁵³². The pragmatists further argue that it is mainly because of India's increasing power profile, the country has been called upon by the international community to play a larger role in the West Asian affairs. This is evident in the pressure on India to adopt a more visible role in Iraq and to use its leverage on Iran to curtail its pursuit of nuclear weapons. In a first of its kind, India was invited by the US to participate in the West Asian peace conference at Annapolis in November 2007 as a recognition of India's growing stature in the international system. Most countries in the region are also now seeking comprehensive partnerships with India based on a recognition and appreciation for India's role in shaping the emerging regional and global order.

The pragmatists also want India to play an active role in West Asia as it has a huge stake in sustaining the peace process in the region. C. Raja Mohan feels that there is a big danger today that extremist forces on both sides will push the region into a renewed conflict that will undermine the Indian interest in pursuing good relations with both Israel and the Arab nation. He suggests that India needs to stick with some broad principles, support pragmatic moves to defuse tension, and lend whatever support it can for a restoration of the peace process⁵³³. According to Harsh Pant, from energy security to defence ties, from

⁵³² Amrita Narlikar, "Power and Legitimacy: India and the World Trade Organization", *India and Global Affairs*, Inaugural Issue, January-March 2008, pp.176-180 at: http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199215294/smith_ch15.pdf. Also see her book *The World Trade Organization: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

⁵³³ C. Raja Mohan, "India's West Asian Stakes", *Hindu*, October 16, 2000.

countering China to pursuing stability in the region, India now has an array of interests in West Asia. He suggests that as India tries to re-define its interests in West Asia, Indian diplomacy should become more outcome-oriented⁵³⁴. M. L. Sondhi writes that “from India’s point of view, an out and out conflict in the West Asian area could have the gravest consequences for Indian economy and society”⁵³⁵. According to Narendra Sisodia, “West Asia is strategically located, focal point of diplomacy and a destination of export of India's manpower, technical know-how and expertise. India can't feel safe if West Asia is in turmoil”⁵³⁶. Shebonti Ray Dadwal argues that if an Israeli–Palestinian peace settlement can be made permanent, a sure sequel will be a free flow of goods between Israel and the Palestinian entity that will emerge from the settlement. If former Prime Minister Shimon Peres’ “New Middle East” can become a reality, and a common market comprising Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian entity can be set up, this would logically be the biggest growth area in the next decade. With India’s relations with both favourable, it can be beneficial, both politically and economically for India. Therefore, it is in New Delhi’s interest to promote peace between both parties and encourage them to abandon their mutual

⁵³⁴ Harsh Pant, “India Redefines Ties in West Asia”, *Rediff News*, October 14, 2008 at: <http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/oct/14guest2.htm>

⁵³⁵ Sondhi, “A Task for India, Israel And Syria” *op cit.*, No. 515.

⁵³⁶ “India Has an Abiding Interest in Peace in West Asia”, *Times of India*, January 30, 2006.

suspensions and hostilities. India should take a more active interest in the current negotiation and do what it can to push it forward⁵³⁷.

Thus, the pragmatists want India to follow an active role in the Palestine Israeli conflict that matches India's profile as an emerging great power. Besides, such a role, they argue is also beneficial for India's national interests. Thus, there is a commonality between the Nehruvians and the Pragmatists in so far as both argue for an interest based approach to India's policy towards Israel and Palestine but unlike the Nehruvians, the Pragmatists do not think high ideals and lofty principles should dictate India's policy. Rather under the certain circumstances, these should be altered to serve India's national interest.

The Status-Quoits Perspective

This perspective owes its origin since early 1990's when India decided to establish full diplomatic relationship with Israel and followed a more balanced policy towards Israel and the Arab world. According to this perspective, India should not change its present policy of keeping a low profile in the Middle East peace process because such a posture better serves its national interests. In other words, India should continue to resist any temptation to play any overt role in the peace process as it helps to maintain normal ties with all parties of the conflict without forcing the country into unpleasant situations.

