CHAPTER 3

INDIA AND ISRAEL: AN OVERVIEW
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In its foreign policy, India largely inherited the legacy of the Indian National Congress (INC). As the INC became the leading political force in the country and in government, its pre-1947 postures and policies had a continuing influence on India's domestic and foreign policies. Once in power it began to adopt pragmatic and realistic positions, as in the case of Commonwealth membership. In other areas, such as Israel, modifications and changes were slower and minimal. 'Historical legacy' finds a prominent position in all major Indian writings on Palestine/Israel. This applies both to official and academic writings. It is true that the Indian attitude towards Zionism prior to 14 May 1948, influenced and to some extent determined Indian policy towards Israel. It is equally true that the formation of Israel and its quick acceptance by both the rival blocs radically changed the scenario. The Indian leadership was conscious of the implications of the new situation. Writing to the Chief Ministers, on 20 May 1948, within days after Israel was proclaimed, Nehru remarked:

The attitude that India has taken up over this matter [i.e the partition of Palestine] has been justified by subsequent events. But these very events have made it difficult to go back to that particular position now. (1)

In other words, the proclamation of Israel made partition a *fait accompli* and India was, hence, not in favour of maintaining *status quo ante* position *vis-a-vis* partition. Even if India were to perpetuate its earlier stand, the geographical, legal and political realities of Palestine underwent a metamorphosis. India was quick to come to terms with the new situation and began to interact with Israel.

**RECOGNITION**

A general understanding of the concept is essential for an inquiry into the various facets and controversies surrounding India's *recognition* of Israel. Recognition can be defined as "a formal acknowledgement or declaration by the government of an existing state, that it intends to attach certain customary legal consequences to an existing set of facts which, in its view, justify it in doing so."

It is the acceptance of a newly born state to the comity of nations as an international person. At the theoretical level there are two schools of thought on

2. It should, however, be noted that major emphasis of Indian writings on the issue concentrated on India's opposition to partition while ignoring the impact of the *fait accompli* status of Israel.

3. Recognition is always used to indicate India's Recognition of Israel. In other cases it is written normally or without italics.

this subject -- the Constitutive and Declaratory theories of recognition. According to Oppenheim, a staunch advocate of the former, "A State is, and becomes, an International Person through recognition only and exclusively". Hence the recognition by others would be a pre-requisite for the existence of a new state. On the contrary, the other school views recognition as "utmost a formal admission of already existing facts". In other words, the advocates of the Declaratory theory believed that the recognition alone does not constitute a State's existence.

Regarding India, Mehrish concludes that in its position "recognition registers but does not create a situation". With regard to format, India's recognition had been explicit and often in the form of official communiqué. There are two comprehensive studies on India's policy on recognition -- K. P. Misra and B. N. Mehrish -- and more often than not their conclusions are not


6. Von Glahn, n. 4, p. 91.

7. Neither of them is exclusively convincing. The Arab non-recognition did not affect Israel's existence as a sovereign state. Similarly recognition by more than 100 states, did not make the PLO proclaimed 'State of Palestine' a sovereign entity.


similar. Some of their inferences on Israel are questionable in the light of later developments and fresh data currently available on this issue. Therefore, a close examination of the various aspects of recognition becomes essential. This includes issues like the formal request for recognition, and the process, nature, delay, rationale and consequences of recognition. An inquiry into each of them would provide new insights.

a. REQUEST

Within hours of its proclamation, the State-of-Israel began approaching other states for recognition. Prime Minister Nehru had given two different dates as to when such a request was made. Answering the Constituent Assembly in August 1948 he declared:

A telegram was received in the middle of June 1948 from Monsieur Moshe Shertock [i.e. later Sharett] Foreign Minister of the Provisional Government of the State of Israel, containing a request for recognition of the Jewish State. (10)

Until recently this was considered accurate. But according to Letters to Chief Ministers published in 1985, such a request was made even earlier. In his fortnightly letter, dated 20 May 1948, Nehru formally acknowledged that his government had received a request from Israel for recognition. According to

Israeli documents, Foreign Minister Shertok's cable to Nehru, was sent on 17 May 1948. There was no mention of a reminder being sent to India and hence the mid-June date could only be a mix-up. These two different dates provide completely contrasting pictures as to the importance Israel attached to India.

b. PROCESS

In spite of the mid-May request, India took as long as twenty-eight months to formally recognize Israel. During the interim period--between May 1948 and September 1950 --there were definite and incontrovertible indications of India's willingness to formally accept Israel as a fellow member of the international community. Positive Indian indications are available in plenty both in Indian and Israeli sources. Writing in May 1948, Nehru remarked:

We proposed to take no action in this matter [i.e. recognition] at present. India can play no effective part in this conflict at the present stage either diplomatically or otherwise. We can only watch events for the time being, hoping that an opportunity may come when we could use our influence in the interest of peace and mediation.(13)

Thus the initial response to the request was one of acknowledging its receipt while deferring any decision.

12. Israel State Archives, File No 2424/19. Hereafter referred as ISA. It is interesting to note that because of its implications, Sharett's request was not acknowledged by India. Note d. 4.10.1948, National Archives of India F.46 (21)-AWT/48. Hereafter referred as NAI.

Three months later he declared that "a new State was formed and we had to wait". In the same way, he observed in February 1949, that recognition would be "guided not only by idealistic considerations but also a realistic appraisal of the situation." A month later he reiterated that Israel "is undoubtedly a State which is functioning as such; and the honourable member's opinion (H.V.Kamath) about it having come to stay may be correct". In the wake of Israel's admission to the UN, in spite of India's opposition, he wrote on 3 June 1949: "We shall have to consider our future policy in regard to it [i.e., UN membership of Israel] carefully".

Before proceeding further it should be stated that while the Indian pronouncements were cautious internally, its position was more forthrightly stated abroad. Decision on recognition was a foregone conclusion abroad, at least as early as in September 1948, and only the exact time was uncertain. While Nehru was preparing the domestic support for

recognition, a friendlier and sympathetic attitude towards Israel proved pragmatic overseas, especially in the US. India's Ambassador in Washington B.N. Rau referred to normalization of ties with Israel as early as 28 September 1948. In mid-May 1949, Vijayalakshmi Pandit who succeeded Rau in the US, observed that India intended to recognize Israel at an appropriate time and added that "this may happen soon after the settlement of the Kashmir dispute". In June 1949, Rau, who had since moved to the UN, dealt at length the common political issues which brought India and Israel closer and added that there was no conflict of interests between the two states. In another meeting with Ambassador Elath on 30 September 1949 Mrs. Pandit observed that India was steadily moving towards recognition and the decision could not be delayed further.

Soon Elath had a lengthy meeting with Nehru, when the latter visited the US in October 1949. Commenting on this the Israeli Ambassador cabled:

... Nehru listened attentively, obviously disturbed by mention Turkey's recognition. In reply after announcing complete frankness he explained India's attitude (towards) Israel. People never anti-semitic, Hitler made them


friends of Jews. Many Indians admired in past Zionist work in Palestine and now most sympathetic (to) Israel. He had to choose slow, long, way towards recognition (in) order (to) justify it objectively and minimize internal opposition... He arrived (at the) conclusion recognition cannot be postponed much longer.... To my question whether he could mention possible date (of) recognition he replied (he) would deal matter immediately on return(ing) India early November and we could expect recognition before January [i.e., January 1950] ...(22)

On returning home, Nehru declared that the recognition of Israel "cannot obviously be indefinitely deferred."

Even though India's recognition was not forthcoming immediately, Rau formally invited Ambassador Aubrey S.Eban (later Abba Eban) for the inauguration of the Indian Republic.

The delay in recognition however did not inhibit India from formally approaching Israel for technical assistance. On 15 November 1947 -- even before the UN vote on Palestine -- acting on the suggestions of K.M. Panikkar and Shiva Rao, Chaim Weizmann offered technical assistance to India which Nehru accepted in principle. As a result of a series of discussions and


24. For the original invitation see, ISA 71/14.

25. Indian Delegates to UN.

offers, in March 1949, India formally requested agricultural assistance from Israel. As an Israeli diplomat observed, "India's approach to us for loan of agricultural experts showed that no real hostility existed". The most promising statement on recognition came in February 1950 when Nehru declared in the Provisional Parliament:

The fact that the State of Israel exists is of course recognized by the Government of India. But formal recognition involving an exchange of diplomatic missions has to be considered in connection with a number of factors. (30)


28. India's Ministry of Agriculture wrote:

"As discussed personally, we [Government of India] are particularly in need of experts in the following matters:

1. Expert in Cooperative Farming
2. Expert in Intensive Cultivation
3. Two or three experts in drilling for tubewells both with percussion rigs as well as rotary rigs..."

K.L. Panjabi to H.Cynozicz, d. 26.3.1949, ISA 2555/5. When the Ministry of Agriculture made this request, India had not recognized Israel. Therefore Cynozicz, the then representative of the Jewish Agency in India, was asked to take up the request with "your people in Palestine".


30. Debates PP 1 : 1, 27.2.1950, 495-6. The latter part of the statement could also be interpreted that in the absence of diplomatic relations, the September 1950 action was not a "formal recognition".
These statements and pronouncements clearly indicated the thought process of the Indian government and its long willingness to recognize Israel. They also revealed the delicacy with which India approached the issue. However, this delay was not favourably viewed in Israel and Walter Eytan summed up its feelings:

Two years after the establishment of the State of Israel, India remains one of the few non-Arab, non-Muslim countries which have not recognized her. Israel had always attributed a special value to India's recognition, due to her prestigious status in Asia. During the past two years, considerable efforts have been invested in making contacts with high-ranking Indian personalities but despite many promises and demonstrations of friendship, India has not yet taken this step.

Now that 60 countries have recognized Israel, recognition by additional one is no longer a burning issue and Israel has ceased trying to persuade vacillating countries, including India. Moreover belated recognition is of lesser political and moral weight than that accorded close to the state's establishment... (31)

On 17 September 1950 a crisp official communiqué read:

"The Government of India have decided to accord recognition to the Government of Israel". A day earlier this was officially conveyed to Israel through the Indian and then Israeli embassies in Washington. The customary reference to the willingness to establish normal diplomatic relations was conspicuous by its absence.


