INTRODUCTION

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

West Asia (Southwest Asia) is a term that refers to the western most part of Asia. It broadly refers to those countries that are members of the League of Arab States, Israel (with its Jewish and Arab population), and the non-Arab countries of Turkey and Iran (which have small Arab populations). These countries are clustered into three sub regions. 1) North Africa, which includes the
countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, 2) The area along the eastern part of the Mediterranean is the Fertile Crescent (Levant of the colonial times) that includes Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as non-Arab Turkey to the north. 3) Lastly, the oil-producing countries of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, namely, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen and the non-Arab, Persian state of Iran¹. The UN also includes Armenia and Azerbaijan (parts of Caucasus) in its extensive categorization of West Asia.

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

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

**India and West Asia:**

India considers West Asia as its *extended* neighbourhood and shares civilisational, historical and cultural ties with the West Asian countries. Not only did Arabs and Indians knew each other before the advent of Islam but it is said that the Arabs even played a crucial role in the emergence of the very notion of “Hindustan” and even in giving a name to the religion of Hinduism\(^3\). India’s cultural links with West Asia can be traced to the early years of recorded history. There is evidence, for instance, of trade links between the Harappan civilization and that of Dilmun in the Gulf. In pre-Islamic times, Arab traders acted as middlemen in trade between Bharuch in Gujarat and Puduchery and the Mediterranean through Alexandria and even through the Palakkad gap as evidenced in archaeological finds of Roman coins and artifacts in southern India.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Third, West Asia also provides a good and thriving market for various Indian commodities like tea, pulses, rice, wheat, dairy products etc. Bilateral trade has assumed added importance in view of the economic liberalization on both the sides. As a group, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is India’s second largest trading partner. It is the largest single origin of imports into India and the second largest destination for exports from India. During 2007-2008, the total two-way trade between India and the Gulf region was US$ 76 billion\(^6\). To further strengthening and deepening of this relationship, India and the GCC are negotiating an India-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) although there are differences over whether oil should be part of the agreement or not.

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

\(^6\) Tharoor, “New Dimensions of Indo-Arab Relations”, *op cit*. No. 3.
Gulf in search of employment and higher wages. Currently, around 6 million Indians live in the Gulf and West Asia\textsuperscript{7}, making them one of the largest expatriate community in the region. The Indian expatriate community can be categorized into four broad groups, viz., (a) unskilled workers, employed in construction companies, municipalities, agricultural farms and as domestic workers; (b) skilled and semiskilled workers; (c) professionals, such as doctors, engineers, accountants, employed in government and private sectors; and (d) businessmen.

The Indian Diaspora serves as a major source of India’s foreign exchange reserves through remittances in hard currency. The World Bank in its ‘Migration and Remittances Fact Book 2011’ Report estimated that India was the largest recipient of the remittances from Diaspora in 2010 followed by China and Mexico. The report further said that remittances flow to India was expected to increase to $58 billion in 2011, compared to around $55 billion in 2010\textsuperscript{8}. Of the total remittance inflows of $52 billion sent by expatriate Indians in 2010, the West Asian economies had a share of 48% or $26 billion\textsuperscript{9}. The remittances of expatriate Indian workers in the Gulf have contributed significantly to India’s economic resurgence even as there have been growing concerns in recent years.

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


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

Fifth, as a rising major power, India considers West Asian region very important in shaping its political, economic, defence and security policies at both the regional and global level. For instance, an India that grows at 7 to 9 per cent will increasingly depend on natural resources from other countries to sustain higher levels of prosperity at home. Resource security will also involve developing special political relationships with the key resource rich nations and the military capabilities to protect the sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean. India also has an interest in preventing hostile powers from either denying access to resources or disrupting the maritime trade routes. As India globalizes, the size of its diaspora will continue to expand and place new demands on protecting its expatriates in the region. India has a high stake in preventing the emergence of failed states in the region which in turn could become havens of international terrorism and religious extremism. Given its own large Muslim population, India would like to see the evolution of the Gulf towards political modernization and religious moderation. India would also prefer to see the Gulf States avoid siding with Islamabad in its disputes with New Delhi and keep away from the internal
politics of the Indian Subcontinent\textsuperscript{10}. In pursuing these expansive interests in the region, New Delhi has institutionalised bilateral relations with key West Asian countries, deepened commercial ties, expanded energy partnerships and increased political interaction at the highest levels.