⁵³⁷ Shebonti Ray Dadwal, "The Current Israeli-Palestinian Process: Consequences for India", *Strategic Analysis*, Volume 22, Issue 9, 1998, pp. 1341-1351.

There are several reasons why the status-quoists prefer India to keep a low profile in the region and avoid active involvement in the Middle East conflict. First, they believe that there is no shortcut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades,” and that “ultimately, it’s the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side.” Second, keeping strict neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict is crucial for India to gain the confidence of both sides and thereby enhance its profile in the region and beyond. Third, India’s choices are actually limited in the context of West Asia as it needs the support and co-operation of both sides of the dispute for its own interests. For its energy security, it needs the hydrocarbon resources of the Arab countries. At present, India imports 60 percent of its crude oil requirement, from the Middle East⁵³⁸. Moreover, the Gulf Cooperation Council accommodates over 5.5 million Indian nationals who send back \$ 30 billion annually⁵³⁹. Indian companies are also executing major projects across West Asia in energy, infrastructure and services. Similarly, India’s relations with Israel have acquired a depth and diversity which cannot be rolled back. This has happened because Israel has been able to meet crucial Indian needs in the field of defence, agriculture and technology without pre-conditions or succumbing to pressures from other countries. Recently Israel has replaced Russia as India’s top military supplier and the trade relationship between India

⁵³⁸ “India Has an Abiding Interest in Peace in West Asia: Pranab”, *Times of India*, January 30, 2006.

⁵³⁹ Talmiz Ahmad, “New Relations with New Arabia”, *Economic Times*, June 16, 2011, p. 13; “India Seeks Revival of Peace Process in West Asia”, Tharoor’s Speech at ICWA, *Hindu*, December 2, 2009 and Nicola Nasser, “Indian - Israeli Ties Could Neutralize Delhi’s Palestinian Policy”, *Global Research*, July 12, 2007.

and Israel is one of the most dynamic in the region⁵⁴⁰. Thus, the status-quoists argue that unlike the past when India followed a one-sided policy towards the Arab world and could freely voice her opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, now it has to maintain good relations on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide and this makes it necessary for the country to follow a policy of equidistance in the Israeli Palestinian conflicts. Girijesh Pant argues in this context that 'for India, West Asia is a region to augment its power rather than to display or assert its power. The thrust of India's West Asia policy and diplomacy thus has to be geared towards mobilizing resources - political, strategic, economic and cultural - from the region to contribute in its emergence as global power'⁵⁴¹.

Others argue that India is actually not in a position to play the role of a mediator due to its own domestic constraints. Ramachandra Guha, for instance, argues that India is still a developing country, with many problems, and should concentrate on internal challenges rather than focusing on external matters⁵⁴². Rajiv Kumar similarly writes that other global powers will not give sufficient credence to India's role if the country's human development and social indicators

⁵⁴⁰ Subhash Kapila, "India – Israel Relations: The Imperatives For Enhanced Strategic Cooperation", SAAG Paper, August 1, 2000; Vinay Shankar, "Arab-Israel Relations: Can India be the Fulcrum?", Bitter Lemons International Organisation, November 20, 2003 and Adam C Castillo, "India and Israel: A Balancing Alliance", International Relations and Security Network, 16 July 2008.

⁵⁴¹ Quoted in R.M. Abhyankar, 'India & West Asia' lecture at IIT Mumbai on 16th July 2010 at: <http://indiadiplomacy.blogspot.com/2010/07/amb-rm-abhyankar-lecture-on-india-west.html>

⁵⁴² Cited in C Rajamohan, " Rising India's Great Power Burden", The Singur Centre for Asian Studies, *Asia Report*, Issue No. 7, January 2010 at: www.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/asia.../11.16.09RisingIndia.pdf

remain at sub-Saharan levels. He cites four critical challenges facing rising India: governance deficit, human resource development imperatives, infrastructure weaknesses and rising disparities in personal and regional incomes and suggests that continued global clout is a direct result of progress at home⁵⁴³.

