CHAPTER 5

PALESTINIAN FACTOR IN
INDO-ISRAEL RELATIONS
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The Palestinian factor adds the crucial third dimension to the understanding of the Indo-Israel relations. Going by the official Arab pronouncements, Palestine, includes the whole territory of Mandatory Palestine inclusive of the present-day Israel. The formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) gave institutional framework to this concept. During the period under study, the Palestinian object was to create a state of their own encompassing the entire mandatory territory. Keeping in tune with the Arab sensitivities, Third World fora like the Non-aligned Movement generally preferred the term 'Palestine' to 'Israel'. Even India's only official publication on the Arab-Israeli conflict was curiously titled India and Palestine: The Evolution of a Policy. As will be discussed later, Palestine and Israel were not complementary entities; their differences were more

1. The term Palestine is used only to indicate the Mandated territory of Palestine. In the Post-1948 era, it would indicate the "Palestinian Nation". Similarly in the post-1948 years Palestinians indicate the Arab Palestinians of West Bank and Gaza strip, Palestinian refugees and the Palestinians in the diaspora does not include Israeli Arabs.

2. India, Minsitry of External Affairs, India and Palestine: The Evolution of a Policy (New Delhi, n.d)
complicated than the dispute over the two Chinas; and legally any state could not recognize Israel and the PLO at the same time since each attempted to negate the existence of the other.

UNSCOP

After trying for more than a quarter of a century to administer an inherently contradictory mandate, Britain decided in early 1947, to hand over the problem of Palestine to the newly born United Nations. On 2 April 1947, it formally requested the Secretary-General "to summon as soon as possible, a special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of constituting

3. In the case of China, the main problem was regarding the regime or government which actually represented China.

4. There were a number of official statements on the nature of the mandate. The Peel Commission of 1937 for example, concluded : "The Palestine Government have attempted to discharge the contradictory obligations of the Mandatary under conditions of great difficulty by "holding the balance" between Jews and Arabs." Report, Palestine Royal Commission, 1937, July (London : 1937) p.271. Speaking in the House of Commons on February 25, 1947 Secretary of State Ernest Bevin declared : "... There is no denying the fact that the Mandate contained contradictory promises. In the first place it promised the Jews a National Home, and, in the second place, it declared that the rights and position of the Arabs must be protected. Therefore, it provided for what was virtually an invasion of the country by thousands of immigrants, and at the same time said that this was not to disturb the people in possession". Cited in Jacob Robinson, Palestine and the United Nations: Prelude to Solution, (Washington, 1947), p.37
and instructing a special committee" to go into the question relating to the "future government of Palestine". Accordingly, the Acting Secretary-General sought the views of the member states and India conveyed its concurrence on 11 April. After obtaining the consent of the majority, the Secretary-General summoned the first Special Session of the General Assembly, on 28 April, which lasted until 15 May when it established an eleven-member United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP).

India was represented in the Special Session by Asaf Ali, its ambassador in Washington who took an active part in the various stages of the discussion. Keeping in tune with the attitude of the Congress Party, Ali took an active pro-Arab stand throughout the session. He demanded the inclusion of the Arab proposal -- "termination of the Mandate and proclamation of the independence of Palestine" -- in the agenda of the proposed committee. Both the Committee and the Assembly rejected the proposal. The majority was of the opinion that the Arab proposal was


6. Robinson, n.4, p.52

7. General Committee, April 30, voting was 1 - 8, 5

8. General Assembly, May, 13, voting was 15-26,12,2
incompatible with the original British agenda which led to the convening of the special session. He was, however, successful in his plea for inviting the Arab Higher Committee before the General Committee. Supporting the American proposal, he suggested the exclusion of the big powers, viz., the permanent members of the Security Council, from being nominated to the proposed UNSCOP. In another move, he supported the Arab standpoint in rejecting any connection between the Palestine problem and the problem of the displaced persons in Europe. Accordingly India voted against the Panama-Guatemala resolution calling for the visits of UNSCOP to the 'displaced persons' camps in Europe. The Indian representative was helpful to the Zionists only in his support for inviting the Jewish Agency to testify before the General Committee.

Asaf Ali's overt pro-Arab stand drew criticism and disapproval from a number of quarters. Commenting on Asaf Ali, Eliahu Epstein (later Elath), who was closely interacting in the UN and later on with UNSCOP for the Jewish Agency, wrote in January 1948:

The (Indian) Ambassador here (i.e. Washington), Mr. Asaf Ali, was the worst opponent we had at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in April last year. Besides that, while the Arabs fight us openly, he has been engaged in

9. For the details on the circumstances in which the Arab Higher Committee withdrew and then persuaded to depose. see Robinson, n.4, pp.130-7.

10. Resolution was, however, carried by 36-8, 4.
intrigues and double crosses, and has confused many of our people by his hypocrisy and machinations. Although he was not a member of the Indian delegation at the last session, there is no reason to believe that he has made an aboutface or that his character has improved...(11)

Similarly Taraknath Das who was championing the cause of the Zionists wrote:

It should not be forgotten that Asaf Ali, the first Indian Ambassador to Washington and Indian Delegate to the U.N., was so pro-Arab that he earned the title the Indian Attorney for the Arab League... (12)

On top of all these personal and somewhat prejudiced views, Nehru himself expressed his displeasure at some of Asaf Ali's observations. Reacting to Ali's hostile attitude towards the United Kingdom over the latter's hesitation in completely accepting the UN recommendations, Nehru telegraphed:

... I do not have full report of what you said but I would suggest your avoiding raising issues which might affect relations between India and any other country. As we have informed you in our brief we support Arab case generally. Nevertheless we should avoid as far as possible needless controversy. (13)

A fortnight later, in a personal letter to Asaf Ali, Nehru complimented the former's role in the UN. At the same time he thought it necessary to mention:


I have a feeling... that perhaps fewer commitments might have been made on our behalf in regard to certain matters. It pays often enough not to give too frequent expression of our views. Though you balanced your observations, when there are many observations they are apt to irritate one party or the other needlessly as they appear to have done sometimes. There have been a few adverse comments here (i.e., New Delhi) on what you have said and a general feeling that it would have been better not to say so much...(14)

Elaborating on 'certain matters' mentioned by Nehru, the editors of the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* refer to Asaf Ali's support for the Arab proposal for immediate independence to Palestine.

Similarly in the official note of 13 May 1947 P.A. Menon observed:

> It is clear both from the telegrams and from press reports that from the very beginning Mr. Asaf Ali had taken a very active part in the discussions... His part in the proceedings appear, however, to have gone rather beyond his instructions which were to be most careful in the expression of views, as well as to leave it to the sponsors of the resolutions to make out a case for the termination of the Mandate and to indicate how the vacuum thus created will be filled. (16)

Thus one is led to conclude that Asaf Ali's pro-Arab observations were not looked at kindly by the Indian government itself. This pro-Arab position had its role. India was neither among the seven 'neutrals' originally proposed by the US representative Warren R.

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15. Ibid.
Canada, Czechoslovakia, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and Uruguay.

18. Guatemala and Yugoslavia.

19. Note d. 9.4.1947 NAI F.2(16)-UNO I/47. Even the official communication to Asaf Ali on his nomination observed: "You should endeavour to obtain for India membership of special committee apparently to be set up." Foreign Office New Delhi to Asaf Ali, Washington d. 18.4.1947, Ibid.

20. Note by P.A. Menon, d. 13.5.1947, Ibid.

21. Asaf Ali New York to Foreign Office New Delhi, d. 12.5.1947, NAI F.46(1)-AWT/47. "The feeling that India was definitely for Arab, led the U.S. Delegation to omit India from their original proposal regarding the constitution of the Special Committee..." Report by Asaf Ali on the Special Session to Secretary, External Affairs Department, d. 4.6.1947, NAI F.2(21)-UNO I/47.
and India from Asia.