Is India important for West Asia? The answer is certainly yes. First, India’s location at the base of continental Asia and the top of the Indian Ocean gives it a strategic location in Eurasia as well as among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean from East Africa to Indonesia. India’s peninsular projection in the ocean gives it a stake in the security and stability of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) which is crucial for oil trade – the lifeblood of Gulf economies\textsuperscript{11}. Second, India’s credibility and role as a “neutral” player in Asia may serve Gulf interests in managing their emerging security and strategic objectives. Unlike the US and other European powers that tie security cooperation with sensitive issues such as human rights, democracy and regime change, India is viewed, even in the Gulf, as a non-interfering partner to align with\textsuperscript{12}. Third, in many areas, the Gulf countries have the capital, while India offers the opportunities, especially for the development of infrastructure. Moreover, India has developed experience and expertise in key areas such as institution and capacity building, governance, science and technology including Information Technology, space technology and


\textsuperscript{11} Samir Pradhan, “India’s Economic and Political Presence in the Gulf: A Gulf Perspective” in \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}.  


biotechnology, healthcare and higher education which could prove crucial for the economic development of the West Asian countries. Finally, India’s model of a secular and democratic polity and its commitment to ensuring minority rights has a great attraction in today’s West Asia where religious and cultural differences amongst the diverse ethnicities have been exposed\(^{13}\).

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

**The Genesis of the Palestine Question**

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

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

\(^{13}\) Rajendra M Abhyankar ed. *West Asia and the Region: Defining India’s Role*, Academic Foundation, New Delhi, 2008, p. 64.
Israelite King David defeated the Philistines and set up an independent Jewish kingdom of Israel with Jerusalem as capital. This first independent kingdom provided the religious and emotional basis for the persistent Jewish interest in Palestine and the Zionist claims to the area in late 19th century. After the death of David’s son Solmon, the kingdom got divided into two parts: Israel and Judah which eventually fell to invaders, after which Palestine experienced a succession of foreign rulers.

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

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

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

In A.D 1099, Crusaders from Western Europe conquered Palestine which they called as the ‘Holy Land’ and held it for almost 150 years when it was recaptured by the Arabs. In 1516, the region fell to the Ottoman Turks, who kept it until the end of the World War I. During mid-1890, an Austrian-Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl called for a meeting of the Jewish leaders from all over the world and proposed that they help establish a homeland for Jews in Palestine.
The movement for resettling Jews in Palestine was called Zionism\textsuperscript{16}. During the period between 1897 and 1914, several thousand Jews immigrated to Palestine, financed in part by Lord Rothschild, a Jewish banker living in England. In 1917, with World War I hanging in the balance, members of the British Government made two contradictory commitments. Arthur Balfour issued the famous Balfour Declaration\textsuperscript{17}, which promised British aid in establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine in return for large loans from Jewish Banking houses that the British desperately needed to finance their participation in World War I. Almost simultaneously, a British Army Officer named Thomas Lawrence, best known as ‘Lawrence of Arabia’, promised independence to the Arabs of the Middle East in return for their help against the Ottoman Empire. Lawrence’s promise stirred Arab nationalism.

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


\textsuperscript{17} For a detail analysis of the Balfour Declaration see Mid East Website at: http://www.mideastweb.org/mebalfour.htm
allowing the immigration of thousands of Jews to Palestine, in accordance with the Balfour Declaration. The influx of Jews angered many Palestinian Arabs, who expected to form their own nation. Almost immediately, violence broke out between Jews and Palestinians and against the British officials in Palestine. The violence escalated during the period between the two World Wars, with both sides forming paramilitary guerrilla units and carrying out acts of terrorism against each other. After Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, many European Jews began to emmigrate to Palestine to escape the Nazi prosecution. This increased influx of Jews angered many Arabs in Palestine who accelerated their violent attacks on Jews. Jewish paramilitary units retaliated.\(^{18}\)

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

\(^{18}\) For more on this see “Israel, Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Arab-Israeli Conflict) - A Brief History” - Part I & II, Middle East Web at: http://www.mideastweb.org/briefhistory.htm
the West Bank. Some also fled to the neighbouring Arab states of Jordan and Lebanon where they lived in appalling conditions in refugee camps. What followed afterwards is discussed in the subsequent Chapters.