32. ISA, 71/14 b.
absence. Nations by convention recognize the state as well as its government and given the circumstances surrounding the establishment of Israel, an unambiguous reference to the State of Israel would have been more appropriate.

c. NATURE OF RECOGNITION

There was no unanimity among Indian scholars as to the legal status of recognition. Like the USSR, India did not specify in September 1950, whether its recognition of Israel was de facto or de jure. According to K.P. Misra, India had generally extended recognition without any reference to its de facto or de jure status. On the contrary, Mehrish concludes that "in case India has accorded only de facto recognition... that has not been followed by full diplomatic intercourse or the conferment of diplomatic immunities upon their representatives" and cited Israel as an example. A careful analysis would, however,

33. Even if only the newly born State was recognized as Von Glahn observed, such a recognition "automatically involves recognition of the Government of that State, for no one could envision recognition of the whole unit without inclusion of its operating agency, its government", Von Glehn, n.4, pp.95-6.

34. Exploiting this ambiguity, some Indian writers went on to argue that India's recognition was temporary and could be withdrawn any time. Francis Parakatil, India and the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (New Delhi, 1975), p.75.

35. Misra, n.9, p.192.

36. Mehrish, n.8, p.80.
indicate that in spite of its vagueness, India's recognition was de facto as well as de jure. First, Nehru's February 1950 statement clearly indicated that India had accepted Israel de facto even prior to its recognition. Secondly, a number of official statements in the subsequent years declared that recognition was de jure. In July 1971 -- a time when normalization of ties was remote -- the government declared in the Parliament: "India extended de jure recognition to Israel in September 1950". And thirdly in his New Delhi Diary of 1952, Walter Eytan provided new insights to the controversy when he wrote:

Miss Naidu [who was dealing West Asia in the Ministry of External Affairs when Eytan visited India] also told me of the argument they had had in the Ministry at the time they recognized Israel -- whether it should be de jure or de facto. The Secretary General, on being apprised of this problem, had consulted all their legal authorities and had come to the conclusion that he couldn't see what difference there was between de facto and de jure recognition; so they recognized us pure and simple...(38)

d. DELAY

In spite of the atmosphere favourable to Israel, India took more than two years to decide. The recognition of a state or government is the prerogative of the recognizing state and as such nations adopt a wait-and-watch policy to satisfy themselves that the newly born entity had fulfilled the necessary

38. Walter Eytan, New Delhi Diary, ISA 2383/21
conditions and became eligible for recognition. Similarly as the cases of East Germany, Algeria and Bangladesh indicated, India had followed a cautious approach to recognition. But this alone does not explain the delayed recognition of Israel. Two more reasons can be given for the Indian delay.

First, in the wake of the communal vivisection of the sub-continent and the subsequent communal riots, the sentiments of the Muslims towards Israel assumed added importance. In early August 1948 -- soon after the formation of Israel--Jhunjhunwala drew the attention of the Constituent Assembly to the cable sent to Truman and Molotov. In this message the President of the Jamiat - ul ulemai - Hind conveyed the resentment of the Indian Muslims towards their recognition of Israel. A fortnight later Begam Aizaz Rasul raised the following question in the same Assembly:

Will the Honourable the Prime Minister keep in mind the fact that there are a large number of people living in the Indian Dominion whose wishes and sentiments in this regard should be kept in view regarding the recognition of the State of Israel and they are definitely opposed to it ?

Even though not officially admitted inside the country,

39. The cable referred to was sent in 1948 and in a non-committal reply Nehru said "...such activities of private organizations in no way claim to represent government policy ", Debates CA, II : I, 9.8.1948, 28.

in their conversations with the Israelis, the sentiments of the Muslims was often cited by Indian diplomats as well as Prime Minister Nehru as the stumbling block in recognition. For example, on his meeting with Nehru in October 1949, Elath cabled:

Turning to recognition he (ie., Nehru) said Indian partition was most painful operation... Pakistan however became theocratic state preventing national assimilation (of) Muslims of India. Hence Indian government must treat its thirty million Muslims most carefully. Palestine was source (of) constant agitation and made deep impression (on) Moslems everywhere... (sic) (41)

Nehru made similar observations when Walter Eytan met him in March 1952. If one analyses the Israeli documents there were numerous instances wherein India referred to the feelings of the Muslims towards Israel.

Secondly, India did not wish to antagonize the Arabs by adopting any hasty move. Given the Arab animosity towards Israel and the past Indian support to the Arabs on the Palestine question, India probably did not wish to precipitate the situation. In October 1949 Elath reported: "He [ie., Nehru] recently discussed Israel with Arab and Moslem envoys (in) New Delhi, emphasizing necessity (of) reconciliation (with) realities and preparing them for our inevitable


42. New Delhi Diary, ISA 2383/21.
recognition by India". As an immediate reaction, in November the Iraqi delegate to the UN "brought strong pressure on (the) Chief delegate (of) India to activate against Indian recognition (of) Israel".

Similarly the official note prepared by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in February 1950 remarks:

The consensus of opinion expressed by our Missions in Arab countries, as a result of their conversations with knowledgeable persons in these countries and as a result of their own study of the question, is that the recognition of Israel by India would displease the Arabs and be treated as an unfriendly act and would certainly aggravate our relations with Pakistan. It has been brought to our notice that Saudi Arabia would be particularly concerned at our recognition of Israel. Our Missions have, therefore, emphatically advised us against our recognition of Israel till the outstanding question of (i) settlement of Arab refugees (ii) boundary between Israel and the Arab World and (iii) Holy places of Jerusalem are satisfactorily settled.

The view has also been expressed that any premature recognition of Israel might affect the position of Indians in Bahrain, Kuwait and other places in the Persian Gulf and the Middle east. The displeasure of the Israel may also have serious repercussions on Hajj pilgrimage by India Muslims and thus give rise to domestic difficulties. (45).

Likewise S.Gopal observes:

... on the question of Israel's admission to the United Nations, his [ie Nehru's] first reaction


44. Walter Eytan to A.Eban, d.21.11.1949,ibid p.637.

45. This note was prepared anticipating supplementary question on Israel by Ram Chandra Upadyaya along with the main question in Parliament on 27.2.1950. NAI F.23 (2)-AWT/50
was to abstain. Later, as part of the policy of cooperation with the Islamic States, he ordered the Indian delegation to vote against...(46)

After India's recognition, Nehru formally acknowledged the Arab factor in delaying the recognition of Israel. On 1 October 1950 he wrote:

We would have done this [i.e., the recognition of Israel] long ago, because Israel is a fact. We refrained because of our desire not to offend the sentiments of our friends in the Arab Countries.(47)

Speaking, soon after the recognition, India's Ambassador in Cairo remarked:

For some time now announcements were being made that India did intend to recognise Israel and that it was only a question of time. India's intentions were made known well in advance to the Arab diplomats in New Delhi and to the Governments in the Middle East through Cairo. Some of these Governments requested India to postpone her decision but India felt that any further postponement would not serve any useful purpose...(48)

Moreover by the time India recognized Israel, all the confronting Arab States had formally signed armistice agreements with Israel, which in a way meant tacit Arab recognition of the Jewish state.


49. They were with Egypt on 24.2.1949, Lebanon 23.3.1949; Jordon 3.4.1949 and Syria 20.7.1949. In a letter to the UN, both Saudi Arabia (8.2.1949) and Iraq (13.2.1949) expressed their support to any Arab-Israeli Armistice agreements.
e. RATIONALE

As a sequel to the delay, it becomes essential to understand why India decided to recognize Israel. From the data available one could infer six possible explanations. First, as discussed earlier, India has committed to the Declaratory Theory of Recognition. The general Indian policy had been to recognize a state as soon as it fulfils the basic requirements of a state and expresses its ability and willingness to honour international commitments and law. Hence recognition of Israel was a logical course of action.

Second, Israel had become a fait accompli and was recognized by a large number of states. Iran and Yugoslavia, which co-sponsored the Federal Plan along with India, had already recognized Israel. Besides three Islamic states -- Turkey, Iran and Indonesia -- had also recognized the Jewish state prior to India's recognition. And above all, Israel had become a member

50. 15.3.1950
51. 19.5.1948.
52. Incidentally, Yugoslavia which proposed the Federal Plan, abstained when partition came up for voting in the UN.
53. 29.3.1949.
54. Since Indonesia was born later, it was recognized by Israel on 12.1.1950 and the Indonesian Premier and Foreign Minister Muhammed Hatta formally sent a note to Moshe Sharett thanking him for Israel's recognition, Israel Documents, CV.V, p.95.
of the United Nations. Explaining this link, Nehru remarked: "... our policy (is) to recognise any country that was an independent functioning country represented in the United Nations". Similarly Krishna Menon remarked: "I have always taken the view that whatever country is recognized by the UN should be recognized by us". Moreover the case of Israel evoked rare consensus among the rival blocs. While membership of a number of countries like Jordan and Albania was blocked, Israel's membership was unanimously endorsed by both the blocs. Recognition, hence, was the obvious step.

A third consideration was India's recognition policy vis-a-vis the Communist China. India was of the opinion that the nature of the regime in Peking could not be the criterion for non-recognition. Questions were raised in the Constituent Assembly regarding 'various criteria' being applied by India in recognizing new states. K.P. Misra observed that a different attitude with regard to Israel "would have placed India in a paradoxical situation".

58. Misra, n.9, pp.57-8.
Fourthly, India was genuinely interested in playing a mediatory role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Explaining the decision to recognize Israel, the official spokesman observed: "...continuing non-recognition is not only inconsistent with the overall relationship but even limits the effectiveness of the Government of India's role as a possible intermediary between Israel and the Arab States". Even when deciding to oppose Israel's admission to the UN, Nehru was aware of the need to adopt a more balanced attitude towards Israel. In May 1949 he wrote: "It is about time that we made some of these Arab countries feel that we are not going to follow them in everything in spite of what they do".