The eleven-member UNSCOP began its first meeting in Lake Success on 26 May 1947 and continued its activities in Jerusalem, Beirut and Geneva. Abdur Rahman represented India in the UNSCOP. As per the deadline set by the General Assembly, the UNSCOP submitted its report on 1 September 1947. Its recommendations could be divided into two categories: unanimous or near unanimous resolutions and political recommendations. There was unanimity on eleven out of twelve recommendations like the termination of the Mandate, independence, transitional arrangements under the UN, protection of holy places, plight of the Jewish displaced persons, protection of minorities and economic unity. Guatemala and Uruguay, however, refused to endorse the twelfth recommendation which declared:

"any solution for Palestine cannot be considered as a solution of the Jewish problem in general". But on the crucial and fundamental issue -- the future political status of Palestine -- UNSCOP was divided. A seven-member majority consisting of Canada, Czechoslovakia, 

22. Australia defeated the Philippines by 21-20 votes and India won Siam (Thailand) by 34-7. After the election Asaf Ali observed: "We regretted contest with Siam who while hoping for our election did not wish to withdraw. We remained in contest at urgent request of Arabs..." Asaf Ali to Foreign Office, d. 14.5.1947, NAI, F.2 (16)-UNO 1/47.

Guatemala, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and Uruguay opted for partition while India, Iran and Yugoslavia put forward a Federal Plan as the solution and Australia endorsed neither.

The majority plan consisted of partitioning Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, an economic union between them and an international status for Jerusalem. While justifying their proposal the majority concluded:

The basic premise underlying the partition proposal is that the claims to Palestine of the Arabs and Jews, both possessing validity, are irreconcilable, and that among all of the solutions advanced, partition will provide the most realistic and practical solution and is the most likely to afford a workable basis for meeting in part the claims and national aspirations of both parties.

Recognizing that the basic problem in Palestine was "a clash of two intense nationalisms" it outrightly rejected the maximal demands of the Arabs as well as the Jews. It conceived that any worthwhile, viable and realistic solution would have to be a compromise.

Federal Plan:

Before analysing the Federal Plan and its merits, it is necessary to ask: was it the idea of Abdur Rahman in his personal capacity or that of the Indian government? When India was elected to the UNSCOP, it was formalizing its independence and Nehru was heading

the interim government. Yet Rahman was the personal choice of Nehru and by way of general instructions the latter wrote:

How to reconcile the two claims (i.e., the Arab and Jewish) is the problem before us. I do not venture to express an opinion except vaguely to say that perhaps an autonomous Jewish area within an independent Palestine might lead to a solution... The general attitude of India must necessarily be friendly to both parties but clearly indicating that an agreement must have Arab approval....(25)

Probably being aware of the controversies surrounding Asaf Ali's pronouncements in the special session, he added:

We (i.e. India) should proceed, especially in this fact-finding committee in a judicial manner as far as possible. It might indeed be desirable not to say too much or to make any particular commitments at this stage. You will function as the representative of India on this committee and will naturally refer to us any particular matters that you think should be cleared up. But you will also be a representative of the United Nations organisation free to suggest what you consider fit and proper from the larger viewpoint of that Organisation as well as of the Arabs and the Jews...(26)

However, the partition of the Indian sub-continent created certain doubts for Rahman. Refuting his claims that the division had affected the status of India and his position, Nehru wrote on 10 July 1947:


26. Ibid.

27. Rahman to Nehru, d.25.6.1947, NAI F.2(16)-UNO I/47
This [i.e partition of India] does not affect the international status of India as a continuing entity, and all our old obligations and commitments continue... Your position on the Palestine Special Committee is not affected in any way. I might point out that it is not quite correct to say that you were nominated by the United Nations, India was chosen as one of the countries to be represented on the Special Committee. The nomination of the representative from India was done by the Government of India and not by the United Nations...(28)

Similarly on the future of Palestine, Rahman had initial differences. Rejecting partition, he argued:

Palestine should in accordance to promises given by British and French Governments be constituted into a democratic UNITARY PALESTINIAN State and although Jewish ETHNIC cultural religious educational and linguistic rights be reserved by constitution either unalterable or alternatively by a three-fourths majority yet there is no reason to deprive the majority of their legitimate right according to principle of self determination to form a Government in which Jews should be allowed a share of one-third in all Government Offices and posts proportionate to their present population...(29)

Since the Government of India viewed the Federal Plan as the ideal solution, Rahman modified his report as well as his special note. It should be noted that the date on which the Indian representative signed the report -- 31 August 1947 -- the sub-continent had already been partitioned on communal lines. In other words, India was advocating an ideal solution for Palestine which it could not adopt itself in a much

29. Telegram of Rahman to MEA, d.20.8.1947, Ibid.
31. Rahman to Nehru, d.1.9.1947, Ibid.
better environment; the Hindu-Muslim relations in India were not as poisoned or insurmountable as the Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine.

Second point pertains to Abdur Rahman himself. Both in his minority plan and his dissenting note, he was highly critical of religion coming into political calculations. In his report, he remarked:

"... it is important to avoid an acceleration of the separatism which now characterizes the relations of Arabs and Jews in the Near East, and to avoid laying the foundations of a dangerous irredentism there, which would be the inevitable consequences of partition in whatever form." (32)

He became more forceful in his note and raised the possibility of 'double loyalty' of the Jews should the Jewish State be conceded. Upholding the principle of self-determination he argued that it would be impossible to "refuse the majority the right of forming the government". On the religious side he argued:

"... it is impossible to forget that the Jews as a whole, are not a nation but only a community which follows a particular religion.... Moreover the so-called nationalism is of too recent a growth to be of any value..." (34) (and) there is no reason why political considerations should be mixed up with religious considerations and why political rights in a state should be confused with religious rights...." (35)

It is ironic that after rejecting any links between

34. Ibid, p.42.
35. Ibid, p.45.
religion and statecraft and soon after submitting his report, Abdur Rahman opted to migrate to Pakistan, a state formed on these same arguments, to become a judge of the Punjab (Pakistan) high court. Therefore the Indian position in the UNSCOP, becomes weak when applied to the sub-continental context.

India's opposition to the majority partition plan was focused on its unworkable nature. It argued that the plan aimed at "a union under artificial arrangements designed to achieve essential economic and social unity after first creating political and geographical disunity by partition, (and hence was) impractical, unworkable and could not possibly provide for two reasonably viable States". In his dissenting note he elaborated this point as well as the reasons for his rejection of partition plan and they would be summarised as follows:

i. Palestine was not a solution for the Jewish problem.

ii. It would not be possible to create two viable states in Palestine.

iii. It would not be possible to create a Jewish state without a very large Arab minority. (38)


38. As Wilson argued the figures given in the majority plan did not give the clear picture. Evan M.Wilson Decision on Palestine: How the US came to Recognize Israel, (Stanford, Cali, 1979), p.113. In addition to the 407,000 Arabs, the proposed (Contd.,)
iv. Palestine was too small to bear the burden of two governments.

v. The Jewish state would be surrounded by hostile Arab states and there would always be the danger of war.

vi. Possibility of Arab-Jewish cooperation would become remote.

vii. Division of Palestine would make transit of goods impossible since commerce was already handicapped by its artificial borders with its Arab neighbours.

viii. The distribution of land and resources between the two states was inequitable and strongly against the Arabs.

ix. Partition would create problems for the Jews as a whole who would be accused of practising double loyalty.

x. Enforcement of the plan would require the use of force since the Arab-Jewish relations would deteriorate.

xi. Partition would go against the principle of self-determination.