**Review of Literature:**

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


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

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

**Research Methodology**

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

The researcher has used Historical Method, Comparative Method and Analytical method to conduct this study. Historical Method has been used to study India’s support to the Palestine question right from the pre-independence period. By using the Comparative Method, I have tried to ascertain whether the establishment of diplomatic relationship with Israel has neutralized India’s
support to Palestine or not. The Analytical Method is used to critically examine different viewpoints related to the theme under study.

Chapter Outline

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

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

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

The third chapter analyses the public discourse that led to India’s diplomatic recognition to Israel, the international and domestic response to this important political decision and the impact of the growing ties between India and Israel on India Palestine relationship.
The fourth chapter discusses on India Palestine relationship from 1992 to 2012. It deals with India’s political, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian help to Palestine at the bilateral and multi-lateral levels. This chapter also examines the gulf between Government’s claim for an all-out support to the Palestine issue and the perception that exists among a number of leaders, scholars, journalists and activists who challenge this claim.

The last chapter examines India’s role in the Israeli Palestine peace process. It looks India role in all the stages of the conflict: role before 1991, role after the Madrid conference and the possibility of a mediatory role in future in the Middle East peace process. The conclusion presents the main arguments and research findings.
This chapter briefly surveys India’s posture towards Palestine during the pre-independence era. An enquiry of the colonial period is necessary for two reasons. First, India’s thinking and perceptions during the freedom struggle especially the views of the Indian National Congress (INC) and its top leadership had a direct impact on many of her post-independent policy postures in the global and regional contexts. This is best explained in the case of Palestine. Second, a peep into the colonial era would shed light on India’s approach to the Palestine question especially the history of India’s commitment to the Palestine cause, the principles that have moulded India’s approach and the rationale of such a policy posture.

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

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

(a) The INC & the Khilafat Movement

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

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

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

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20 For a more perceptive analysis on the Khilafat Movement and its implications for the Indian
freedom struggle see A.C Neimeijer, *The Khilafat Movement in India 1919-1924*, Martinus Nijhoff,
The INC took the issue into its hearts and expressed solidarity, sorrow and sympathy of all Indians towards the fate of Turkey. At the annual session of the Congress in 1922, its President, R.N Mudholkar, referred to the matter and at the next session of the INC in 1923 its President Nawab Syed Mohammed Bahadur made further reference to the troubles of the Islamic world outside India and the anxiety that caused among the Indian Muslims.\(^{21}\)

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

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

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

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

(b) The Palestine Question:

Like the Khilafat issue, India’s response to the Palestine question could also be traced to the post-World War 1 period. During this period, the Indian attitude was represented by the Indian National Congress. Indian national leaders who were leading India’s struggle for independence from British colonial rule had shown a strong interest in the Palestine problem, and the ongoing Arab-Jews struggle in the Holy Land. The INC while formulating the policies considered the domestic situation in India, which in a bigger way conditioned its perceptions, policies and the extent of its involvement in the Palestine question.23

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

stone unturned to reassure the Muslims of India that they were not separate from the rest of the Indian masses. Right from the beginning, the INC was firm in its political belief that the question of minorities had to be settled within the framework of a pluralistic order and not by partition\textsuperscript{24}.

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

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

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


\textsuperscript{25} A. Main Zaidi ed. \textit{Congress and the Minorities} Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, New Delhi, 1984, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{26} Cited in G.H Jansen, \textit{Zionism, Israel and Asian Nationalism}, The Institute for Palestinian Studies, Beirut, 1971, p.181.
passed a resolution on the ‘Egyptian Crisis’ which was the first non-Khilafat move on West Asia\textsuperscript{27}. Later in 1927, the Congress in its Madras session, asked for the withdrawal of Indian troops from Iraq, Iran and from all other countries. In 1928, the INC extended its sympathy to Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq in their struggle against the Western imperialism\textsuperscript{28}. Further, in the Brussels Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, the INC declared, “this Congress sends its warm greetings to the people of Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq and its assurance of full sympathy with them in their struggle for emancipation from the grip of Western imperialism”\textsuperscript{29}.