Fifthly, a sizable and vocal section of the Indian public opinion favoured speedy recognition of Israel. The issue was frequently raised in the Constituent Assembly and the government obviously could not have remained immune. The issue first sprang up in August 1948 when H.V. Kamath questioned the government's policy and since then every session was plagued with demand for recognition. Besides this internal

phenomenon, a number of prominent Indians living abroad were actively campaigning for Israel's recognition. One of these personalities was Prof. Taraknath Das of the New York University who seemed to have played an active and crucial role in India's recognition. Thus it is necessary to look into his role in detail.

Reporting on his role, Jerome Unger, the Executive Director of the American Zionist Council wrote in October 1950:

... Dr. Das has played a most significant role in the events that have just led to India's recognition... He is in constant correspondence with the Director of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai. In this interchange of views, Dr. Das has continually hammered on the point of Indian recognition for Israel, basing his argument not only on the merits of the case but on India's need for dependable allies in the struggle over Kashmir...

Finally on August 21, Sir Girja wrote: "As for the recognition of Israel, I have already written to you that this should be feasible in the near future. I shall now take up the question of fixing a date"... Dr. Das's first step was to write Sir Girja, emphasizing the importance of timing the recognition before September 19, the opening of the UN General Assembly... Dr. Das then won over to support of this view Mr. G.J. Watumull, the wealthiest and most influential Indian businessman resident in the United States... On September 6, Mr. Watumull sent the following cable to Prime Minister Nehru: 'Respectfully suggest India's immediate recognition of Israel before opening of United Nations Assembly...' Mr. Watumull then phoned... to a friend of his who is now advisor to India's U.N. delegation, Professor Amiya Chakravarty urging the Professor to discuss the issue of recognition of Israel with Dr. Das and to do everything possible to further it. Professor Chakravarty conceded the correctness of Dr. Das' stand and asked what he could do. Dr. Das pointed out that what would probably be most effective would be a cable to Mr. Nehru from Professor Chakravarty, Sir B.N. Rao and his brother Shiva
Rao couched in terms of the strategic value of recognition to India in the U.N. The cable was sent a few days before the seventeenth of September...

In the meantime Dr. Das had written to all the Chief Indian supporters of a pro-Zionist orientation asking them to exert whatever influence they could on New Delhi. These persons included Dr. Tandon, the new head of the Congress Party and Syama Prasad Mookerji...

Also Dr. Das sent to a score of the most important Indian papers "A plea to Recognize Israel", which was printed in a number of them during the second week of September. He there suggested that a most suitable date for recognition before the opening of the U.N. session would be September 12, the Jewish New Year. There is an interesting reaction to this in a letter of September 24 to Das from Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai. Sir Girja writes: "Our recognition of Israel was announced on the 18th of this month, that is, one day before the Assembly session began. I tried hard to arrange it for the Jewish New Year but that was not possible. There were many protests from the Arab countries but we stood firm..." (63)

Finally, effective lobbying was done by Israel as well as some leading Americans. There was no let up in the Israeli attempts to court and influence India and these wide-spread efforts were carried out mainly in the US. Personal and regular contacts were established with a number of leading Indian diplomats and delegates like Asaf Ali, B.N. Rau, Shiva Rao, Mrs. Pandit and Krishna Menon. Among the Americans the pro-Indian Congressman Emanuel Celler played a key role in the campaign for Indian recognition. He took an active part in the Nehru-Elath Washington meeting in October

63. Unger's letters to Nahum Goldmann d. 9.10.1950, Central Zionist Archies file, Z6/372, Emphasis original, Hereafter CZA.
1949 and according to Elath,

He [i.e., Nehru] arrived (at the) conclusion recognition cannot be postponed much longer. Here he turned (to) Celler saying it would be unwise to grant Israel recognition during his [Nehru's] stay because this (is) liable (to be) interpreted as American pressure...(64)

Another notable Jewish leader to campaign for Israel's recognition was the British M.P. Sidney Silverman.

Similarly leading Israeli personalities like Chaim Weizmann contributed their mite to win over India's support. In the same fashion Olsvanger who had established personal contacts and relations with Nehru in mid-thirties also made efforts in this direction.

Even before the formation of Israel, the renowned scientist Einstein sought Nehru's support for the Jewish cause. Given this world-wide star-studded


67. CZA, K-11, 81/3

68. In his reply Nehru wrote inter alia : " Where rights come into conflict it is not an easy matter to decide....I confess that while I have great deal of sympathy for the Jews, I feel sympathy for the Arabs also in this predicament.... I would like to do all in my power to help the Jewish people in their distress in so far as I can do without injuring other people....". Nehru to Einstein, d. 11.7.1947,Nehru Works, Series II, vol. III, pp. 393-6.
lobbying, India could only delay and not deny recognition.

Besides these, K.R. Singh adds that the growing friendship between Pakistan and the Arab countries had contributed to India's recognition. Elaborating this aspect Gopal observes: "...the vote cast by Farouk's Egypt against India on the Hyderabad issue in the United Nations disposed him [i.e., Nehru] towards accepting the fact of Israel and recognizing her".

f. LEGAL STATUS

The recognition of Israel provoked controversy over the distinction between recognition and normal diplomatic relations. In the absence of official ties between the two countries, some Indian scholars have contended that recognition was a legal act and the exchange of diplomats a political one. Explaining this connection Misra argues: "...recognition cannot be considered a political act simply because the executive branch of a government sits in judgement over it". However, available data does not substantiate this contention. While recognition per se is a legal

71. Singh, n.69, pp. 75-6; Misra, n.9, p.60; Mehrish, n.8, p.80.
phenomenon, the entire process and inputs are political in character.

In its policy pronouncement on China, in 1950 the US government argued:

In the view of the United States diplomatic recognition is a privilege and not a right. Moreover, the United States considers that diplomatic recognition is an instrument of national policy which is both its right and its duty to use in the enlightened self-interest of the nation. (73)

Elaborating this, Appleton argues: "It is not likely that governments will forego the use of it [i.e., recognition] if they are convinced that significant advantages may be gained by granting or withholding it at their discretion". As historical examples like Western countries' attitude vis-a-vis Communist China or the Arab position over Bangladesh had shown, recognition was withheld not because the state in question did not fulfil the legal requirements. Similarly there were instances wherein the entity in question was recognized by others even though it did not possess the attributes of a state. The self


proclaimed 'All Palestine Government' in Gaza was recognized by a number of Arab states even though it did not possess the fundamental ingredient of a state—sovereignty. As Von Glahn remarks, recognition is rather a political act with legal consequences.

g. CONSEQUENCES:

It is customary, if not mandatory, that recognition is followed by establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the states in question. The recognizing state by its action, conveys its intention and willingness to formulate diplomatic and commercial ties with the recognized state. Yet it is neither necessary nor possible that a state should establish relations with all the states it had recognized. If this is the case, then India's non-relations with Israel should not attract any attention, as India did not maintain relations with a number of states that had recognized Israel.


76. The self-proclaimed Palestine State declared in November, 1988 suffers from this drawback in spite of being 'recognized' by many.

77. Von Glahn, n.4, p.91.

78. For example, in 1980s New Zealand closed down its High Commission in New Delhi as part of austerity measures and later reopened.
small or distant states. India's initial willingness to maintain normal ties with Israel and its subsequent inability to do so make the study more interesting. The intentions of India did not receive adequate attention among Indian scholars and recognition was often treated as a not-so-significant event.

Speaking on Spain in 1956, Nehru agreed that "a logical consequence of that [i.e. recognition] was to exchange diplomatic mission, subject of course, to our having the personnel". The same logic could be applied to Israel. An official note dated 4 April 1951 clearly reveals the favourable view on normalization. It remarked: "In order to ensure that we obtain a clear picture of the Middle East it is necessary for us to open a mission in Israel as soon as possible". At the time of its independence, India's resident missions in West Asia were confined to Cairo, Tehran and Istanbul; in short, Cairo alone in the entire Arab world. The

79. For example M.S. Agwani, "The Palestine Conflict in Asian Perspective", in I. Abu-Lughod, (ed) The Transformation of Palestine, (Evanston, Ill, 1971) p. 456; Mehrish, n.8 p.80; Parakatil, n.34 p.75; Singh, n.69 p.75.


81. This note was prepared when Victor Grunwald, a Notary Public of Tel Aviv made an offer in September 1950 to act as India's Honorary Consul in Israel. NAI F.22(31)-AWT/50.

initial concern of the Ministry of External Affairs was focused on reducing its budget through various administrative measures. The Annual Report for 1949-50 remarked:

In view of the imperative need for all possible economies on expenditure, the proposal for establishing consular representation at Mehshed and Koramshahr (Iran), Basra, Bahrain and Muscat have been kept in abeyance.(83)

Likewise, an official note prepared for the supplementary questions in Parliament in December 1950 remarked: "...Owing to reasons of financial strigency, the case of Israel has presumably to wait for more propitious times." In the following year the Ministry argued that "as a measure of economy, the Heads of Mission in certain countries were concurrently accredited." As a result, even in the early 1950s Indian Ambassador in Cairo, K.M. Panikkar, was concurrently accredited to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Taking note of this, Israel proposed that the Indian diplomat in Ankara be concurrently accredited to Israel but the proposal was not viewed favourably.

84. Note for Supplementaries, NAI F.23(7)-AWT/50. The main question was raised by H.V.Kamath on 11.12.1950
87. Shimoni to Pollack, d.16.12.1951, ISA 2554/12.
Soon after recognition Nehru ruled out any diplomatic exchanges due to "financial and other reasons" and added that the government was "anxious to avoid additional commitments abroad at present." Two years later India formally declared:

Owing mainly to the existing financial stringency it has not been found possible to establish missions in these countries [in Israel, Saudi Arabia and Yemen] so far (89)

This proves beyond doubt that India had intended to establish a mission in Israel. Gopal elaborates this:

In March 1952 Nehru informed the Israeli government that there was no major objection to the exchange of diplomatic representatives, but it might be better to wait for the formation of a new government after the elections. (90)

Moreover, in the initial days of its independence, absence of diplomatic relations was more of a rule for India than an exception. Even by 1961 India did not maintain relations with about a third of the countries which it had recognized.