The rejection of the partition plan as unworkable was not new. The Woodhead Commission set up in 1938 to study the Peel Commission proposal of dividing Palestine, proved unsuccessful. Commenting on partitioning Palestine, the twelve-member Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry wrote in 1946:

Partition has an appeal at first sight as giving a prospect of early independence and self-government to Jews and Arabs, but in our view no partition would have any chance unless it was basically

Jewish State would include about "90,000 Bedouins, cultivators and stock owners who seek grazing further afield in dry seasons." This additional population could not be Jewish and hence the proposed Jewish state would consist of 498,000 Jews and 497,000 Arabs or non-Jews; a wafer thin margin in formation itself.
acceptable to Jews and Arabs, and there is no sign of that today. We are accordingly unable to recommend partition as a solution...(39)

As an alternative, India, along with Iran and Yugoslavia, proposed a Federal Plan to resolve the crisis in Palestine.

The main features of the plan are:

i. Palestine would be a federal and independent State.

ii. While the Mandate would be terminated soon, there would be a transitory administration whose tenure would not exceed three years.

iii. Federal Palestine would consist of Arab and Jewish states.

iv. Each state would enjoy internal autonomy excluding "national defence, foreign relations, immigration, currency, taxation for federal purposes, foreign and inter-state waterways, transport and communications, copyrights and patents".

v. Federal state would have a bi-cameral legislature.

vi. Constitution would safeguard, inter alia, equality of all citizens with regard to political, civil and religious rights of the individual and linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural rights of the people.

In addition, the Indian representative made certain political observations, which would indicate the Indian thinking on the whole question. A number of issues raised in his note were highly debatable. However,

39. Director of Near East in the US State Department Henderson drew similar conclusions. But it was overlooked in the domestic political calculations of President Truman. For the complete text see Wilson, Ibid. pp.117-21.

40. For the complete text see UNSCOP Report, Vol.I pp.59-64
prejudice in favour of the Arabs was the underlying aspect of Rahman's cross-examination as well as his 41 dissenting note. He observed *inter alia*:

a. The Balfour Declaration should not have been made.

b. The Mandate was in conflict with and inconsistent with the covenant of the League of Nations.

c. The Mandate was in the circumstances to prevail in preference to the covenant when and where it was found to be inconsistent with the latter.

d. Nations had no right to create a Mandate over Palestine without the consent of its inhabitants and to impose their will upon them.

Because of its very nature and the acceptance by a sizeable section of the UN, the Majority Plan was closely examined, hailed or criticised. On the other hand, the Minority Plan received no attention in the UN and hence was left unexamined. This can lead to the impression that the Minority Plan was foolproof and could have eliminated all the ills of the erstwhile Palestine. Like the Partition Plan, the Indian proposal was also not free from defects. One of the major drawbacks of the plan was its lack of realism. It was unanimously accepted by the UNSCOP that Arab-

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41. While the pro-Zionist attitude of the representatives of Guatemala and Uruguay was frequently highlighted, the Arab bias of Rahman was often ignored in India. For example M.S. Agwani "The Great Powers and the Partition of Palestine", in M.S.Rajan, (ed) *Studies in Politics: National and International*, (New Delhi, 1971), p.353.

Jewish cooperation was next to impossible. The UNSCOP remarked,

...Indeed, government service, the Potash Company and the Oil Refinery are almost the only places where Arabs and Jews meet as coworkers in the same organizations.(43)

Given this state of affairs, it required a superhuman effort, if not divine intervention, to bring about mutual trust and cooperation between the Arabs and the Jews. While there was a wide spectrum of Jewish opinion on the whole question -- ranging from the Revisionist notion of a Jewish state on either side of the Jordan river, to the Magnus' view of a bi-national Palestine -- the Arabs adopted an uncompromising and inflexible attitude. This ruled out any Arab cooperation, which was a prerequisite for Federal Palestine. Secondly, the plan had the serious disadvantage of being rejected by both the contending parties and this rejection became the only common platform for the Arabs and Jews vis-a-vis the UNSCOP.

Even though partitioned Palestine fell short of the general Zionist goals, it was accepted as the best option possible at that time. Hence, it had at least enjoyed the support of one of the parties. On the other hand, the Federal Plan offered civic and religious rights to the Jews when they were aspiring


44. For example their rejection of the Federal Plan itself is an ideal example.
for political rights and sovereignty. Similarly it had disappointed the Arabs who were demanding an unitary state of Palestine.

Thirdly, the plan suffered from operational defects. While recommending the constitution of the federal state, it stipulated a number of conditions. The basic purpose of the Federal Plan was to safeguard the rights of the Jewish minority in the Arab state. At the same time, it also meant the encroachment upon its sovereignty. Given the mutual animosity such a guarantee could only be enforced by a third party, which in turn, would question the very notion of independence. And fourthly, it was debatable whether Palestine could have maintained its democratic character in a federal set-up. None of the Arab states which presented the Arab case to the UNSCOP were democratic. The structure and functioning of the Arab Higher Committee which represented a large section of the Arabs of Palestine was also incompatible with democracy. This aspect became complicated if one looks at the organized Jewish community. Given tho

45. UNSCOP recorded: "In times of crisis, as in 1936-1938...pressure has taken the form of intimidation and assassination. At present time, non-conformity regarding any important question on which the Arab Higher Committee has pronounced a policy is represented as disloyalty to the Arab nation...In the absence of an elective body to represent divergences of interest, (the Arab community) therefore shows a high degree of centralization in its political life." UNSCOP Report, Vol.I, pp. 25-6.
situation, the Federal State, would consist of a centralized and infant democratic Arab state and an advanced and decentralized Jewish state; this could hardly be a solution for Palestine.

The UNSCOP and the UN:

Upon the submission of the UNSCOP report, the UN once again became the focus of international attention for the next three months and the report became an important agenda for the second session of the General Assembly. After a general debate, the ad hoc committee decided to set up two sub-committees. Sub-committee 1 was entrusted with the task of drafting a viable partition plan and sub-committee 2, consisting mainly of Muslim states, was made responsible for producing a scheme for unitary Palestine. It is worth noting that the Federal Plan, so vociferously advocated and argued by India, was not even considered by the ad hoc committee of the General Assembly. There can be two plausible explanations: One, it may be the result of the uncompromising attitude of the Arabs; and two, it

46. Members were Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, Poland, South Africa, Soviet Union, the US, Uruguay and Venezuela.

47. They were Afghanistan, Columbia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.

48. This was one reason cited by the Guatemalan delegate for the absence of Yugoslavia in the voting of the partition plan. I. Garcia-Granados, *The Birth of Israel: The drama as I saw it*, (New York, 1948), p. 104.
may be due to the inability, failure or unwillingness of the Indian diplomacy to convince the Arabs of the validity of the Federal Plan. Whatever might have been the reason, it was undeniable that a well-argued case was rendered futile. Then, was India not aware of its rejection? India's ambassador Vijayalaksami Pandit offers an explanation. She writes:

For us to advocate Minority Report would please no one and lead us nowhere. The Arabs and indeed the Muslim countries generally are now attaching an IDEOLOGICAL and emotional significance to this question which it would be a serious mistake to ignore. Apart however from merits of this question my view is that we should look at the problem from point of view of India's position among Eastern and Middle Eastern Powers. I feel very strongly that India should make a bid now for leadership of these countries. If we miss this opportunity we shall find ourselves completely isolated and a force of doubtful importance and influence in Asia and of practically no (repeat no) influence in Middle and near East...(49)

As subsequent events proved, the Arab commitments to the Palestinian cause were more rhetorical than real.