By the mid-thirties, the situation in Palestine had deteriorated due to the emergence of Nazi Germany. Violence and counter-violence continued unabated in Palestine. The reaction of the INC to this state of affairs was unequivocally in favour of the Arab cause. In 1936, the INC adopted a resolution on Arabs in Palestine at its Wardha session and expressed its greetings and sympathy “to the Arabs of Palestine in their struggle for freedom against British imperialism”\textsuperscript{30}.

Considering the volume of attention given by the Muslims and the sentimental attachment by the Muslim League towards the issue of Palestine, the INC observed September 27, 1936 as ‘Palestine Day’ by holding meetings and


\textsuperscript{28} Prasad, \textit{op cit.} No. 21, p.814.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}

demonstrations throughout the country in support of the Arab cause\textsuperscript{31}. A mass meeting was also held in Allahabad in support of the Arabs. Similarly, the Sindh Congress Socialist Conference held at Karachi on July 18, 1936 sent its greetings to the Arabs in Palestine and hoped that they would keep up the fight till independent Palestine was established\textsuperscript{32}.

In October 1937 at its Calcutta session, the All India Congress Committee (AICC) protested “against the reign of terror that has been established in Palestine by British imperialism with a view to coercing the Arabs into accepting the proposed partition of Palestine and assured them the solidarity of the people with them in their struggle for national freedom”\textsuperscript{33}. The following year, it resolved that “Britain would be well advised in reversing its present policy and leave the Jews and the Arabs to amicably settle the issues between them”\textsuperscript{34}. A resolution conveying Bombay citizen’s full sympathy to the Arabs in Palestine was adopted at a public meeting held under the auspicious of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee to celebrate the Palestine Day. Addressing the audience there, Sarojini Naidu stated that the fight against imperialism was a world fight and therefore it was the moral duty of the exploited people like Indians to sympathise with the Arabs fighting for independence from British domination\textsuperscript{35}.

\textsuperscript{31} R. Sreekantan Nair, \textit{Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed; India and Israel} Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.65.

\textsuperscript{32} Prasad, \textit{op cit}. No. 21, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Encyclopedia of INC}, Vol. 9, p.260.

\textsuperscript{34} Birendra Prasad, \textit{Indian Nationalism and Asia}, B.R Publication Corporation, New Delhi, 1979, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{35} Heptulla, \textit{op cit}. No. 24, p.149.
In its 51st session in February 1938, the Congress condemned the plan for partition of Palestine, protested against the repressive policy of Britain and expressed sympathy with the Arabs. It also appealed to the Jews “not to seek the shelter of the British Mandatory and not to allow them to be exploited in the interests of the British imperialism”36. In 1939, the INC sent a communication to Aminul Husseini, the Mufti of Palestine, wishing the Arab Higher Committee “complete success in the attainment of their objective” against the Zionists37.

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

36 N.V Rajkumar ed. The Background of India's Foreign Policy, All India Congress Committee, New Delhi: 1952, pp. 49, 54-55.
38 Heptulla, op cit. No. 6, p.149.
for the common object of securing the independence for their country. “And thus there is much in common between their struggle and ours”, Nehru further remarked, “and even on the narrow grounds of self interest we in India should support and sympathies with the Arabs. I trust that the Arab struggle in Palestine will help us to see our own struggle in a proper perspective and make us forget our internal divisions in the face of common diversity”\(^{39}\).

Maulana Ahmed Sayeed, the President of the first session of the Bihar Muslim Independent Party Conference held at Patna on September 12, 1936 criticised the British Government’s policy in regard to Palestine\(^{40}\).

Asaf Ali tabled an independent adjournment motion in the Legislative Assembly on September 11, 1936 to discuss the failure of the Government of India in inviting the attention of the British Government to the danger of persuading the policy of denying the indigenous population of Palestine their legitimate right of self-determination\(^{41}\). Sir Mohammad Yakub raised the Palestine issue on September 14, 1936 in the Indian Legislative Assembly. Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Shaukat Ali asked the Government of India to clarify the British policy towards Palestine\(^{42}\).