A formal and officially negative attitude towards normalization was noticeable during the 1956 Suez

91. Krishna Menon remarked : "We don't send Ambassadors to a lot of countries". Brecher, n.56, p.79.
92. Out of the 81 countries it had recognised, it did not maintain relations with 24 States. Debates LS, II : 5.9.1961.
Crisis. Nehru declared that "in view of the existing passions" diplomatic exchange was not possible. This argument - "the time is not yet ripe"-had subsequently become the standard Indian position. Later on, Nehru himself had admitted that exchanges should have been carried out in the earlier days of recognition. This view was shared by others like Krishna Menon and Morarji Desai. In September 1963, Dinesh Singh added one more reason by stating in the Parliament, "The Government of India have not considered it necessary to establish a Consulate in Israel because there is not enough consular work to justify a post." The aftermath of the June War added two more reasons for the non-relation. First, Israel had followed 'wrong' policies against the Arabs and particularly vis-a-vis the

93. _Dabates LS, I : IX part II, 20.11.1956; 595._

94. For example in 1960 Nehru remarked: "We did not send a mission because we thought we would approach a little nearer to the solution to problems there by not doing so" _Jerusalem Post_, 13.5.1960.


96. He observed: "If we had sent an Ambassador at that time [i.e soon after recognition] there would have been no difficulty". Brecher, n.56, p.79.

97. Personal Interview with Morarji Desai on 22.10.1987 at Bombay. Hereafter _Interview Desai_.

98. _Debates LS, III : XX 9.9.63; 5019._

Palestinians. And secondly, India could not accept the criterion that religion could become the basis for nationality. However, neither of the premises was convincing. What was unquestionable was that at least during Nehru's time the principle of diplomatic ties per se was not challenged. Following Eytan's visit, K.P.S. Menon (Sr), the then Ambassador in Moscow, wrote in October 1952:

I am very sorry that the exchange of Missions between India and Israel has not yet taken place. I hope and trust that it is now only a matter of a few weeks. I shall do all I can from this end, as I am really keen that we should establish a Mission in Israel without further delay... (101)

Taking into account the then prevailing political climate this letter does not appear to be a mere act of diplomatic courtesy.

The cool Indian reception did not prevent Israel from establishing contacts and cultivating relations with Indian diplomats abroad. These were supplemented by visits to India by various Israeli officials and political figures as well as by the leaders of the world Jewry. Even prior to its recognition India allowed an aliya office in Bombay which facilitated the transit to Israel of Indian Jews as well as

100. The Arab States were equally, if not more, responsible for the plight of the Palestinians and the non-realization of the latter's national aspirations. The second argument questioned the very existence of Pakistan after more than two decades of its existence.

101. K.P.S. Menon to Eytan, d. 23.10.1952, ISA 2554/12.
Afghan, Iraqi and Polish Jewish refugees. After prolonged negotiations, a consulate was opened in Bombay which paved the way for more formal contacts between the two countries. While a detailed discussion on this will follow later, it would be appropriate to note here the general Indian position on consular missions. By definition, the consular duties are mainly commercial in nature and often they serve as the progenitor of fulfledged ambassadorial or other forms of diplomatic relations. Harishwar Dayal argued, that India "appointed representatives with consular designations as a first step towards the establishment of regular diplomatic relations". Israel also adopted similar position whereby consulates served as a prelude to embassies.

OVERVIEW

When normal and formal relations exist between two states an analysis of various facets of such relations can be attempted. In the absence of such relations, the best one can do is to attempt an overview of political developments surrounding this situation. Hence Indian policy would be examined through a study of its

102. Harishwar Dayal "The Organization of Diplomatic and Consular Services", India Quarterly (New Delhi), Vol 12, no.3, July-September, 1956 pp. 270-1. Similarly, Gundevia, Nehru's last Foreign Secretary, observed: "The Government of India stationed their agents in some of these countries—Burma, Ceylon, Malaya and South Africa—and these offices, after Independence, came to be converted into our first diplomatic missions". Y.D.Gundevia, Outside the Archives (Hyderabad, 1984) p. 49.
official positions on various major events surrounding Israel. It is through these events that one can trace the crystallization of India's official position vis-a-vis Israel.

During the period under review --1948 to 1980-- India witnessed four premierships or regimes, with the Congress Party dominating the entire period except for the 1977-79 period. Of these, Nehru's tenure (1947-1964) was the longest and the most crucial; the Shastri era (1964-66) was the shortest and transitory in nature; Mrs Gandhi's period (1966-77) witnessed serious challenges, rapid changes and bitter controversies; and the short-lived Janata government under Morarji Desai (1977-79) witnessed some new developments in the Indo-Israeli relations.

a. JAWAHARLAL NEHRU (1947-1964)

Nehru's influence and impact on India's foreign policy in general and in regard to Israel in particular began during the freedom struggle. As Prime Minister of free India, he laid the foundation of the Indian foreign policy. No account of Indian external policy would be complete without understanding the Nehruvian contribution. Commenting on this, Michael Edwards wrote: "No other democratic Prime Minister has ever..."
had such a free hand in the formulation and execution of his country's foreign policy." For the entire 17-year tenure he was also the Foreign Minister and thereby nurtured the foreign policy personally. Besides, Nehru was also the main, if not the only, foreign policy spokesman of the Congress Party. Hence it would not be an exaggeration to say that Nehru formulated, articulated and executed India's foreign policy. So overwhelming was his influence that even the non-Congress government which came to power more than a decade after his death could only change its style but not the substance. Regarding Israel, besides recognition, this period witnessed three major conferences--New Delhi (1947), Bandung (1955) and Belgrade (1961) -- two major conflicts -- Suez crisis (1956) and Sino-Indian War (1962)--and one diplomatic controversy in 1964. Besides, it was during this period that Israel sought and attained the UN membership. A close study of these seven events would shed some light on India's Israel policy.

1. UN Membership (1949)

Keeping in tune with its "consistent" attitude on the whole question, India decided to vote against Israel's admission, when the UN General Assembly endorsed admission by a margin of 37-12 with 9

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104. Michael Edwards, "Illusion and reality in Indian Foreign Policy" International Affairs, Vol. 41, January 1965, p.49
abstentions. Speaking on the occasion M.C. Setalvad argued that India "could not recognize a state which had been achieved through the use of force and not through negotiations."

However, the legal and political significance of the Indian stand needs some explanation. Major Powers had vetoed UN membership for states even though the opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had varied. In May 1948 the ICJ declared that a member-state voting on the application of state for admission to UN "is not juridically entitled to make its consent to the admission dependent on conditions not expressly provided by para 1 (of the Article 4 of the Chapter)."

Similarly, the legal memorandum prepared by the UN Secretariat concluded:

...a member could properly vote to accept a representative of a government which it did not recognize or with which it had no diplomatic relations and that such a vote did not imply recognition or a readiness to assume diplomatic relations. (109)


106. Cited in Agwani, n.79 p.456. Moreover it should be borne in mind that while an act of war can be unilateral, peace always needs the cooperation of two parties.

107. USSR vetoed Ireland, Portugal and Trans-Jordan and USA and UK opposed Albania.

108. Advisory opinion of May 28th, 1948 ICJ, Reports of Judgements, Advisory Opinions and Orders, p.65

At the same time, the converse is also true: viz., "there is no suggestion that recognition binds the recongizing state to vote for the admission of the candidate." Therefore, its non-recognition could not legally bind India to oppose Israel membership.

On the political side, India had always emphasized the universal character of the UN. There was a proposal at the San Francisco Conference of 1945 to restrict the membership of the United Nations by way of demanding certain guarantees. India, which was still a dominion, argued for the universal composition of the UN. Elaborating this in 1949, B.N. Rau argued:

...refusing admission to peace-loving and sovereign states on grounds which had nothing to do with the merits of their applications would be disastrous both for the organization's prestige and authority.(112)

In spite of this declared position, India voted against Israel's admission. This was probably the only occasion when India opposed membership of a state in the UN. While this was consistent with India's policy on Palestine question, it was not consistent with India's policy on the universal membership of the UN. Expressing similar views, Shiva Rao, a member of the


Indian delegation to the Third Session of the UN, bitterly remarks: "I think we are making a great mistake in continuing our opposition to Israel's coming into the U.N. On general principles we are not maintaining such an attitude toward any other state. We believe in every state coming into the U.N. Also it does not seem to me right that we should seek Israel's help in matters of primary value and significance to us and yet maintain this hostile attitude."

2. Asian Relations Conference (1947)

Convened on the eve of India's independence, this was an important landmark as it provided the first opportunity for the newly born and the near-independent states to meet and understand one another. Bearing non-official character it was organized by the Congress Party and other nationalists with Nehru, who was then heading the Interim Government, playing a pivotal role. Among the invitees was a ten-member Jewish delegation from Palestine. Except for A. Appadorai, who was the Secretary of the Conference, most of the Indian observers had either ignored or played down the participation of the Jewish delegation. On the other hand, Israeli and Jewish writers had described this as


the official recognition of the status of the Jewish
nation as a legitimate member of the Asian family of
nations. Reflecting similar feelings Prof. Bergman, the
leader of the Jewish delegation, observed:

... the most important and positive aspect of our
participation is... the mere fact that we have
taken part. This participation in itself has
established Jewish Palestine as part of the Asian
continent and as a member of the family of the
nations of Asia. (116)

In addition it provided the first opportunity for
the Jewish leaders to establish formal and often maiden
contacts with various Indian and other Asian
personalities, who were to become the future leaders of
their respective countries. Reflecting on this Bergman
wrote:

In many of our conversations we met outspoken
sympathy for our case... It need not be pointed
out... that this sympathy may be considered, in
most cases, a matter of politeness and
conversational manners and that even in cases
where it has been sincere and real, it need not
commit not only the Government of the countries
concerned, but even the personalities themselves
who expressed it, in a political sense. (117)

On the attitude of Nehru in particular he remarked:

It should be mentioned... that most (of) us had
the feeling during the whole Conference that
Pandit Nehru was not very keen to greet us or meet
us in the Hall or Lounge, the Dining Room or
wherever he happened to meet us in public. (118)

115. Ran Kochan, "Israel in Third World Forums" in
Michael Curtis and Susan A. Gitelson (ed) Israel in

116. 'Report on the Inter-Asian Conference' d.17.4.1947,
CZA S25/7485

117. Ibid

118. Ibid.
Even though meeting-of-the minds was the principal aim of the conference it was not free from controversies. There was no unanimity on the invitees, as the Chinese objected to the Tibetan delegation and Vietnam protested against the non-Vietnamese delegation from Indo-China. The Egyptians tried to depict the Arab non-participation as a boycott over Zionist participation. Egypt was the lone Arab participant and a verbal duel between Egyptian and Jewish delegates led to some unpleasantness. This political squabble as well as the Arab boycott were taken into account when New Delhi hosted the eighteen-nation conference on Indonesia. Held in January 1949, more than six months after the establishment of the Jewish state, it excluded Israel while six Arab states were represented.