Some other status-quoists argue that even without being actively involved in the Middle Eastern peace process India has benefited from it the most, so there is no need for any direct Indian role. For instance, the September 13 1993 agreement between the PLO and Israel on their mutual recognition and on Palestinian self-rule provided a good opportunity to the Rao government to justify its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and its balancing act in the Israel-Palestine conflict⁵⁴⁴. Another section argues that if the US could not bridge the gap between the two warring sides, India could not even dream of playing such a role. To one scholar, "Indian policy makers should not forget that West Asian sensitivities have been offended and hurt by aggressive US intervention in the region"⁵⁴⁵. Another scholar argues, "over the last several years, India has sought close relations with the United States, especially in the area of nuclear cooperation. Therefore, it is hardly in a position to deviate from the line of the US in West Asia"⁵⁴⁶.

⁵⁴³ Rajiv Kumar, "International Role and Respect? Not Without Economic Prosperity", *Global Asia Journal*, Vol. 6, No.1, March, 2011.

⁵⁴⁴ John Cherian, "A Breach of Trust" op cit., No. 437.

⁵⁴⁵ Abhyankar, 'India & West Asia' op cit. No.13.

⁵⁴⁶ Sujata Ashwarya Cheema, " Palestinian Israeli Peace Process in the New Middle East: Can India Have a Role to Play? in Anwar Alam ed. *India and West Asia in the Era of Globalisation*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2008, p. 314.

Other status quoits are against any Indian involvement in the peace process because it would make the country unnecessarily controversial. For instance, a direct Indian role in the conflict could lead to accusations of an “American-Zionist-Hindu Communal Parties” alliance against Islam⁵⁴⁷. According to one scholar, an Israeli government that is less flexible on peace negotiations would make it harder for India to get the desired outcome⁵⁴⁸. This would adversely affect its relationship with the Jewish country which is smooth at the moment. Similarly an undesirable outcome could trigger anti-Indian sentiment in the Arab world and undermine the goodwill of the Palestinians. Another scholar has written that India as an emerging power has significant interests with Israel, the source of most of the Indian military’s advanced technology edge, by joining in the peace process instead of leaving it to the two sides to thrash it out in negotiations, in the manner Delhi would prefer the Kashmir issue to be settled, it would only harm its own interests. He cites the recent example when India joined the call for a sovereign Palestinian state in the UN General Assembly which led the US President Barack Obama to reject a meeting with Manmohan Singh in New York and made the Israelis hurt⁵⁴⁹. Moreover, Pakistan would certainly

⁵⁴⁷ Ronak D. Desai_ & Xenia Dormandy "Indo-Israeli Relations: Key Security Implications", *Policy Brief*, July 10, 2008 at:

http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/18414/indoisraeli_relations.html?breadcrumb=%2Fexperts%2F1631%2Fronak_d_desai%3Fgroupby%3D1%26page%3D1%26hide%3D1%26id%3D1631%26back_url%3D%252Fexperts%252F%26%3Bback_text%3DBack%2Bto%2Blist%2Bof%2Bexperts

⁵⁴⁸ Harsh V. Pant cited in Arielle Kandel, “Indo-Israeli Relations in the Post-Cold War Period”, *Weekly Blitz*, February 21, 2010.

exploit from any Indian role in the peace process. For instance, even during the absence of diplomatic relations, Pakistan accused India of conspiring with the 'Zionist enemy' to threaten and undermine the larger Islamic world. After normalisation, 'Hindu-Jewish', 'Brahmin-Zionist' or Indo-Israeli conspiracies have periodically become a prime theme in the Pakistan media⁵⁵⁰. Internally, India's active role in the peace process would put it into a difficult situation. There are several left-wing political parties in India that are openly hostile toward Israel and sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Moreover, as a functioning democracy with a sizable Muslim population, no government in India could ignore the influence of its Muslim constituency. Indifference toward their views and sentiment would undermine the country's democratic credentials⁵⁵¹. Also, the Muslim factor does play a role in the calculation of India's political parties. For instance, a large section of India's Muslim population has traditionally voted for the Congress party in India's national elections, and the party fears it would lose the support of these voters if it adopted an overly friendly attitude toward Israel⁵⁵². Thus, due to all these reasons, the status-quoists want India to remain neutral in the Israel-Palestine conflict and follow a low profile posture in the peace process.