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

\(^{39}\) Prasad, op cit. No. 21, p. 146.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Amrit Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), April 27, 1937.

\(^{42}\) The Amrit Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), September 15, 1936.
September 1937 to express sympathy with the Arabs in their fight for freedom, Saukat Ali declared that every Muslim in India felt the strongest sympathy for the brave Arabs. A.R Siddiqi, the President of the conference, urged the Muslims of India to raise their voice in unison with the rest of the Muslim world against the contemplated amputation of Palestine\textsuperscript{43}.

In October 1937, the Muslim members of the Central Legislature in India in a statement noted with concern the developments in Palestine and expressed their sympathy with their Arab brethren in the fight against the heavy odds to safeguard legitimate rights and to save the Holy Land from Zionist aggression. They demanded that the whole of Palestine should be handed over to the Arabs, the sons of the soil\textsuperscript{44}. The All India Shia Political Conference held at Lucknow in October 1937 condemned the Peel Commission’s recommendations for the division of Palestine\textsuperscript{45}. The Raja of Mahmudabad, the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the 25\textsuperscript{th} session of the All India Muslim League held at Lucknow in October 1937, pointed out that Indian Muslims were anxiously watching the developments in Palestine and warned the British Government that any further inroads upon the rights of the Arabs of Palestine would start a conflagration which would lead to disastrous results\textsuperscript{46}. In his Presidential address, Jinnah told the British Government that the question of Palestine, if not fairly met, boldly and courageously decided, was going to be the turning point in the history of the

\textsuperscript{43} *The Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), September 25, 1937.

\textsuperscript{44} *The Amrit Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), October 11, 1937.


\textsuperscript{46} *Ibid*, p.402.
British Empire. Expressing India’s support to the Arab cause Jinnah said, ‘The Muslims of India will stand solid and will help the Arabs in every way they can in their brave and just struggle that they are carrying on against all odds’. The All India Muslim League wished that the recommendations of the Peel Commission should not be compiled with for they were opposed to the religious sentiments of the Muslims.

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

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

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

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47 A Ahmad, *Pakistan and the Middle East*, Karachi, 1940, p. 162.
48 *The Times of India*, October 18, 1937.
49 *The Amrit Bazar Patrika*, October 12, 1938.
50 *The Star of India*, January 31, 1939.
governing state and the complete stoppage of Jewish immigration into Palestine.\footnote{Indian Annual Register, 1939, Vol. I, p. 382.}

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

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of the most prominent and vocal nationalist leaders of India, vehemently opposed to the idea of creating a state Israel in Palestine. It is important to note here that his idea was no way influenced by the Muslims sentiment in India. He was firm in his belief that one can not divide the people on the basis of religion. In Calcutta session in 1937, INC assured the Arab people ‘full solidarity of the Indian people in their struggle for national freedom’.\footnote{N. V Rajkumar ed. The Background of India’s Foreign Policy, Navin Press, New Delhi, 1952, p. 54.}

However, the Jewish dimension of the problem was drawn by Subhas Chandra Bose in February 1938, in the 51\textsuperscript{st} session of the INC held at Haripura; Bose highlighted the contradiction involved in the British policy in Palestine.\footnote{For full text of the Presidential address see Sisir Bose and Sugata Bose eds. The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp.197-219.} Hence, the AICC in the same year (1938) appealed to the Jews not to seek...
shelter on the British mandate and not to allow them to be exploited in the interest of British Imperialism\textsuperscript{55}.

A similar view was expressed by Nehru, while addressing the Peace and Empire Conference in London on July 15, 1938. Nehru held British imperialism responsible for the unrest in Palestine and suggested that the Palestine problem could be solved only when the Arabs and Jews coming together with an agreement and not by the British Imperialism\textsuperscript{56}.

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

Finally, the fifty-second session of the INC was held in Tripura in March 1939 that categorically reiterated the significance of the earlier resolve\textsuperscript{58}.

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


\textsuperscript{56} Prasad, Indian Nationalism and Asia op cit, No. 34, pp. 145-46.