As far as Israel was concerned the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung was important for two main reasons. One, it legitimised the exclusion of Israel from all the subsequent Afro-Asian and Third World gatherings; and two, it formally acknowledged that the Arabs possessed the veto so far as Israel was concerned. It becomes necessary to go into the

119. Ibid
121. Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen; besides, Iran and Turkey also attended.
background of this gathering in order to elaborate on these points. Initially India was unenthusiastic when Indonesia proposed the idea in mid-1954 but gradually it began to favour such a move. In December, 1954 the five Colombo Powers -- Burma, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) met in Bogor to lay down the basic framework and agenda. In principle, they had agreed to invite "all countries in Asia and Africa, which have independent governments". In order to allay fears over the Indian-sponsored inclusion of People's Republic of China, the communique added that the acceptance of invitation by any state "would in no way involve and even imply any change in its view of the status of any other country". On the basic purpose of the Conference, the communique declared: "... the countries concerned should become better acquainted with one another's point of view". In spite of such a broad agenda, and an accommodating position on the legal status of the participants, Israel was excluded. The operative part of the communique read: "with minor variations and modifications of this basic principle, they decided to invite the following countries...."


123. For the complete text see MEA Report 1954-55, pp.55-8

124. Emphasis added. A number of countries who were being invited did not recognize PRC and hence this addendum.

125. Emphasis added.
The reason was two folded: the Arab determination to block Israel and Pakistan's attempt to outbid India, with India yielding to both. In early 1950, the Arab League decided that the Arab states would refrain from hosting any international conference in which Israel could participate. This was subsequently enlarged to encompass any conference held anywhere if Israel was to attend. In a bid to reiterate its determination, in December, only a few days before the Bogor meet, the Cairo meeting of the League declared:

It has been the policy of the Arab states not to participate in any regional conference where Israel is represented. The Arab States do not have any doubt that Israel will not be invited to this conference (i.e Bandung) and will not participate therein...(127)

It was more an ultimatum. The Indian position was difficult as it felt Israel's exclusion could not be justified. While Krishna Menon favoured inviting Israel, Nehru "agreed with reluctance that an invitation to Israel should be extended only if the Arab countries agreed to it".

On the question of Israel Nehru declared: "In the final analysis, I think it is better not to include Israel, if that is likely to lead to the Arab countries

126. Israel and United Nations, n.110, p.166.
128. Gopal, n.46, vol.II, p.232. In short, the Arabs were given the veto over Israel, even though they did not participate in the Bogor meet.
keeping away". However Menon elaborated this by saying:

They [ i.e Burmese ] said, 'we won't come without Israel'. We said our position is the same but we have got to carry the Arabs with us. We will do whatever the Conference agrees but we will vote for an invitation to Israel. And we were three to two, Ceylon, Burma and India for, and Pakistan and Indonesia against; but Pakistan was the leader. They made propaganda against us and issued leaflets terming us a Pro-Jewish country. (130)

He also added: "Even Indonesia might have been persuaded at that time, but Pakistan made use of our attitude to Israel's presence at Bandung in propaganda with the the Arabs". However, it was also possible that Menon was reflecting the Pakistan-phobia inherent in most of the Indian leaders.

Except for its adherence to the principle of mutual dialogue as a means of settlement, there was no compelling reason for India to demand Israel's participation. While the Indian stand can be called pragmatic, two facts should be noted. One, opposition to someone's participation was not altogether new to Asian gatherings. In the Asian Relations Conference, China had reservations over Tibet and Vietnam over non-Vietnamese Indo-China. Moreover, even in Bogor,


131. Ibid p.79
Ceylon had misgivings about China. However, while
other states could be persuaded to accept the
compromise viz., the legal status of the invitees, the
Arabs would not budge. Two, while India was willing to
allow the Arab intervention on Israel, it vehemently
rejected similar moves by Britain and the US on China.

The final communiqué of the Bandung Conference
declared inter alia:

In view of the existing tension in the Middle
East caused by the situation in Palestine and of
the danger of that tension to World peace, the
Asian-African Conference declared its support of
the Arab people of Palestine and called for the
implementation of the UN resolutions on Palestine
and the achievement of a peaceful settlement of
the Palestine question. (133)

It was undeniable that the conference adopted this
milder resolution largely because of the efforts of
Burma and India. In order to exhibit its solidarity
with the Arabs, Pakistan made an unsuccessful bid to
condemn the creation of Israel. Underlining the need
for a negotiated settlement, Nehru pleaded: "... some
time or other, whether you (i.e the Arabs and Israel)

132. "For us to be told....that the United states and
the United Kingdom will not like the inclusion of
China in the Afro-Asian conference is not very
helpful. In fact, it is somewhat irritating. There
are many things that the United States and the
United Kingdom have done which we do not like at
all." Official statement quoted in Gopal, n. 46,

133. For the complete text see Asian Recorder(New

are enemies or you have fought a war, there must be negotiations. There is always some kind of settlement..."

Looking at this issue from a different angle, a few things emerge. Exclusion of Israel might have been unavoidable; the logical consequence should have been the prevention of any discussion on an issue in which Israel had a stake. While it could have given the opportunity for the Arabs to air their views, the Conference could have deferred taking any decision until Israel was given a chance to defend and explain its position. On the contrary, though common, the absence of Israel became the carte blanche for unilateral resolutions. Seen in this light, this resolution as well as the subsequent ones in the NAM fora, lose their importance. Further exclusion could hardly be an incentive for Israel to comply with the Bandung resolution. While the resolutions of the UN were mentioned, keeping in tune with the Arab position, it avoided referring to Israel by name; instead it preferred the term Palestine. But the most important outcome of the Conference was the formal exclusion of

135. Ibid

136. For example, NAM membership of Iran and Iraq prevented the Third World from adopting any strongly worded resolution on the Gulf war. Moreover, it never named Iraq as an aggressor.

137. Interestingly, Jordan, which had incorporated large segment of the Arab Palestine proposed by the UN Resolution, was also party to final communiqué in Bandung.
Israel from the Afro-Asian gatherings and hence from Non-aligned Movement and the Group of 77.

4. The Belgrade Conference (1961)

It was at the summit meeting of the non-aligned countries in Belgrade, in September 1961, that the Bandung decision to exclude Israel was institutionalized. It appeared that Israel's attempt to attend the NAM was frustrated by Nasser at the Brioni Conference of 1956. At the NAM summit Burmese Premier U Nu adopted a moderate line while the Arabs favoured a stronger position on 'Palestine'. Krishna Menon apparently favoured the former. But there had been a sea change since Bandung, the Suez crisis having highlighted the collaboration between Israel and former colonial Powers, the increasing links between Israel and forces of imperialism, and the growing personal friendship between Nehru and Nasser. Thus, diluting the Burmese proposal, Nehru and Tito advanced a stronger resolution which read:

The participants in the Conference declare their support for the full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine in conformity with the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.(140)

Even though countries like Burma, who were sympathetic


towards Israel could help water down a strongly-worded resolution, they could hardly substitute for Israel's pressure. Non-membership of Israel in effect meant the absence of a moderate solution. Mere resolutions hardly solve problems. Had Israel been present, the Belgrade Declaration would have been different, since the NAM adopts the policy of consensus and not majority voting. As discussed elsewhere, the NAM declarations of Israel gradually became stronger.

5. Suez Crisis (1956)

This was one of the two major conflicts -- the other being the Sino-Indian war of 1962-- which provide some insights into the Israel policy of India. The causes and consequences of the Suez war are too widely known to need fresh elaboration. The general Indian position could be summarised as follows:

a. While it did object to the *modus operandi* of the action, nationalization *per se* was not questioned by India. (142)

b. India believed that any failure to find a peaceful solution could lead to conflicts. (143)

c. India could not endorse the use or threat of force to solve the crisis. (144)

d. India had a serious economic and hence strategic interest in the Canal and was concerned with its unhindered operation. (145)

e. While accepting the invitation for the London Conference it could not endorse it's composition (146) and added that India "would equally decline participation in any arrangements for war preparations or sanctions or any steps which challenge the sovereign rights of Egypt." (147)

f. In the Conference the Indian position was spelt out in the form of a six-point formula as the basis for settlement. (148)

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142. Krishna Menon observed : "...The question of nationalisation... was an act which was within the competence of the Egyptian government...We would like to have seen that nationalisation carried out in the normal way of international expropriation, where there is adequate notice, and the way of taking over is less dramatic and does not lead to these consequences..." For the complete text of the 20 September statement at the London Conference see *The Suez Canal Problem*, Ibid. pp.159-78.

143. For Nehru's statements in Parliament see *Debates LS*, I : VII part II, 8.8.1956; 2536-44.

144. Nehru declared : "I would fail in my duty...if I do not say that threats to settle this dispute or to enforce their [i.e British and French] views in this matter by display or use of force, is the wrong way..." Ibid.

145. Discussed supra.

146. India mainly objected to the exclusion of Burma and Yugoslavia.


148. See the *Suez Canal Problem*, n.141, pp.174-5
Even after the failure of the London Conferences of 22 and 18 Powers, India played a significant role in the adoption of the 13 October 1956 Security Council Resolution.