Both the sub-committees submitted their reports on November 19 and 11 respectively. After a lengthy debate the ad hoc committee rejected the unitary state proposal on 24 November. In a last bid to prevent the partition, the Arab states, supported by India, tried to refer the question to the International Court of Justice, but failed. It was only then the Arabs were

49. Mrs.Pandit to Bajpai, d.8.10.1947 NAI F.46(1)-AWT/47.

50. Votes were 12-29 and 14 abstention.
willing to consider the Indian proposal of Federal State. Commenting on this Arab attitude Nehru declared:

Others (i.e., the Arabs) so keen on the unitary state idea and were so sure of at any rate preventing partition or preventing a two-third majority in favour of partition that they did not accept our suggestion. When during the last few days partition somehow suddenly became inevitable and it was realised that the Indian solution was probably the best and a last minute attempt was made in the last 48 hours to bring forward the Indian solution not by us but by those who wanted a unitary state. It was then too late...(51)

With minor territorial changes the ad hoc committee approved the partition plan on 25 November by a margin of 25 to 13 votes with 19 abstentions. Four days later, on 29 November 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 (II) recommending partition of Palestine, with 33 votes in favour and 12 against and 10 abstentions. India voted against partition both in the ad hoc committee and in the General Assembly. Yugoslavia abstained. While this resolution intensified tension and conflict in Palestine, Britain announced its unilateral decision to withdraw from Palestine on 15 May 1948 irrespective of the consequences. In order to restore peace and order in Palestine, a second special session of the General Assembly was summoned on 16 April 1948. In a sudden policy reversal, the US proposed the suspension of the partition plan and replacing it with a temporary trusteeship for Palestine. As it meant the avoidance

of partition which it opposed, India endorsed the American proposal and was included in the twelve-member sub-committee to formulate a provisional regime for Palestine. While the UN was bogged down with endless debates and technical details, the Zionist leaders met in Tel Aviv on the evening of 14 May 1948 to proclaim the State of Israel. Within minutes the US gave *de facto* recognition to the Jewish state followed by others. And this rendered the special session meaningless and it ended abruptly on 15 May.

THE ALL PALESTINE GOVERNMENT

Before examining India's response to the Palestinian government proclaimed in 1948, it would be useful to take note of the political developments surrounding this proclamation. In Palestine, Zionism and Arab nationalism were in two different and conflicting stages of development. Ever since the Balfour Declaration promised a Jewish National Home, the Zionists made all the efforts to prepare themselves to become a nation-state. When the British finally left Palestine in May 1948, they were able to step in and proclaim a Jewish state. It would be incorrect to believe that Israel was created by the UN; it merely recommended a Jewish state in Palestine but did not try to enforce it. Israel came into being only

52. At the time of the proclamation of Israel, the UN was debating for the suspension of the partition resolution.
because of the efforts of the Zionists in Palestine, even though help from the US and the UK did count a lot. Evan Wilson aptly summed up the situation when he wrote:

The Jewish community had already developed into something of a state within a state with its own executive (the Jewish Agency), legislature (the *Vaad Leumi* or National Council) trade union system (the Histadrut) and even its own military organization, the underground Haganah. So well-organized, in fact, was the *Yishuv* that all of us who followed the Palestine scene (i.e. US State Department) knew, long before the Jewish state came into being that if the Jews were to secure their State, Weizmann (i.e. President of the World Zionist Organization) would be the President, Ben-Gurion (i.e. Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive), the Prime Minister, Shertok (i.e. the head of the political department of the Jewish Agency) the Foreign Minister, Kaplan (i.e. the treasurer of the Agency) the Finance Minister and so on... (53)

On the other hand the Palestinians were in utter disarray and even the partition resolution did not inject any urgency or realism into their leadership. When the Arab League met in December, soon after the General Assembly resolution, there was a proposal to establish a Palestine government but it never proceeded further. After prolonged discussions, on 18 February 1948 the League decided to establish a Palestine Committee to unify and direct the war Palestine. Thus the Palestinian problem was formally taken over by the Arab League. This undoubtedly

53. Wilson, n.38, p.13

provided the much needed political and military strength for the Palestinians. At the same time, it also proved to be the undoing of the Palestinian nationalism. The Arab Higher Committee and its President Hajj Amin, who were hitherto playing a pre-eminent position in the Palestinian struggle for independence, were sidelined. While the Zionists were whole-heartedly spearheading their struggle, the Palestinians had abdicated their fate to the Arab League. When the Arab armies entered Palestine after Israel was proclaimed, the territorial ambitions of the Arab rulers, especially of King Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, overtook the interests of the Palestinians.

Yet, in spite of their defeat, the League decided to form a Palestine government and on 22 September 1948 the Arab Higher Committee met in Gaza to proclaim the formation of 'All Palestine Government' under the leadership of Ahmad Hilmi Pasha. Five days later the Republic of Palestine was proclaimed in Cairo with Haj Amin as its President. But it was still-born. While all the other Arab countries recognized it, King Abdullah who was actually controlling a large segment of the Arab part of Palestine (i.e., the non-Israeli part) had different plans. The Arab notables who met in Jericho on 1 December 1948 resolved to unite it with

55. Ibid., p 189.
Trans-Jordan and subsequently King Abdullah formally annexed the Western Bank of the Jordan river.

On 30 September Ahmed Hilmi informed India of the formation of an independent Palestine state and conveyed "the earnest desire of the all Palestine Government to establish relations of cordiality and cooperation with your country". But the Government of India viewed this with scepticism and decided "not to take any action on the telegram and the said telegram (was not to be) acknowledged in view of possible political complications".

There could be five possible explanations for the Indian stand. As in the case of the recognition of Israel, India was adopting a cautious approach towards the Gaza government and in the meantime the Jericho conference revealed the internal differences among the Palestinian leadership. Secondly, unlike the Jewish state, the Palestinian entity did not have de facto control over any part of the erstwhile Palestine, in spite of calling itself `All Palestine Government'. When Trans-Jordan annexed the West Bank, Gaza strip was under the military control of Egypt. Accordingly an official note on this issue observed:


57. Official Note, d. 4.10.1948, Ibid. Shertok's telegram also met the same fate.
The claims of this government for recognition are no stronger than that of the Government of South Korea posing as the national government of all Korea. Realistic approach would suggest our ignoring this claim...(58)

Thirdly, India probably felt it prudent not to interfere in the inter-Arab conflicts as sovereignty over Palestine had become a bone of contention between the Arab League and Trans-Jordan. Fourthly, with the exception of Pakistan, none of the non-Arab countries had recognized the Gaza regime and hence the Indian move was not unusual. And fifthly, Haj Amin increasingly became a staunch supporter of Pakistan especially on Kashmir. The Mufti-Pak tie-up became obvious in February 1951 when the Mufti presided over the World Muslim Conference in Karachi. Given the Indian apprehension over Pakistan's attempts to forge an Islamic bloc, India's non-recognition of Mufti's government appeared a logical outcome.