⁵⁴⁹ Sadanand Dhume, "India Fumbles on Palestine", *Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2011.

⁵⁵⁰ See for instance, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, "Growing Indo-Israeli Nexus", *The News*, 09 September, 2001 and "India Israel Nexus gives Musharraf Sleepless Nights", *Indian Express*, September 13, 2003.

⁵⁵¹ P.R. Kumaraswami, "The Muslim Factor in India's Foreign Policy", *Japan Times*, July 30, 2008.

⁵⁵² Kandel, "Indo-Israeli Relations in the Post-Cold War Period" *op cit.*, No. 548.

Which streams of thought would be close to the future Indian role in the Palestine Israeli peace process? This study has found that India took part in multilateral initiatives such as the Annapolis Conference in November 2007 when invited by the Americans. Otherwise it has confined itself to generalities, highlighting the need for negotiations and accommodation. This posture would continue in future as argued by the status-quoists. A recent U.S. Embassy cable on India, accessed by *The Hindu* through WikiLeaks revealed that as an emerging global power, New Delhi recognises that it cannot afford to alienate either the Palestinians or Israelis, as this could endanger Indian defence interests or provoke a domestic backlash. It further suggested that India hopes to avoid being forced publicly to choose between its pragmatic strategic relationship with Israel and its commitment to the Palestinians. India's bilateral relationship with Israel continues to flourish with growing defence ties, trade links and opportunities for high tech collaboration. However, with a large Muslim population that plays a critical role supporting the ruling Congress in national elections, India has historically supported Palestinians in multinational fora and considered itself a strong supporter of Palestinian self-determination⁵⁵³. In another raw cable dated March 31, 2006 (58913: confidential), US Ambassador to India David Mulford wrote that "the underlying straddle of meek statements about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict combined with full-steam-ahead engagement with Israel on

⁵⁵³India Balancing Relations with Israel and Hamas, WikiLeaks India Cable, 110122: *Hindu*, March 15, 2011 at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/article1539484.ece>

practical and strategic matters is unlikely to change in future⁵⁵⁴. *Jim Colbert* similarly argues that while India can be expected to pursue bilateral ties with Israel, its regional approach will always employ rhetoric that pleases the Arab states and Iran⁵⁵⁵. *Pratap Bhanu Mehta* calls such an Indian Foreign Policy posture as *cautious prudence*. It is cautious in recognising a limit to its own ability to affect change elsewhere. It is also a prudent power, in the sense that, contrary to standard narratives, it understands that power does matter⁵⁵⁶.

From the above analysis, it is evident that while India has been playing a limited role in the Middle East peace process, there is a growing perception that India should play a larger role in the Israeli Palestinian conflict although the Radicals have a different viewpoint on this issue. The Nehruvians and the pragmatists differ in important respects but they adopt a common position for an active Indian role in the peace process both for the sake of Palestine people and for India's own interests. The status quoists perspective is different on this important issue as they consider India's has its own limitations to play a mediatory role between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The real challenge for India in future would be how to balance its domestic concerns with the actual requirements at the extended neighbourhood.

⁵⁵⁴ Cited in Hasan Suroor, "West Asia Policy Hostage to 'Muslim vote'", *Hindu*, March 15, 2011 at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/article1539452.ece>

⁵⁵⁵ *Jim Colbert*, "India's Misunderstood Israel Policy", *The Diplomat*, December 02, 2010.

⁵⁵⁶ *Pratap Bhanu Mehta*, 'Still Under Nehru's Shadow? The Absence of Foreign Policy Frameworks in India', *India Review*, Vol. 8, No.3, 2009, pp. 209 — 233.