However, once the conflict began, India's reaction was swift and unequivocal. In an official statement India declared its indignation over the "flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and ... all the principles laid down by the Bandung Conference". Writing to British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, Nehru categorically wrote:

> It seems to us that this is clear aggression and a violation of the United Nations Charter. For us in India and I believe, in many other countries of Asia and elsewhere, this is a reversion to a previous and unfortunate period of history when decisions were imposed by force of arms by Western Powers on Asian countries. We had thought that these methods were out-of-date and would not possibly be used in the modern age...

In a similar tone, he publicly declared:

> In the middle of the 20th century, we are going back to the predatory methods of the 18th and 19th centuries. But there is a difference now. There are self-respecting, independent nations in Asia and Africa which are not going to tolerate this kind of incursion by colonial Powers...

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149. Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), India, Indonesia and USSR refused to attend the second meeting hence it became 18 Powers Conference.


153. *The Hindu*, 2.11.1956
Unfortunately, it was this unequivocal stand on Suez which brought serious criticism for Nehru, when he adopted a milder position on the Hungarian Crisis and the Soviet invasion which followed it. He was accused of adopting double standards and this charge came both from inside the country and abroad. After long deliberations Nehru expressed his formal sympathy to the Hungarians on 5 November. On subsequent assessment Nehru declared "...it was viewed almost with the relief that it happened in Hungary so that attention might be diverted from Egypt to Hungary..." As Escott Reid, the Canadian High Commissioner in India during these years, remarked the converse is also equally true.

The Suez Crisis assumed additional importance for Israel as a result of the Indian stand on the freedom of navigation. While endorsing the principle of non-discriminatory treatment, its position differed from that of Israel. In the UN, India declared that a legal


155. By then however, Krishna Menon had declared in the UN that the events in Hungary were "a domestic affairs'.


157. "My anger was the greater because the invasion (i.e Suez) diverted attention from Hungary and I felt that if the world's attention could be concentrated on Hungary, the Soviet Union might decide not to crush the revolt". Escott Reid, Envoy to Nehru, (New Delhi, 1981), p.150.
controversy exists over the right of passage through the Gulf. India also pronounced the entire Gulf as the "inland sea" and its waters as the Egyptian "territorial waters". Krishna Menon argued that "various states have held that gulfs and bays indenting their territories with mouths wider than that of the Gulf of Aqaba, are territorial". This position on the Gulf assumed prominence in 1967 when India endorsed the Egyptian position on the Gulf and its closure to Israeli shipping. It should however be noted that India's stand on the Gulf was purely a political judgement devoid of a consideration of geographical realities. In its eagerness to support a fellow member of the Afro-Asian movement--Egypt--India apparently overlooked some crucial geographical facts.

1. The Gulf of Aqaba has a multilateral shore and even if Israel were to be excluded there are three independent littoral states.(159)

2. The examples given by Krishna Menon to justify the Gulf as territorial waters were fundamentally different. Unlike Aqaba, all those wash the shores of only one state.(160)

3. The Gulf is the only sea outlet for Jordan and hence declaring it as Egyptian territorial waters would be legally harmful to the former.


159. They are Egypt (100 miles), Saudi Arabia (100 miles), Israel (6.5 miles) and Jordan (3.5 miles).

4. The area claimed as territorial zones by the four states far exceeds the total breadth of the Gulf. (161)

If these were taken into account, India's arguments during the 1967 crisis become weaker. Yet the Suez Crisis marked a clear deterioration of Indo-Israeli ties and soon afterwards Nehru formally ruled out normalization of ties with Israel.

6. Sino-Indian War (1962)

In spite of the negative attitude adopted towards Israel largely due to the Suez Crisis, India did not hesitate to seek as well as obtain material assistance from Israel in times of national crisis. In the wake of the Sino-Indian war Nehru made an universal appeal for assistance and personally wrote to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. Sharing India's concern, the Israeli premier extended his support as well as offered and did supply certain quantities of small arms. There was however no official word about such an Israeli

161. At its northern end where all the states are contiguous the breadth of the Gulf is 3 miles while the claims are 6 nautical miles each for Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel and 3 nautical miles for Jordan. Louis H. Bloomfield, *Egypt, Israel and the Gulf of Aqaba in International Law* (Toronto, 1957), p. 2.


assistance, while the 'understanding attitude' of the Arab states during the war was formally and duly acknowledged by India. Looking at this in a historical context and in the wake of later developments one may conclude: India was not averse to approach Israel for security assistance; Nehru had established a precedent for such an approach in 1962; and India was unwilling to publicly recognize such security and other assistance.

7. Independence Day Controversy (1964)

Towards the fag-end of his tenure, Nehru witnessed a controversy over the Israeli consul's decision to celebrate the National Day of Israel in New Delhi. Since such celebrations were always held in Bombay the government was determined not to permit the unprecedented move. It argued that the celebrations should be restricted to Bombay and demanded the cancellation of the function scheduled for 15 April 1964. In the absence of a response from the consul, it got the reservations at the state-run Asoka Hotel cancelled. In Parliament, Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh declared that such a function would not have been permitted anywhere in Delhi. In the debate that followed this episode, H.V.Kamath raised a vital legal question when he asked:


166. Debates RS, XLVII : 5.5.1964; 1777.
Is it a fact that the Consul General of Israel is accredited to the entire territory of the Republic of India, ..?(167)

Unfortunately this was never clarified.

The absence of formal ties and the lack of progress in that direction, did not in any way inhibit interactions between the two countries in the non-political arena. Besides the normal contacts abroad, various official and unofficial delegations visited Israel to study mainly the agricultural developments and cooperative farming in Israel. However these were overshadowed by the political developments and the absence of formal ties and when Nehru passed away in May 1964, diplomatic relations became a remote possibility.

b. LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI (1964-66):

As far as foreign policy in general and Israel in particular were concerned, the Shastri era lasting less than two years was a transitory one. It was too short to offer new ideas or make drastic moves. Moreover he had all the disadvantages of being overshadowed by the personality and legacy of Nehru and hence he had to tread on beaten track. Since his predecessor had laid down the foundations and the general trend of Indian foreign policy, there was very little Shastri could do. This in a way compensated for his non-exposure to foreign affairs. Shastri's maiden

visit abroad as Prime Minister was to the second summit of NAM. Unlike the previous Afro-Asian gathering this summit hosted by Nasser in October 1964 adopted stronger and more assertive position on Israel. Adopting an unequivocal stand it declared:

The Conference condemns the imperialistic policy pursued in the Middle East and, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, decides to:

(1) endorse the full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine to their homeland, and their inalienable right to self-determination;

(2) declare their full support to the Arab people of Palestine in their struggle for liberation from colonialism and racism.(168)

More than a decade prior to the UN resolution on Zionism, the NAM had explained the Palestinian problem in racial terms. This attitude of endorsing the Arab interpretation of the situation could be attributed to the absence of leaders like Nehru and U Nu who always exerted a moderating influence in the earlier summits. Being the host, the views of Nasser enjoyed additional influence in its deliberations.

As a sequel to the summit, India accorded an official welcome in November 1964 to a delegation from the Nasser-sponsored and newly formed, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). In a similar move India began to adopt a friendlier attitude to the Arab states. The Arab information office which was

168. NAM Documents, p.21.
functioning in New Delhi since 1959, was upgraded in July 1965 and granted diplomatic status. Comparing with the April 1964 controversy over the jurisdiction of the Israeli consul, this decision declared India's predisposition towards the Arabs. While the Israeli mission was a consulate in the far-off Bombay, the Arab League was represented by an embassy in the national capital entitled to all immunities similar to those conferred on the UN mission in New Delhi.

The litmus test for India's policy came in the form of the Indo-Pak war of 1965. The general Arab attitude was non-committal or sympathetic and understanding towards Pakistan. Yet India felt it prudent to play down the Arab attitude and confined its disappointment to the attitude of individual states like Jordan and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, it argued that by and large the Arab countries had shown an understanding of the Indian position. The Iranian assistance to Pakistan was viewed within the context of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) framework. The role played by President Nasser especially at the Casablanca Arab summit in adopting a balanced position, was received with appreciation. According to highly


reliable sources in Israel, during the war, Shastri, following Nehru's example in 1962, did approach Israel for military assistance. Unlike 1962, this time the request was official but verbal and was complied with.

One minor but significant development of the Shastri period was the introduction of an independent Cabinet Minister for External Affairs. It would suffice to mention that while following the policy of his predecessor, Shastri gave an institutional framework to the pro-Arab policy as exhibited through various developments surrounding the NAM, the Arab League and the PLO.

c. INDIRA GANDHI (1966-1977)

Both in terms of its length and eventful nature this was a crucial period for Indian policy. When Indira Gandhi assumed office in January 1966, the maintenance of status quo appeared to be the best that one could expect from the situation. In fact, it became a period of deterioration for the Indo-Israeli relations. This uninterrupted downward trend was due to the changing political scenario in India and abroad. There were armed conflicts, domestic disturbances,

173. This information was obtained under strict confidence and hence the source cannot be divulged.

174. However, Nehru had deputies to assist him. They were A.K.Chanda (12.8.1952 to 1.5.1957); Syed Mahmud (7.12.1954 to 17.4.1957); Lakshmi Menon (17.4.1957 to 10.4.1962 & 16.4.1962 to 27.5.1964).
changing political alliances, controversies and political turmoils and these developments took place in a short span of eleven years. In the 1967 general elections, the opposition made significant political gains and eroded Congress strength both in Parliament and in the State legislatures. This had a clear impact on the domestic and foreign policy debates and formulations. Under Nehru, Parliamentary debates on foreign policy were always initiated by the Government, often in the form of an official motion on the 'international situation'. During Mrs.Gandhi's tenure, there was a complete reversal of roles and all the major debates on foreign policy -- June War, Rabat fiasco, Czechoslovak crisis or the recognition of East Germany -- were initiated by the Opposition. In short, the Government had lost the initiative to the more articulate and well-prepared opposition. Further, government's policy on Israel came under severe criticism and scrutiny almost throughout the tenure of the fourth Lok Sabha (1967-1971) or until Mrs.Gandhi swept the 1971 polls.