INDO-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS : BASIC ISSUES

Formal and official contacts between India and the Palestinian leadership re-emerged only after the formation of the PLO. Even then, the contacts were

58. Note by J.S.Mehta, d. 4.10.1948, Ibid.


60. He also presided over World Ulema Conference in Karachi in February 1952 and led the Palestinian delegation to another meet in May 1952. Jabra, n.54, p.190.
mainly 'private' and few, until India formally recognized the PLO in January 1975. In the meantime, India took positions on various aspects of the Palestinian problem from time to time. Broadly speaking, there were four important issues, viz., refugees, self-determination, annexation of territories by conquest and terrorism. In spite of its broad commitment to these principles, India's position with regard to the Palestinians was always guided by the general consensus in the Arab World, the NAM and the UN in that order. Except for those issues in which it had vital security interests, India was always guided by consensus. Thus a general understanding of the international opinion on the 'Palestine Question', to use the UN term, becomes essential. In this context the NAM assumed primacy over the UN. Since it was a gathering of like-minded countries of the Third World, the NAM summits gave a more accurate picture of the attitude of the member-states. Devoid of any direct involvement of the power blocs, NAM's stand vis-a-vis Palestinians clearly depicted the thinking of various governments including India. The NAM operates on a policy of consensus and hence it is more accommodating than the UN system. Moreover since the Arab world constitutes a significant segment, the NAM also acted

61. Indirect involvement and manipulations did and do exist in NAM and countries like Cuba, Vietnam, Singapore did act as proxies for one or the other bloc.
as the barometer for gauging the changing Arab thinking on various issues.

a. Refugees:

One tragic outcome of the formation of Israel and the following Arab-Israeli war of 1948, was the problem of Arab refugees. Even after years, there is no unanimity as to the causes underlying the Arab exodus and their actual number. It is beyond any doubt that events like the Deir Yassin massacre of April 1948 did accelerate the pace of the Arab exodus; but they alone could not be the cause for the refugees. When the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) was set up in 1949, a refugee was defined as "a person who in May 1948 had been living in Palestine for at least two years who in consequence of the conflict of 1948 had lost his home and means of livelihood and who still is in need". While the UNRWA estimated the refugees at 960,021 in 1950, Walter Pinner had argued that the actual number was around 539,000 and added that out of the UNRWA estimate, 415,500 persons "never


lived on the Israeli side of the Armistice Line." Israeli spokesmen put the figure at about 520,000. The reason was obvious; "if people... became accustomed to the large figure and we are eventually obliged to accept the return of the refugees, we may find it difficult, when faced with hordes of claimants, to continue the world that not all of these formerly lived in Israeli territory... It would, in any event, seem advisable to minimise the numbers... than otherwise". However, the UNRWA figures had universal acceptance in spite of their inaccuracies; for example, since 1951 Jordan refused to deregister the dead; the refugees were resisting any attempts by the UNRWA to update its rolls; and the Arab governments had also forbidden the UNRWA to conduct any census of the refugees.

On the question of the refugees, India had all along endorsed the General Assembly Resolution 194(III) adopted on 11 December 1948. It unequivocally declared:

that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for

66. Israeli documents quoted in Morris n.62, p.297. Morris puts the figure between 600,000 and 760,000.
67. Pinner, n.63, p.16.
loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible...

By December 1948, however, Israel had apparently reached a consensus that it would refuse the unfettered 69 return of the refugees. As a conciliatory move, in mid-1949 it had agreed in principle to accept 100,000 refugees while Jordan and Syria resettling the non-repatriated refugees within their borders. However, differences over the interpretation of the UN 70 resolution sabotaged any prospects of a settlement. While Israel argued for the establishment of an Arab-Israeli peace agreement as a pre-condition for repatriation, the Arabs had rejected any formal peace with Israel and the refugee problem lingered on. Subsequently Israel confined its offer to compensation in lieu of repatriation.

The Indian position was different; according to India and Palestine,

India has consistently supported... the right of the refugees to have an unfettered choice either to return to their homeland or to compensation... India appreciated the aspirations of the Palestine refugees to return to their homes. India also took the position that the UN was responsible for the partitioning of the country and that the rights of the refugees to choose between


repatriation and compensation which had been clearly recognised in Resolution 194, should be respected ...(71)

Also India refuted the Israeli position that the Arabs were responsible for the creation of the refugee problem. In addition to its political support to the refugees, India had materially contributed towards their welfare. Even though its contributions were not so significant in size, given its perennial foreign exchange problem, they assumed importance. In September 1948 Nehru wrote:

In response to an appeal from Count Bernadotte, the U.N. mediator in Palestine, the Government of India have contributed Rs.100,000 for the relief of refugee sufferers. This is a token amount only and it is meant to be used without distinction of race...(73)

Subsequently this was raised to $100,000. And since then India had regularly and voluntarily contributed to the UNRWA fund. Gradually its contribution was in terms of cloth, medical assistance and food and its

71. India and Palestine; n.2, p. 51.
72. Ibid. It should be noted that India heavily depended on the authority of the historian Arnold Toynbee to repudiate these charges.
74. Meeting of the Cabinet held on Saturday the 13th November 1948 at 4.30 P.M. Case No 461/17/48: Contribution to the Palestine Refugees Relief Fund NAI F.1(20)-UN II/48.
76. India and Palestine, n.2, p.52.
total contribution to the UNRWA upto 1977 was estimated at $495,568.

However, any discussion on refugees would be incomplete without examining Israel's position. Whatever might have been the reason, the flight of the refugees was not one-sided; while about 'a million' Arabs were uprooted, at least half a million Jews emigrated to Israel from the Arab countries. The figures were estimated at about 530,000 and Israel had repeatedly argued that a de facto population transfer had taken place and any Arab-Israeli settlement should take this into consideration. For example, speaking in the General Assembly in December 1961 Golda Meir declared:

> About 550,000 Arabs left the territory which is now Israel. A similar number of Jewish refugees from the Arab countries have been integrated into Israel. There has thus been a de facto exchange of population...

Israel believes that the future of the Arab refugees lies in their resettlement in the Arab countries, within the framework of the economic development of the Middle East...

77. Shahid, n.64, p.218.

78. According to Pinner n.63 p.x the break up is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>12,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>42,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>8,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Syria</td>
<td>8,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>31,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>36,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>123,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>46,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>234,942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 537,034

Surprisingly this more or less equals Pinner's estimate that the actual Arab refugees were 539,000.
Israel stands by its readiness to pay compensation for property abandoned by refugees, even before a general peace settlement is concluded - provided these funds are used for the overall solution of the problem. Israel will demand compensation for property of its citizens that was confiscated by the Arab governments.... (79)

But there are some basic differences between the relative situation of Arab and Jewish refugees. Unlike the former, Jewish emigration to Israel was carried out over a period of time. In other words, the migration of half-a-million refugees to Israel took a longer time while the first Arab exodus coincided with the formation of Israel. Jewish emigration was an outcome of the euphoria generated over the formation of Israel and due to the anti-Jewish policies adopted by countries like Iraq, after their failure to prevent the establishment of Israel. Moreover, by this emigration to Israel, the Jews had attained a new national entity and the state was too eager to incorporate and resettle them. The Arab refugees, however, fled to a number of Arab countries and in the bargain, lost, at least temporarily, their Palestinian identity. For the Arab countries to maintain their refugee status proved politically more advantageous than their resettlement. The refugees were also not too eager to be assimilated.

Regarding India's position on the whole issue, no concrete data is available as to its stand on the de facto transfer of population. However, there were

clear indications of the keen interest shown by India, in the successful attempts by Israel to resettle the Jewish refugees from all over the world. In the early days of its independence, resettlement of the refugees from Pakistan was a major preoccupation of India. Therefore, on Nehru's suggestion, in March 1952, Walter Eytan met minister of state for rehabilitation Ajit Prasad Jain and appraised him of the measures taken by Israel in the absorption of the Jewish immigrants.

b. Self-determination:

Self-determination of the people has been one of the most widely accepted political principle in the twentieth century. In principle, it is unacceptable that people can be ruled without their expressed or tacit approval or concurrence. Brought into prominence by President Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', self-determination assumed global sanctity when the concept was included in the purposes and principles of the UN charter. Article 1 of the Charter explicitly pledged, \textit{inter alia},

\begin{quote}
To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples; and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace...
\end{quote}

A number of former colonies and liberation movements had adopted the principle of self-determination as the cornerstone of their nationalist struggle.