CONCLUSION AND MAIN FINDINGS

This study demonstrates that India has had a consistent and unwavering record of support for the Palestinian cause since the days of its freedom struggle. Right from the very beginning, Indian leaders regarded the Palestinian question as a colonial question and considered the elimination of colonialism, in terms of the termination of the British Mandate and establishment of an independent state of Palestine. India's position here was primarily anti-colonial and directed against the British policy of 'divide and rule', that is, exploitation of Arab-Jewish differences to perpetuate the domination of Palestine. In this phase, India viewed the Palestine question in the light of its own colonial experiences. In an expression of solidarity, the Congress Working Committee sent its greetings to the Palestinian Arabs and observed September 27, 1936 as the Palestine Day.

India's perception of the Arab-Jewish issue in Palestine registered a shift with the large-scale migration of Jews from Eastern and Central Europe to Palestine, between 1935 and 1947, primarily owing to Nazi persecution. While India deeply sympathised with the sufferings of the Jews, it was opposed to a separate state for the Jews in Palestine on two grounds. First, it regarded any state exclusively based on religion as untenable. The foundations of a secular India are laid on this principle. Secondly, it considered a remote historical connection with the area as an insufficient ground for the creation of a separate Jewish state in Palestine.

This Indian view spelt out during the freedom struggle by the Indian National Congress and its top leadership like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal

Nehru and Maulana Azad laid the foundation to India's foreign policy on Palestine and on the Jewish question which was pursued more or less with the same verve for many years in the post-independence era. The first sign of this policy was seen on November 29, 1947, when India along with 12 other nations voted against the UN General Assembly resolution 181 for the partition of Palestine. India supported the Minority Plan which called for the establishment of a federal Palestine with internal autonomy for the Jewish illegal immigrants.

On May 11, 1949 India voted against the U.N. resolution for admission of Israel into the United Nations. This time, India stood alongside six Arab states, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Burma. Explaining India's stand, the Indian delegation stated that "India could not recognise an Israel which had been achieved through the force of arms and not through negotiations." But soon after, Pandit Nehru watered down his stance and the Government of India accorded *de jure* recognition to Israel on September 17, 1950. The Jewish government was allowed to open an office in Mumbai that was converted into a consulate in 1953. Nehru, however, made it clear that recognition did not mean endorsement of Israeli position on its frontiers and India would continue to support the cause of the Palestinians.

The Indira Gandhi era witnessed an all-round development of Indo-Arab relations. She evinced keen interest in the affairs of the Arab world and especially showed a great concern for the people of Palestine. India supported the Arab stand on the Palestine issue in the United Nations and Non-Aligned Summits. India became the first non-Arab State to recognise the Palestine

Liberation Organisation (PLO) as 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people' and allowed it to open its office in New Delhi in January, 1975. She invited PLO leader Yasser Arafat to New Delhi and established formal diplomatic relations.

When Janata party came to power in 1977, there were speculations about a possible shift in India's Palestine policy. Belying all expectations, the Janata Government reaffirmed India's support to the Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular and was supportive of any peace initiative between Arabs and Israel. In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a thumping majority and continued her support to the Palestinian struggle. Her Foreign Minister, P.V Narasimha Rao announced in Parliament on 26th March 1980 that India had decided to accord full diplomatic recognition to the office of the PLO in New Delhi by upgrading its office to that of an embassy endowed with all diplomatic immunities and privileges. Rajiv Gandhi (1984-89) followed the footsteps of his mother and grandfather. He accorded recognition to the State of Palestine in November 1988 and the PLO office in New Delhi started functioning as the Embassy of the State of Palestine.

Thus, India's West Asia policy from 1947 to 1991 was characterized by a pro-Arab and anti-Israeli foreign policy. This stance reflected India's own interest in the Middle East as well as its traditional sympathy with the Arabs; it was further influenced by India's commitment to the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the sentiments of its own minority population.