1 Alleged Discourtesy (1966)

Mrs.Gandhi's tenure began with a very ominous note for Israel when its President Zalman Shazar was paying a seven-day state visit to Nepal in March 1966. Because of flight schedules he made a brief stop-over in New Delhi and stayed overnight in Calcutta. While no
officials received him in the Capital, he was greeted by a demonstration in Calcutta. Replying in Parliament, Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh declared: "It is true that no one from the Ministry of External Affairs received him ... But the arrangements were known to him." Pressed further he stated in May: "It is not that we extended our hospitality. We only extended our courtesies." Another passage through India in the same month, March 1966, would highlight the discourtesy shown to the Israeli President. Even though India had not recognised the German Democratic Republic by that time, its Deputy Prime Minister Margarete Wittkowski visited New Delhi and was received by Dinesh Singh himself. India's assertion that Shazar was on a 'private visit' was technically correct, but he was on a state visit to India's neighbour Nepal and was compelled to stay in India only because of technical reasons. The main implication of the entire episode was the Indian unwillingness to be cordial towards Israel and its preparedness to go to any extent to exhibit it.

2 The June War of 1967

The Arab Israeli war of 1967 could be described as the most important milestone in Indo-Israeli relations. It was the most hotly contested foreign policy issue in

176. Ibid. LVI, 3.5.1966; 23.
177. Interview with Reuven Dafni in Jerusalem. Hereafter Interview Dafni
the history of Independent India till date. Neither the Opposition nor the media were willing to be convinced by the arguments of the Government and the Congress party itself witnessed a mini-revolt. India's position was formulated and announced even before Israel made the first decisive move towards confrontation viz., the nomination of General Moshe Dayan as Defence Minister. On 25 May in identical statements in both the Houses of Parliament, the External Affairs Minister M.C.Chagla outlined the Indian position. There were five important aspects in the statement and each of them needs careful examination.

a. The creation of Israel had given rise to tensions between Israel and Arab countries: In somewhat similar fashion in 1958, Nehru had remarked: "Ever since Israel came into existence, it has been a source of constant irritation to the Arab countries." (179) While Nehru's statement went unnoticed, Chagla's pronouncements sparked off an acrimonious debate in Parliament.

b. Egypt's sovereign right to demand withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) cannot be questioned: This is in accordance with the Indian position adopted since the formation of and its participation in the UNEF. (180)

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178. For the complete text see, Debates LS, IV: III, 25.5.1967; 871-6.
180. In a letter dated 6.11.1956, to the UN Secretary General, India's Representative Arthur Lall declared, inter alia: "...it is understood the Force (i.e. the planned UNEF) may have to function through Egyptian territory. Therefore, there must be Egyptian consent for its establishment." Eayrs, n.138, p.360. For similar statements see, Debates RS, XXX, 11.8.1960; 619.
c. India appreciated the reasons which compelled Egypt to demand the withdrawal of the UNEF from the Egyptian soil: This was in agreement with the general policy of the government to support the Arabs.

d. The Gulf of Aqaba was the territorial waters of Egypt and India appreciated their closure to Israeli shipping. As discussed earlier, geography did not favour Indian position and hence Nasser's action could only be an act of war, in the legal sense of the term.

e. India foresaw a threat of aggression from Israel. India anticipated an Israeli aggression more than ten days before the commencement of actual hostilities. In the absence of any resident mission or even a journalist in Israel, India had no facility to obtain first hand information. India's assessment could only be based on the reports filed from the Arab capitals. In short, the government was not in a position to make an independent assessment of the situation.

According to Chagla, this controversial statement "was drafted by my Ministry (i.e Ministry of External Affairs), (and) was finalised and approved by the Political Affairs Committee of the Cabinet". In spite of the repeated pleas from the Opposition, the Government refused to modify its 25 May position. Thus, India confronted the June War with this predisposition and it was reflected in its subsequent interpretation of the events.

The immediate Government reaction on the Israeli aggression was focussed on the killing of the Indian soldiers of the UNEF. In a personal statement in the


182. For the text of the 5 June Opposition appeal to the PM see, Debates LS, IV: IV, 6.6.1967; 3296.
Parliament Mrs. Gandhi condemned 'the cowardly act' and described it as 'deliberate and without provocation'. A formal protest was lodged with Israel through the Indian embassy in Moscow and initially the government demanded formal compensation from Israel. Later on the Israeli offer was rejected on the plea that it "disavowed all responsibility for the attacks."

Before proceeding further it is both necessary and appropriate to examine the role of Israel in the death of Indian soldiers. India's reaction both in the Parliament and in the UN, was an instant one based on unconfirmed reports. First-hand information was available only after 26 June -- 20 days after fighting broke out -- when Maj. Gen. Indar Jit Rikhye reached the UN and was contacted by the Military Advisor to India's UN mission. Based on his personal account -- he was commanding the UNEF at the time of its withdrawal -- the following conclusions can be drawn:

183. For the text of Mrs. Gandhi's statement see, Ibid. cols. 3292-5.


i. It was the Arab mines placed on the rail road crossing the south of Gaza that killed Cap. Vijay Sachar and his fellow passengers in their car.

ii. It was both the Israeli shells and Arab mortar bombs that killed and wounded soldiers at Camp Delhi near Dier el Balah railway station.

iii. The early withdrawal of the Canadian contingent seriously affected air transport and quick evacuation.

iv. India, which was the first country to accept Nasser's demand for withdrawal, "never earmarked any military air transport to support its contingent in Gaza".

v. The baggage of the Indian contingent was an additional impediment to consider airlifting the troops. (188)

In the light of these developments, the official position was weakened. However, if one were to look at the events through a political prism, the conclusions would be different; by highlighting the killing, the ruling party could enhance its support base and anyone supporting the Israeli position could easily be suspected or silenced.

India adopted an unequivocal stand on the Israeli offensive. Rejecting the Opposition suggestion for caution, Mrs. Gandhi declared: "We have not made our mark in the world by being cautious. We have made our mark in the world by taking a firm stand where justice

188. For details see, Ibid. pp. 150-5.

189. Noticeably the Congress Party did not adopt any formal resolution on the killing.
was concerned". India's position was clearly summarised by Chagla as follows:

1. It is not open to a country to start a war merely because it feels that a threat to its security exists;

2. No aggressor should be permitted to retain the fruit of its aggression;

3. It is not permissible for a country to acquire territory of another State in order to be able to bargain from a position of strength; and

4. Rights cannot be established, territorial disputes cannot be settled through armed conflicts. (191)

A close scrutiny of these arguments would reveal the underlying rationale.

Contrary to the claims of the Government, its policy on the war did not enjoy the unanimous support of the party, Parliament, press, or the public. The 23 June AICC resolution revealed beyond doubt the internal differences within the Congress Party. While expressing its concern and anxiety over the "recent developments which escalated into a war" it did not condemn Israel, which the official statements in Parliament did. The latter also did not refer to the recent developments which was exactly what the


192. Ibid, IV : IV, 6.6.1967. 3316
opposition demanded. There was also no reference by the AICC to the killing of the Indians, while Mrs. Gandhi repeatedly mentioned them in Parliament.

In his memoirs, Chagla concedes: "I found that not only the Opposition but even a section of our own party was opposed to our policy". An opinion survey conducted in July 1967 revealed a large-scale disapproval of the government's attitude.

Even the bureaucracy had reservations on the pro-Arab policy. In his memoirs, C.S. Jha, the then Foreign Secretary writes:

I felt that as a sincere friend of Egypt we should advise Nasser to rest on the withdrawal of the United Nations forces from Sinai and to go slow over the closing of the strait of Tiran so as to avoid a disastrous war which would ill-serve the Arab countries... I drafted a message from the Prime Minister to President Nasser pointing out the gravity of the situation and urging that Israel should not be given a pretext for going to war... In the light of subsequent developments I have often regretted that we did not send that message and I have blamed myself for not pursuing further the proposal with Chagla and with the Prime Minister...(196)

It should, however, be noted that none of the political forces in India including Israel's staunch supporters,

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193. For the complete text of the resolution Encyclopaedia INC, Vol.XIX pp.356-7. There was also a threat of mid-term polls during its deliberations. Richard J. Kozicki, "Indian Policy towards the Middle East" Orbis, Vol.11 no.3 Fall 1967, p.786.


195. Quote in Kozicki, n.193, p.797.

justified the Israeli occupation of West Bank, Gaza and other areas. There were differences regarding the nature of the offensive as to whether it was an aggression or an act of self-defence.

3 Rabat Conference (September 1969)

India's participation in the Rabat Conference raised some fundamental issues concerning India's policy. It all began with the burning of the al-Aqsa mosque in Israel-occupied East Jerusalem -- the third holiest shrine in Islam -- on 21 August 1969. Denouncing it as a sacrilege of the holy shrine India refused to accept the incident as an Islamic question. It viewed the issue as a much larger question of the rights of the Palestinians and the preservation of holy and sacred places and hence demanded immediate implementation of the Security Council resolutions on Jerusalem. India showing a keen interest on the issue argued:

... with its firm belief in secularism, had felt especially grieved at the desecration of a place of worship, and numerous and religious leaders of many faiths had expressed their profound shock. Nevertheless, it must not be believed that the question before the Council was a religious issue. Any attempt to create such a division would do incalculable harm and present fresh difficulties in solving the west Asian problem. India considered that the incident was a direct consequence of the illegal occupation by Israel of Jerusalem and other Arab areas. Israel thus


could not be absolved of its responsibility for the incident of 21 August. (199)

India felt it prudent to explain the incident and its implications in secular terms. But the Arabs for whom the matter was of serious concern, instead portrayed it in religious colour. For the Moroccan and Saudi monarchs, al-Aqsa provided a useful ground to counter Nasser and his brand of socialism. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, who was contemplating an Islamic gathering, was joined by Morocco's King Hassan and both decided to call an Islamic conference in Rabat to exclusively discuss the al-Aqsa incident. Accordingly, it was decided to invite all Muslim-majority states and countries having Muslims as heads of state. India fulfilled neither of the criteria. Yet India was eager to participate both to curry favour with the Arabs and to counter potential anti-Indian propaganda by Pakistan and managed to obtain an 'invitation'. While the organisers interpreted it as an invitation to a Muslim delegation from India, the government sent an official delegation under cabinet Minister Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. Due to its delayed arrival Ambassador Gurbachan Singh

199. Annual Report of the Security Council 1969, reproduced in Palestine Documents, 1970 (Beirut) p. 475. Since India was not a member of the Council at that time, it sought and obtained an invitation to participate without the right to vote.