\textsuperscript{57} Cited in Nair, op cit. No. 31, p.66.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
its leadership especially the top leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. Hence an analysis of the perceptions of these two leaders on the Palestine question is needed which was later bequeathed by free India and its successive political leadership.

**Perception of Gandhi**

Even before the emergence of the Palestine question, Gandhi had been closely associated with the Jews. During his *Satyagraha* days in South Africa, he was an admirer of the Jewish philosopher Martin Bubber. Moreover, Hermenn Kakenbach and H.S.L Palak were his close associates\(^{59}\). He was also deeply shocked by the sufferings and hardships of the Jews, who, he believed, were treated worse than the untouchables in India\(^{60}\). However, his personal sympathy and affinity towards the Jews did not influence his views on the Palestine question. He wrote “my sympathies are all with the Jews. I have known them intimately in South Africa. Some of them became life-long companions. Through these friends, I came to learn much of their age long prosecutions….But my sympathy does not blind me to the requirements of justice. The cry for the national home of the Jews does not make much appeal to me. The sanction for it is sought in the Bible and in the tenacity with which the Jews have hankered after their return to Palestine. Why should they not like other peoples of the earth make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their

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livelihood”61? Gandhi’s perception on the whole issue was based on his deep faith in non-violence and the centrality of means over ends.

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

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

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64 Gandhi’s Works, Vol.88, p.262.
65 Young India, March 23, 1921, Gandhi’s Works, Vol. 19, p. 472.
66 Ibid.
Similarly, on the eve of the Palestine tragedy, he was more convinced of the grievous wrong done to the Arabs and wrote expressing his moral support to the helpless Palestinians who were being uprooted from their homes and fields. “The Jews” he wrote, “have erred grievously in seeking to impose themselves on Palestine with the aid of American money or British arms for forcing themselves on an unwelcome land”\(^{68}\).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{70} Gandhi’s Works, op cit. No 37.

\textsuperscript{71} Quoted in Jansen, op cit. No 68. Also see Gandhi’s Works, Vol. 68, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{72} Harijan, November 26, 1939. Also see Gandhi’s Works, Vol. 68, p. 140.
the two parties and hoped that if the Arabs provide refuge to the Jews without the mediation of any Nation, it will be in their tradition of generosity.\textsuperscript{73}

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

From the above discussion, it is clear that he was taking a pro-Arab stand on the Palestine question. This was mainly due to his high moral convincement and belief in non-violence. One could also notice in his attitude a soft approach for the Jews on humanitarian grounds when he said that “the Jews have a good cause in Palestine and in terms of claim they got priority”\textsuperscript{74}. This was because of his life-long friendship with many Jews and also for the age-long prosecution meted out to them. However, a few months before his assassination, Don Campbell of Reuters asked him, ‘What is the solution of the Palestine problem?”. In reply, Gandhiji in great despair said that it had become a problem which seemed insoluble.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} Gandhi's Works, Vol. 82, p. 262.

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

\textsuperscript{75} Krishan Gopal and Sarabjit Sharma, India and Israel: Towards Strategic Partnership, Authors Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 113.
Perception of Nehru

Towards the end of the 1920’s, Jawaharlal Nehru—a man most travelled and conversant with foreign affairs than any of his fellow Indian nationalists—was the recognized spokesman of the INC on foreign affairs and every resolution of the Congress on foreign affairs was practically inspired, drafted and piloted by him\(^76\).

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

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


\(^78\) Ibid, p.763.
cause of national independence and assured them the solidarity of the Indian people with them in their struggle for national freedom\textsuperscript{79}.

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

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

He was of the opinion that Jews should not rely on British support and should reach an agreement with the Arabs to safeguard their position in an independent Arab country. To him, the British appeared to be exploiting the differences between the Jews and the Arabs in the same manner they were promoting communal tensions in India\textsuperscript{81}. Hence, while addressing the audience


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

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

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

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82 Nehru, *op cit.* No. 77, p.767.

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

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

When India became independent in 1947, it could not keep itself away from these intellectual, ideological and moral legacies of the past. Moreover,
Nehru gave official colour to the views of the INC on Palestine once he became the Prime Minister as well as the Foreign Minister of independent India.