However, the Government of India's policy on the Arab Israel conflict remained a subject of deep dispute within the country as it was challenged by the political parties in opposition --- the right wing *Jan Sangh* and the *Swatantra* Party and the middle of the road *Praja-Socialist Party (PSP)* and the *Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP)*--, the national media and the informed Indian citizens. The Congress party itself was also divided on the issue and even senior Cabinet Ministers had been known to entertain serious reservations regarding the unqualified support extended by the Prime Minister and the External Minister to various moves made by the West Asian nations on different occasions especially during the Chinese aggression in 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1965 & 1971.

There was however, a shift in India's foreign policy towards Israel during P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure as India announced its decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992. But the Indian Government's decision to normalize ties with Israel did not happen all of a sudden. The move in this direction was undertaken in mid-1980 when Rajiv Gandhi, known for his non-ideological approach to foreign policy, met his Israeli counterpart Shimon Pares during the annual UN General Assembly session in September 1985 and undertook a number of steps afterwards. The ideological rhetoric of the past had no attraction for the young leader who sought to carry forward the country into the next century as modern and technologically developed country. But a series of events stalled the process of normalization with Israel. With the change of the international scenario caused by the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of

the Soviet Union, the emergence of the United States as the only super power, the change of PLO's strategy towards Israel, the start of the Middle East peace process, India's own economic liberalisation, delinking of Pakistan from its Middle East policy, the rising problem of terrorism in the country, the change in India's domestic politics and a strong domestic discourse in favour of establishing full diplomatic relationship with Israel, also influenced India's decision in favour of Israel. After the release of Israeli hostages held in Jammu and Kashmir in summer 1991, along with the publicly reported visit of the Deputy Director General for Asia of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Moshe Yegar, the Indian media, right-wing political leaders and intellectuals came out openly in support of full diplomatic relations with Israel leading to the normalisation of relations with the Jewish country since January 1992.

Although India's relation with Israel started at a low profile during the Congress regime, the relations between the two countries reached new heights during the BJP led National Democratic Alliance regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). When the United Progressive Alliance Government under the Congress leadership came to power in mid-2004, it decided to follow the same line of the policy adopted by the earlier NDA regime. The growing ties between India and Israel and its consequent effect on New Delhi's posture towards Palestine have generated another lively debate in the country. There are two different viewpoints on this issue. According to one view, India's growing ties with Israeli has neutralised its traditional support to the Palestine issue. The other

view argues that India's friendship with Israel has not affected its support to the Palestinian cause.

After establishing diplomatic relationship with Israel, India continued to support the cause of Palestine. At the political and diplomatic level, India provided strong support to the people of Palestinian in their quest for a sovereign, independent and viable state, economically India provided both material and technical support to the Palestinian government and its people in their search for nation-building. The Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat frequently visited India, so also other high level dignitaries. After Arafat's death, the new Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, accompanied by several ministers visited New Delhi in May 2005, October 2008 and in February 2010. From the Indian side, the Union Home Minister, the External Affairs Minister, the Minister of State for External Affairs and other senior officials visited Palestine.

Besides supporting the cause of Palestine through several bilateral visits, India also espoused the cause of Palestine at various international forums such as the UN and NAM. India supported numerous Palestinian-related resolutions at the United Nations from time to time. It also helped to pass several Non-Aligned Movement-sponsored resolutions on the Palestine issue. In addition to securing international support, India also provided much needed economic, technical and humanitarian assistance to the PNA, especially after its establishment in 1994 in pursuance of the Oslo principles. India also continues to financially contribute to the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) for undertaking relief work in the occupied Palestinian territories from time to time. Besides, the Government of

India has recognised the passport/ travel documents issued by the PNA and established a Representative Office to the Palestine National Authority in Gaza in 1996 which was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

However, the Government's claim that it continues to provide diplomatic and political support to the Palestinians in their effort to have a separate homeland and help them in "the reconstruction of their nation" through economic, technical and humanitarian assistance from time to time, has not been shared by a number of leaders, scholars, journalists and activists who on the contrary argue that India's support Palestine has now been reduced to mere statements, resolutions and occasional economic assistance. In other words, it is clear that India, under the given the circumstances, is no longer supporting the national struggle movements that it used to do in the past. In the garb of so called 'pragmatism', India is steadily getting sucked into the vortex of Western design and quagmire. Whether India is under the NDA or UPA rule, the Government has diluted the country's principled foreign policy for certain interests that are not going to pay it in the long run.