200. Muslims constituted only about one-sixth of the population and V.V. Giri had taken over as President.
represented India. Capitalizing on this ironical situation as well as the riots against Muslims in some parts of India, Pakistan foiled the participation of the Indian delegation. In reality, India's eagerness to go to Rabat proved counter-productive; at worst India's absence would have produced an anti-India resolution but its participation resulted in a fiasco.

This led to a heated political debate in the Parliament and Mrs. Gandhi faced her first challenge after the Congress split. Even though the government was able to defeat the Opposition motion by a convincing margin of 306 to 140 votes, its arguments were not convincing. It argued that "in spite of its name (Rabat) was a political conference and it was in India's interest to be represented at it". It also contended that India's participation was the follow-up of an unanimous invitation but was unable to table the 'invitation' as demanded by the watchful Opposition. From the debate certain irrefutable points emerge:

1. In spite of India's interpretation Rabat was an Islamic conference in name, content and participants.

2. India had always explained and justified its support for the Arab States in secular terms and Rabat was a setback to that secular orientation.

3. The main motive of the two sponsors was to undermine Nasser and his secular and social values.

4. In the post-1967 era Nasserism was giving way to Islamism and India probably was reacting to the winds of change. But India could not possibly identify with Islamic cause as Pakistan did and all its attempts in that direction were bound to be counter-productive.

5. Rabat reversal was not unique for India as it had faced similar fate at the world Muslim conference in Somalia in December 1964. (204)

Besides this the Rabat controversy highlighted the Indian eagerness to adopt a pro-Arab stand to counter Pakistani influence and in that situation the urge for normalization with Israel became fainter.

4 Bangaladesh War (1971)

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 provided an opportunity both to test the Arab goodwill for India and to evaluate India's reaction. The December 1971 war and the events leading to the conflict underlined two trends; it showed the extent of the Arab commitment to Pakistan and the limitations of India's influence among the Arabs. India formally expressed its disappointment at the Arab attitude and their inadequate understanding of the crisis over Bangladesh.

204. For a statement of Dinesh Singh on this see Debates LS, III : XXXVIII, 22.2.1965; 651.

Yet this dissatisfaction was underplayed and medical and other assistance provided by the Arab countries to India were overplayed. At the same time it carefully omitted similar help from Israel. Only after repeated questioning, the Government of India acknowledged the June 23 Knesset resolution on India and Israel's offer of medical personnel. The unfriendly Arab attitude sparked off fresh demands for reassessment of India's policy towards Arabs and Israel. Ruling out any changes, Foreign Minister Swaran Singh asserted: "No passing of disappointment should mar these close relations (i.e between Arabs and India) which are in our mutual interest".

The post-Bangladesh period was one of further slump for the Indo-Israeli relations. A number of domestic and external factors contributed to this. The massive mandate won by Mrs. Gandhi in the 1971 general elections and the lightning military success over Bangladesh enhanced and consolidated her position. She became an undisputed leader at least for a short time. Parties hitherto adopting a pro-Israeli line, like Swatantra and Jana Sangh, faced serious electoral reverses. This virtually eliminated any real

207. Debates RS, LXXV, 31.3.1971; 123-4; LXXVII 28.7.1971, 8; and LXXVII 4.8.1971, 68
opposition as witnessed during the June War and Rabat Conference. In the international arena Israel was facing increasing isolation mainly due its refusal to comply with the UN demand for its withdrawal from the Arab territories. Taking all these into account Indian support for the Arabs in their war with Israel in 1973 was an anticipated one. According to India the cause of the tension in West Asia was due to Israeli aggression and refusal to vacate territories occupied by the armed forces. This intransigence on the part of Israel is clearly the basic cause leading to the outbreak of hostilities. In December 1973, Foreign Minister Swaran Singh maintained that the arrogance of Israel and the active support it received from its mighty friends "had driven the Palestinians to measures of desperation."

The post-1973 years saw the emerging influence of the PLO and following the Rabat resolution of 1974 India permitted an independent office of the PLO in New Delhi. Reiterating its support for the Arabs India endorsed the Arab-sponsored UN resolution declaring


210. Debates RS, LXXXVI, 6.12.1973; 256-7, unlike the past, the official position was not challenged seriously either in the Parliament nor in the press.
Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination. Explaining its stand on this controversial 10 November 1975 resolution of the General Assembly, India maintained that "in its impact on the people in the Middle East suffering from the consequences of Zionist occupation and oppression, Zionism was certainly a form of racial discrimination". It is necessary here to add a word about the domestic situation in India. Mrs. Gandhi was fighting for her political survival and internal Emergency had been declared in June 1975; there was very little parliamentary discussion and none whatsoever on foreign affairs. Since the freedom of expression was seriously curtailed it was unlikely that anyone would have offered any critical comments.

These events highlight the pro-Arab thrust of foreign policy under Mrs. Gandhi. While Nehru avoided making any harsh remarks on Israel, the converse was true in this period. Adopting an openly belligerent position was perceived to be in India's interest. In the non-political arena there were not many known contacts. It was during this period, especially after the Yom Kippur war, that India added a new dimension to the Indo-Israeli relations in the form of visa diplomacy. A large number of Israeli scientists, sports

211. For a detailed discussion on the resolution see Bernard Lewis, "The Anti-Zionist Resolution" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 55, no. 1, October 1976, pp. 54-64.

for peace in West Asia.

1. Camp David Accord

There were two important developments during Desai's tenure which would highlight the Indian attitude vis-a-vis Israel, viz., the Camp David Accord and the incognito visit of Moshe Dayan to New Delhi. Broadly speaking, the official position was favourable towards the peace process. Welcoming the direct talks between the disputing parties, India had anticipated a peaceful solution resulting in the Israeli withdrawal. Nevertheless India made it clear that "boundaries between states should be settled through negotiations and not by force and all states in the region, including Israel, should have the right to exist in peace within secure boundaries". It would be interesting to note the usage of phrases like 'negotiated settlement' and 'secured borders', because Israeli offers of peace revolve around these terms. At the same time, India did not abandon the Palestinian cause or the demand for a separate homeland. In the wake of the Arab non-acceptance of the peace process and the eventual isolation of Egypt, the Indian position was


216. It was for the first time India had formally endorsed the question of a separate Palestinian state.
somewhat hardened. India now underlined the drawbacks in the peace agreements: the question of Palestinians and their inalienable rights were ignored and it was also silent on the status of Jerusalem.

2 Dayan's Visit

The other development was the controversial incognito visit to India by the then Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan. There are different versions on when the visit actually took place. In his memoirs the Israeli general placed it in August 1977 while Desai mentions early 1978 as the possible date. In an election speech in 1980, Mrs.Gandhi claimed that Dayan had come to India more than once. External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao went a step further and declared:

While we have complete information about Moshe Dayan's visit to Delhi in August 1977, the statements of the leaders of the Janata and the B.J.P. point to the possibility of more visits than one --viz one in 1977, another in 1978 and perhaps a third in 1979. (222)


218. The Times of India (New Delhi), 1.10.1978.


220. Desai had always maintained that the visit took place in early 1978. For example his 16 May 1980 Press Conference in Bombay Indian Express 17.5.1980 and Interview Desai.

221. Times of India (New Delhi), 22.5.1980.

Evidently, the issue gave a political handle to the newly formed Government of Mrs. Gandhi to belittle the already trounced Janata Party. Discussion on this issue in Parliament throws up the following points:

1. In spite of the controversy surrounding its exact time and frequency, there is no doubt that General Dayan did visit India when Desai was Prime minister.

2. Since the Giden Rafael's 1961 visit, this could possibly be the first visit to India by an important Israeli Minister. (223)

3. The visit was mainly the outcome of the Israeli desire to seek a reappraisal of the Indian policy in the wake of new political changes in both the countries. (224)

4. Conceding that India should have established relations soon after recognition Desai expressed his inability to do so unless Israel withdraw from the occupied territories (225)

5. The visit was not made public because of its explosive nature (226) and apparently there were no official records of the meeting. (227)

6. Dayan was unsuccessful in achieving his basic objective viz., establishment of diplomatic relations with India.

223. In the absence of complete documentary evidence, one cannot categorically state that there were no visits during the interim.

224. The Likud party which was in opposition since the formation of Israel swept to power in the June 1977 Knesset elections.

225. Dayan, n.219 pp.28-9, Interview Desai

226. According to Dayan, "If the news of my visit to him (Desai) now were to be published, he said, he (Desai) would be out of office". Dayan, n.219, p.29

7. India did adopt a definitely favourable attitude towards the Camp David Agreement.

8. There were various high level contacts between the two countries including one between Desai and Israeli Defence Minister Weizmann. (228)

However Government's favourable disposition towards Israel came under public and private criticism. General Secretary of Janata Party Madhu Limaye publicly declared: "India has no reason to extend a welcome to the Camp David Accord". Its leader Jagjivan Ram had also taken exception to the Government's policy towards the region. During the electioneering, as the leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party, he met the Arab ambassadors in New Delhi and assured them of the support of his party. Gradually India's policy vis-a-vis Palestinian question had become an important election issue and various parties were vying with each other to express their support to the Palestinians. Available data is not sufficient to draw any definite conclusions. But it is apparent that Janata's policy towards Israel was one of continuity and change. While

228. Weizmann met Desai in London prior to Dayan's visit. Interview Desai. And Desai's Secretary V. Shankar visited Israel in June 1979.


231. Tribune (Chandigarh), 10.11.1979.

adhering to the cause of Palestinians it was not averse to establish formal and informal dialogue with Israel. Considering the internal differences within the party and its shortened tenure, it would be futile to speculate how India's policy towards Israel would have evolved if the Janata had continued in power for its full term.