But historical evidence shows that this principle was at times overshadowed by great power interests and pragmatic political calculations. The Guatemalan representative at the UNSCOP aptly summed up this situation when he wrote:

All other (i.e. other than Palestine) former Turkish territories dealt with by the treaty of Lausanne were distributed among the victors without consultation of peoples ... The same pattern was followed after World War II. Italy gave up her claims to Trieste, relinquished Fiume to Yugoslavia and yielded the Dodecanese Islands to Greece. Finland ceded Karelia and the province of Petsamo to the Soviet Union. In keeping with the Potsdam agreements, Germany had to cede Koenigsburg to the Soviet Union, and practically all of East Germany along the Oder and Niesse to Poland; in turn, Poland gave its eastern territories to the Soviet. The Soviet also re-incorporated Bessarabia and obtained Northern Bukovina from Rumania and Carpatho-Russia from Czechoslovakia.

In none of these instances, before or after World War II, were the peoples of the ceded territories consulted. International Conferences were held and the decisions taken there...(81)

The consent of the inhabitants was not sought in the division of Germany, Korea, or Vietnam. While these violations cannot be cited to justify the denial of self-determination to Palestine, they do provide some understanding of the working of international relations.

India, at least in theory, is committed to uphold the right of self-determination. Among the various historical examples, the Palestinian question, stands out as the most notable one. Speaking in the plenary

session of the Asian Relations Conference on 24 March 1947 repeating similar attitude, Nehru remarked:

Palestine is essentially an Arab country and no decision can be made without the consent of the Arabs... (82)

This adherence to the right of self-determination became the principal plank for India to oppose the majority plan at the UNSCOP. Abdur Rahman in his forceful note argued:

If the right of self-determination of peoples, as envisaged by President Wilson... is to be the determining factor and if imperialistic designs are to be countenanced no longer, there is no escape from the conclusion that independence should be granted to Palestine forthwith, subject to such interim arrangements for the transfer of power as may seem to be desirable. The people of Palestine have now admittedly reached a stage of development where their recognition as an independent nation can no longer be delayed. They are in no way less advanced than the people of the other free independent Asiatic countries. (83)

After the emergence of Israel, India's support to the political rights of the Palestinians was expressed in terms of its support to their 'natural rights' 'legitimate rights', 'inalienable rights', 'all rights' 'national rights' etc. This vagueness was a mere reflection of the then prevailing international situation. Unequivocal support to Palestinian right to self-determination was largely a post-1973 phenomenon and until the June war the problem was one of the

return of the refugees and their settlement and not about their political rights.

The Bandung Conference exclusively discussed the question of self-determination. But the Palestine question was not referred here and the final communiqué confined its support to "the rights of the Arab people of Palestine and called for the implementation of the 84 UN Resolutions." The Belgrade NAM summit while extending its support for the self-determination of Algeria, Tunisia and Angola restricted itself to support the "full restoration of all the rights of the 85 Arab people of Palestine."

It was in its second summit in Cairo in October 1964 that the NAM explicitly endorsed the principle of 86 self-determination for the Palestinians. Subsequently, it once again reverted to the earlier position of vagueness. In July 1969, the NAM consultative meeting "endorsed the full restoration of the rights of the


86. Ibid. p.21. However, it was rather misleading. While Gaza Strip was under the military administration of Egypt, West Bank including East Jerusalem was part of Jordan and given the latter's position on the West Bank, self determination could only be directed against Israel.
Arab people of Palestine." The third summit at Lusaka in 1970 still 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 is 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." In 1972 it went a step further and, in an unequivocal fashion, affirmed, on behalf of non-aligned solidarity its full and effective support to Egypt, Jordan and Syria in their legitimate struggle to recover entirely and by every means their territorial integrity...(89)

This position on Jordan was maintained in the Algiers summit in September 1973. It, moreover, gave legitimacy to the PLO when it declared that the PLO "is the legitimate representative of the Palestine people and their legitimate struggle."

But the October War of 1973 drastically changed the situation. In 1974, the NAM hailed, the heroic struggle waged by the people of Syria, Egypt and the People of Palestine in October 1973 to liberate its land and restore its rights and sovereignty.

87. Ibid., p.34.
88. Ibid, p. 51
89. Resolution adopted at the NAM Foreign Minister's Conference in Georgetown, Guyana. Ibid p. 83.
90. Ibid., p. 111.
As a pre-condition for peace in the region, the NAM demanded,

Restoration of the Palestine People's national rights, foremost among which is the right to return to its homeland and exercise its right to self-determination. (91)

In March 1975, at its Havana meeting, the NAM endorsed the Arab position of the PLO being "the only legitimate representative of the Palestine people" and formally delinked it from Jordan. All these examples taken together indicate that the NAM adopted an unequivocal stand on self-determination only after the Arab League had reached a consensus on the political status of the PLO. As long as the principle of self-determination was against the Arab or Jordanian interests, it was excluded from all the NAM meetings. The same trend prevailed in the UN. It was only after the Arab League's endorsement of the legitimacy of the PLO and the Jordanian acceptance of its position, that the right of self-determination was endorsed by the UN. In November 1974 the General Assembly resolution 323 (XXIX) formally endorsed the Palestinian "right to self-determination without external interference".


92. Ibid., p.135.

93. The Cairo summit was an exception.

94. Moreover for the first time since 1952, the 1974 General Assembly Session included "Question of Palestine" in its agenda.
What was the general Indian record on self-determination? By and large India had adhered to the principle of right of self-determination of the native inhabitants. It had consistently supported this right in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia etc., yet its application was not universal and, like the other countries, India had used this principle rather selectively to suit its national interests. In the UNSCOP, the right of self-determination of the Arabs was India's foremost weapon against the partition plan. But once Israel came into being and the Arab conflict over non-Israeli Palestine emerged, India began to adopt a milder and pragmatic position. Similarly, keeping in tune with the Arab attitude India never applied this principle to the Kurds. By accepting the Chinese claim over Tibet, it refused to endorse Tibetan right of self-determination.

c. Acquision of Territory by Conquest:

Conquest as a legitimate means of acquiring territories is an off-shoot of the doctrine of 'Might is Right'. All the colonial empires were built up only by this process. The formation of the United Nations led to the rejection of this principle. However, as various instances like the Baltic republics of the

95. The accession of Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim to India were also not free from controversies. Legally speaking, the principle of self-determination was not applied in both the cases.
USSR, the West Bank of Jordan, the Gulf Islands of Iran or Falklands of the U.K. had shown, countries still acquire and maintain territories by force of arms. India's commitment to this principle of opposing territorial conquest was vocal but the application of this was selective. Since the formation of Israel, India had maintained its opposition to Israel's territorial expansion and yet it remained silent or tacitly recognized the conquest of Jordan, Iran, the USSR, the UK and others. It would be safe to conclude that as in the case of any other sovereign state, India applied this principle as and when demanded by larger political and pragmatic considerations.