In addition to the Government support, the people of India have always come forward in support of the Palestine issue. This is evident from the numerous campaigns and demonstrations against Israel's actions in Palestine by several civil society groups from time to time. Moreover, frequent seminars and conferences have also been organised in the country in the recent past to raise awareness and garner support for the just cause of Palestine.

India has also played a limited role in the Middle East peace process to solve the problem of Palestine. It was invited to become a participant in the multilateral track of the Peace Process that began in 1991 and actively participated in all the five working groups discussing Middle East-Palestine question such as regional economic development, arms control and regional security and environment and water resources. India welcomed the mutual recognition by the State of Israel & the PLO and the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement on Palestinian self-rule on 13 September 1993. It welcomed the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement in Cairo on 4th May 1994 (also known as Gaza-Jericho Agreement). An Indian delegation led by the Minister of State for External Affairs, R.L Bhatia was present during the signing ceremony. India also greeted the Oslo Interim Agreement (Oslo II) signed on 30th September 1995 and reiterated the view that durable peace in the region was necessary to resolve all outstanding issues to the satisfaction of all concerned parties. Terming the Wye River Memorandum signed between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on 23 October 1998 as 'an important milestone' in the stalled peace process, India supported its unconditional implementation. The Indian Trade and Industry Minister Ashwani Kumar participated in the Sharm El Sheikh summit in February 2005 between Israeli and Palestinian leaders to end the 2000 Intifada and resume negotiations under the roadmap. India was invited as a participant in the Annapolis Conference which was held on November 27, 2007 and Kapil Sibal, the Minister

for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, represented the country at Annapolis.

In recent years, there is a growing perception that India should play a more direct and mediatory role in the Israel Palestine Peace process. While India has shown some interest in the regard and this is welcomed by the Israelis and the Palestinians, the domestic discourse on India's new role is sharply divided. There are four different discourses: the Radicals, the Nehruvians, the pragmatists and the status quoists. The Radicals want India to fully support the Palestine issue, end all cooperation with Israel and call for a combination of global isolation, sanctions and external pressure against the Jewish country by the international community. The Nehruvians want India to provide more vigorous support and play an active role in the peace process because unlike in the past, it is now in a better position to play such a role. They support an active role for India in the Palestine issue because the Palestinians are not only fighting for a just and humanitarian cause but there has also not been any change on the ground situation in the occupied territories. The pragmatists, like the Nehruvians, want India to play a leading role in the peace process but for the sake of its own rising power profile and national interest. According to the status-quoists, India should not change its present policy of keeping a low profile in the Middle East peace process because such a posture better serves its national interests. In other words, the status-quoists maintain that India should continue to resist any temptation to play any overt role in the peace process as it helps to maintain normal ties with all parties to the Middle East conflict without forcing the country

into unpleasant situations. In view of these differing perceptions, the real challenge for India in future would be to balance its domestic concerns with the actual requirements at its extended neighbourhood.

However a small comment is needed on 'national interest' since it is the buzzword which has united people from mutually opposed viewpoints. Foreign policy does not automatically or routinely pursue national interest. Ideas of pragmatism and national interest pre-suppose a socially neutral state which can look after the interest of all its citizens. This is problematic. States, even democracies, are biased in favour of certain classes, castes, patriarchy and so on.

Therefore unless pressured from below, states tend to pursue the sectional interest of the powerful and pass it off as national interest. Foreign policy is a combination of morality and pragmatism and just what the mix will be will depend on the nature of the country's political leadership. It is not at all coincidental that leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi were so *pro-Palestine* and would strongly consider morality, decency and dignity in foreign policy in comparison to Rajeev Gandhi, Atal Behari Vajpayee or Manmohan Singh.

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