From the beginning India had maintained its opposition to the Israeli policy regarding its frontiers. It criticized the Israeli capture of Um Reshresh (later named Eilat) after the conclusion of the Egyptian - Israeli armistice agreements. It further argued:

It should be noted that this area [i.e Negev and Eilat] was taken over after talks had commenced with Trans-Jordan (and the Lebanon) for the conclusion of armistice agreements. Israel used as bargaining points its military occupation of areas in the other Arab states and ultimately armistice agreements were arrived at with three remaining Arab States (Lebanon, Jordan and Syria)...(96)

Regarding the territorial limits of the Jewish state, India felt it necessary to highlight the importance of

96. *India and Palestine*, n.2, p.29.
the General Assembly Resolution 181 (II) and added:

Under the partition plan in the General Assembly resolution, the Jewish State was to get approximately 5,500 sq.miles of the territory of the Palestine, which as a whole was 10,423 sq.miles. The present (i.e pre 1967) area of Israel, according to the latest figures available, is said to be 7,993 sq.miles, that is to say 45% in excess of that authorised by the UN Resolution. (97)

Keeping this in mind, at the time of its recognition of Israel in September 1950, India categorically stated:

The recognition of Israel... does not mean that there is no difference between India's attitude and that of Israel over questions like the status of Jerusalem and Israel's frontiers. These questions would be judged by India on merits and due regard would be given to Arab claims... (98)

This argument gained further prominence in India's policy pronouncements, after the June 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. India had forcefully argued that the aggressor (Israel) should not be allowed to enjoy the fruits of aggression nor the territorial conquest be used as the bargaining point. At the General Assembly its Foreign Minister Chagla argued:

...it is a universally recognized and honoured principle of law that the gains of aggression must not be permitted to remain with the aggressor. The United Nations was based on this principle. The founding fathers of its Charter had not written the Charter so that the scourge of war could be considered as an investment by anyone who was strong enough to overcome his neighbours. Faith in the cardinal principle that disputes can be solved only through peaceful means must not be allowed to be eroded. The international

97. Ibid., p.31
98. Statement of the official spokesman reported in The Hindu, 18.9.1950.
community, therefore, cannot acquiesce in Israel keeping the fruits of its conquest...(99)

A closer examination of this position might suggest that by supporting the Arab position on Israel's territorial conquest, India was aiming to consolidate its position vis-a-vis the occupation of its territory by China and Pakistan.

d. Terrorism:

Terrorism had assumed significance since the late 1960s when the Palestinian problem drew wider international attention through the proliferation of hijackings. It had been an important instrument for sizeable section of the PLO to gather international support for their cause. In spite of various attempts, terrorism defies any comprehensive, definite and universal definition. Of late, the term 'state terrorism' has become vogue and the acts of Israel come under this category. Yet terrorism has certain traits: it is the systematic use of violence by individuals, groups or such non-state actors; it has a certain definite political aim which differentiates it from normal crimes; even though it involves violence against innocent non-combattant civilians, it has a wider target population which it threatens to intimidate; and hence it assumes importance not by the number of victims but by the political dividends it could derive from such

99. India and Palestine, n.2, p.64.
acts. But the problem arises when a state supports the political aims of a group which carries out this violence; in that case it is excluded from terrorism by the former, on the plea that the latter is a liberation movement and hence could adopt any means in order to realize its objectives.

Until 1980s - a period beyond the scope of this study - India was relatively free from terrorism and its implications and hence its attitude towards terrorism in general and Palestinian terrorism in particular was one of indifference and non-committal. While individual incidents were condemned, Indian attitude was generally one of sympathy and understanding towards the Palestinians. While it maintained a complete silence on the Munich massacre, the NAM condemned Israel for its rescue operation in Entebbe. The political declaration of the Colombo summit categorically stated,

100. Walter Laqueur, an authority on terrorism wrote "...it has been said that it [i.e., terrorism] resembles pornography, difficult to describe and define, but easy to recognize, when one sees it". "Reflections on Terrorism" Foreign Affairs, Vol.65, no.1 Fall 1986, pp.88-9.

101. This possibly explains why scholars like Jansen, vehemently denied Zionism as a national liberation movement. To do so would mean accepting and recognizing all the means adopted by them to "realise" their Jewish National Home. G.H.Jansen, Zionism, Israel and Asian Nationalism, (Beirut, 1971).

The Conference strongly condemned Israel's flagrant violation of the Republic of Uganda's sovereignty and territorial integrity and the deliberate and wanton destruction of life and property at Entebbe Airport and further condemned Israel for thwarting the humanitarian efforts by the President of Uganda to have all the hostages released...(102)

And India was party to this stand of the Colombo summit.

At the bilateral level, India's position on terrorism was explicitly stated in September 1972. In an official statement on the Munich massacre, issued on 6 September, India declared:

The news of the tragedy in Munich shocked us. Sports and terrorism go ill together. We thought it a good augury that Arabs and Israeli sportsmen were participating in the Olympics in the traditional spirit of sportsmanship...(103)

Till date this has been one of the strongest Indian statement on terrorism. However, when questioned about the political status of al-Fatah, Foreign Minister

102. NAM Documents, p.203, Emphasis added. However, Israel had different understanding of Idi Amin's 'humanitarian efforts' and hence acted differently


104. When three Western diplomats were killed in Khartoum in March 1973, India characterised it as a "condemnable act of lawlessness". MEA Report, 1972-73, p.33
Dinesh Singh declared in Parliament,

...may I say that there is no question of Al-Fatah, being a terrorist organization? It is a revolutionary organization in West Asia of considerable importance. (105)

In spite of all this, India could not prevent its territories from being used for Palestinian acts of violence. Often India became an important link for various acts of violence. According to a study conducted by Jaffee Center, for the period 1968 to 1984 as many as ten Palestinian acts of terrorism either originated from or happened in India.

Given the Indian tradition of non-violence, peaceful co-existence and ahimsa, how can one explain this milder position on terrorism. An answer should be sought in the basic Indian understanding of the Palestinian struggle. Palestine has been an Arab territory. Palestinian struggle against British was anti-imperialist as well liberationist. India endorses the basic rights of the Palestinians even though the exact definition of these rights took a long time to be crystallized. As discussed elsewhere, Indian stand was in line with that of the majority of the world community on the issue. Once India was in agreement.


with the broad political aspirations of the Palestinians, its understanding attitude towards the means of the Palestinian struggle becomes logical and inevitable.

Moreover, Palestinian violence was mainly a reaction to the denial of their national identity and continued Israeli military occupation. While India could not approve terrorism of the Palestinians, it was willing to understand the reasons behind it. At the same time it becomes pertinent to compare India's attitude towards Palestinian and Jewish nationalisms. While it adopting a position of indifference towards Jewish nationalism, Indian nationalists underlined the imperial connections and colonial designs of the Zionists. Had the Indian nationalists understood and appreciated the Jewish nationalist aspirations, their reactions would possibly have been different.

INDIA AND THE PLO

Soon after the first Arab summit in Cairo, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was proclaimed at the Palestine Congress held in East Jerusalem in May-June 1964. Following his visit to the Cairo non-aligned summit, Lal Bahadur Shastri extended an invitation to a PLO delegation in November 1964. Yet

107. William Korey, "India and Israel: Unmasking a Neutral", New Leader, Vol.50, no.15, 17.7.1967 p.8, It is rather surprising that none of the Indian writers had mentioned this reported trip.
nothing substantial took place. In September 1969, al-Fatah which had since joined the PLO, sent a three-member delegation to India, at the invitation of the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity. During this visit, which was officially described as a private visit, it had tried to establish official contacts with the government and was anxious to open an independent office in the Indian capital; but India was cautious and unenthusiastic. Yet the delegation was successful in enlisting the support of the communists in pursuance of their goal. The communists did for the Palestinians what the socialists were doing for Israel -- lobbying.

In August 1970, for example, Bhupesh Gupta of the Communist Party of India, piloted two amendments to the official motion in the Rajya Sabha on the international situation and they read:

...this House urges upon the Government to extend its full support to the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs to return to their homeland and in particular, to the al-Fateh which is leading this struggle.

...this House recommends that the al-Fateh be allowed to open an information office in New Delhi. (109)

In early 1970, the Government of India declared:

The P.L.O. of which al-Fatah is the most widely known constituent, is assuming growing importance as a political force. The organization has become more viable and effective due mainly to its


success in the unification of their different groups. (110)

In the Parliament in March 1970, the government of India declared that al-Fatah "is a secular organization fighting for the the liberation of Palestine".

Around this time the PLO was gaining international acceptance; it had entered the non-aligned movement when NAM consultative meeting took place in Belgrade in July 1969. But its status was somewhat confusing; it attended the Belgrade meeting as a 'participating country' and subsequently its status was described as 'observer'. In the Lima ministerial meeting in August 1975, the PLO's status once again became that of 'participant' and it formally entered the NAM as a full member at the Colombo summit in August 1976.

Referring to the PLO's participation in the Dar es Salaam NAM meeting, India's Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh declared:

110. MEA Report, 1969-70, p.56.
112. NAM Documents, p.32. More over the designation of the Palestinian delegation was also different. It was Palestine Liberation Movement (al Fatah) at Dar es Salaam in April 1970 and Lusaka summit in 1970; and PLO. in Georgetown, Guyana (August, 1972), and in Algiers Summit.
113. Ibid., p.138.
114. Ibid., p 186.
So far as P.L.O is concerned there was no question of the recognition; it was allowed to make a statement along with other liberation movements from colonial territories. (115)

In other words, India was cautiously reacting to PLO's entry into the NAM.

The sixth Arab summit in November 1973 at Algiers was a milestone in the history of the PLO. The Algiers meeting formally declared the PLO to be the "sole representative of the Palestine people", despite the Jordanian reservation. This radically enhanced the status of the PLO; and in October 1974 King Hussain of Jordan reluctantly endorsed this position. In the very next month, the United Nations General Assembly granted 'observer' status to the PLO and its Chairman Yasser Arafat addressed the Assembly. About this time, India acknowledged that it was maintaining contacts with the PLO through diplomatic channels. 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'. All these efforts culminated on 10 January 1975 when India's ambassador in Beirut S.K. Singh signed the necessary documents with the PLO chairman Arafat. Through this accord, India


117. Debates RS, XC, 22.11.1974, 47.

decided to recognize the PLO and to permit an independent PLO office in New Delhi. India thus became the first non-Arab country to do so.

According to Arafat, India's decision should have come somewhat earlier. Speaking to the All India Radio soon after the recognition he remarked.

...I remember, at the last interview between me and her excellancy Mrs. Gandhi, in Algiers, during the non-aligned countries conference, I remember what she had promised me, and now we can say that what she promised me, has been fulfilled. (120)

This meant that India was contemplating the recognition of the PLO even before the Arab summit in Algiers decided to grant legal sanctity to the PLO. Since its recognition, India has been consistently championing participation of the PLO, on an equal footing, in any peace process in West Asia. In March 1980, India accorded diplomatic recognition to the PLO by upgrading its office to that of an embassy endowed with all diplomatic immunities and privileges. This was one of the first foreign policy decisions taken by Mrs. Gandhi after her return to office in January 1980.

119. Asian Recorder, Vol.21, March 5-11, 1975 p. 12475. Till then the Arab League Office in New Delhi was looking after the interests of the PLO.

120. International Documents on Palestine, 1975, (Beirut, 1977) p. 372

121. For example see MEA Report 1975-76, p.75.

Gradually, Indo-PLO ties were strengthened through increased contacts.

INDIA, ISRAEL AND THE PLO

The birth of Israel politically changed the status of Palestine. Even though it was not enthusiastic about an independent Arab state in Palestine, Israel did not stake an exclusive claim to Palestine until June 1967. In other words, Israel's policy was different from Communist China's opposition to the two China theory or the early West German opposition to the recognition of East Germany. In short it was not a question of 'Israel or Palestine'. However, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and its annexation of East Jerusalem brought the entire area of the erstwhile Palestine under Israel's political or military control and this changed the political climate. On the other hand, since its inception in 1964, the PLO had vehemently opposed the formation and existence of Israel. The very title 'liberation' could only mean a liberation from the Jewish state. To set all speculation to rest, Article 24 of the 1964 covenant of the PLO declared:

This Organisation does not exercise any regional sovereignty over the Western Bank in the Hashemite

123. An Indian delegation led by its Lok Sabha Speaker Balram Jakhar attended the 15th session of the Palestine National Council in Damascus in April 1981. This the first time that Indian delegation
Kingdom of Jordan, on the Gaza strip or the Hamma area. Its activities will be on the national popular level in the liberationist, organizational, political and financial fields.

If West Bank and Gaza were excluded by the PLO it left only Israel to be liberated. Once Jordan lost control over West Bank to Israel in 1967, the need to have any clarification was lost and hence this article was dropped from the revised charter adopted in 1968.

The 1968 charter formally and beyond any trace of doubt rejected the establishment and the existence of Israel in as many as four articles. They were:

Article 1: Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people: it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation.

Article 2: Palestine, with the boundaries it had during the British mandate, is an indivisible territorial unit.

Article 19: The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of the State of Israel are entirely illegal, regardless of the passage of time...

Article 20: The Balfour Declaration, the mandate for Palestine and everything that has been based upon them, are deemed null and void. (124)

This charter forms the foundation of the PLO and is endorsed by all the Palestine National Council meets and hence supersedes all the ambiguous statements made by various leaders of the PLO regarding the existence

124. For a majority of Israelis, the PLO Charter was a death warrant against Israel. For an Israeli interpretation and evaluation of the Charter see Y.Harkabi, The Palestinian Convenent and its Meaning (London, 1979).
of Israel. The declaration of the State of Palestine in November 1988, therefore became a first major step taken by the PLO to express its willingness to co-exist with Israel. In other words, an Arab state of Palestine along with Israel and not replacing Israel. But for the purpose of comparing India's recognition of Israel and the PLO this new development is not relevant. When the PLO was recognized in 1975 by India, the former denied Israel's right to exist. By the same token Israel by its refusal to an unconditional withdrawal and its action aimed at changing the demography of West Bank through settlements, denied the Palestinians their national rights.

While recognizing Israel in 1950 India had formally expressed its reservations vis-a-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. While India was one of the last independent non-Muslim states in 1950 to recognize Israel, it became the first non-Arab state to recognize the PLO. Similarly, 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

125. It is be possible that had some reservations about its Charter and they were not spelt out due to political considerations. Even if it had differences with the PLO they were not spelt out publicly as happened with Israel in 1950.
years. In 1950 its recognition of Israel was conveyed through an unilateral message whereas its recognition of the PLO was formalized through an agreement between India and the PLO.

Considering the above developments, certain broad conclusions may be drawn on the Indo-Palestinian relations and the factors governing them. Coming to the latter first, India broadly supported the right of self-determination of nations, opposed territorial acquisition through military conquest and rejected violence in international relations especially in the form of terrorism. Available evidence indicates that the application of those principles was not universal. In a complex and ever-changing international situation, it would be impossible, unnecessary, and at times even futile to transform these principles into policies. Every nation, depending upon its history and tradition would develop certain ideals; but these are mainly guidelines as larger political considerations and pragmatism overtake idealism. Hence the apparent contradiction. Looking from this angle, it would appear that India, in spite of its formal commitment to self-determination, fighting terrorism etc., did not transform them into policies, and rightly so.

As far as Indo-Palestinian relations were concerned they could be divided into three broad periods: the pre-partition years; the period between
partition and the emergence of the PLO in 1964 and the post-1964 era. India's position on partition was one of vehement opposition to the division of Palestine on communal grounds and it explained its support for the Arabs in terms of self-determination and secularism. But the fait accompli of Israel changed the situation. The Arab-Israel War of 1948 and the subsequent developments revealed the absence of any viable Arab leadership and the inter-Palestinian and inter-Arab rivalries. Hence in the second phase, India's policy was one of ambiguity. While generally supporting the Arabs it left the details undefined except for the refugees' right to return. This trend was largely a reflection of the then prevailing Arab thinking on the whole issue and continued even after the formation of the PLO. It was only after the October war of 1973 and the Arab summit in Algiers, that the PLO became strong politically. India then began to establish formal ties with the PLO and made it an important plank of its policy. All this happened about three decades after the formation of Israel. According to various accounts, the most crucial decision on normalization came soon after Walter Eytan's New Delhi visit in 1952 and at that time Palestinian factor was of marginal influence.