Chapter Two

INDIA’S POLICY TOWARDS PALESTINE (1947-1992)

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

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

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

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

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

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

India’s Support to Palestine Issue at the United Nations

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

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87 Gopal and Sharma, India and Israel, op cit., p. 14.
majority plan and the minority plan; the majority plan insisted on the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and the other Jewish, with the internalisation of Jerusalem under UN jurisdiction while the minority plan suggested the creation of a federal state with Jewish and Palestine units, with Jerusalem as the national capital.  

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

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

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votes in favour, 13 against and 10 abstentions. India voted against the plan along with the Arab and other countries\textsuperscript{90}.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{90} Nair, \textit{Dynamics of a Diplomacy Delayed, op cit.}, No. 31, p.70. Also see Shamir Hasan, “The Evolution of India’s Palestine Policy: A Fall from the Heights?”, \textit{Social Scientist}, Vol. 36, No. 1-2, January-February, 2008, p.82.

\textsuperscript{91} Vincent, \textit{op cit}, No. 86, p. 160
Was this recognition due to domestic concerns, including the fact that there was a Jewish community living in India (40,000 Jews out of a population of over 360 million)? An official communiqué gave two reasons for this decision. First, as in the case of communist China, the government of India was recognising ‘an established fact’. Secondly, non-recognition was not only inconsistent with the overall relationship between two member states of the UN but would also limit India’s role as a possible peace-maker between the Arabs and Israelis. According to Shivshankar Menon, a third reason was to enable peace to prevail in the region, enable de-colonization and to put an end to imperialism. Nehru, however, made it clear that recognition did not mean endorsement of Israeli position on its frontiers and India would continue to support the cause of the Palestinians.

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

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93 Shivshankar Menon’s talk on “Indian Foreign Policy in the Middle East” at the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem, 7 May 1997 at: http://www.passia.org/meetings/97/meet04.htm
because of Nehru’s firm attitude. David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel stated in 1960, “I cannot understand how Mr Nehru fits his behaviour to Israel with Gandhi’s philosophy of universal friendship.”

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

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

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


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

The withdrawal of the US offer to finance the construction of the Aswan Dam across the Nile led to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by President Nasser in 1956. The negotiations between Egypt and Anglo-French Governments failed to persuade Nasser to modify his position. While the issue was being debated, Israel launched an attack on Egyptian position in Sinai on October 29, 1956\(^{97}\). Israel’s unabashed and unprovoked aggression on a Third World country with ex-colonial powers like UK and France under false pretences dissipated whatever little sympathy the Indian leaders and the public entertained for Israel. An official statement issued on 31\(^{st}\) October 1956, denounced Israeli aggression as a fragrant violation of UN Charter and in opposition to all principles laid down in Bandung Conference\(^{98}\) and Nehru publicly denounced the Israeli action as ‘clear naked aggression’\(^{99}\). India also cosponsored resolutions in the General Assembly urging the immediate withdrawal of French, British and Israeli forces from Egypt.


\(^{98}\) *Foreign Affairs Record*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi No. 10, October 1956, p. 150.

\(^{99}\) *Hindu*, November 2, 1956.
According to Kumarswami, India's Israel policy at that time was influenced by three distinct factors: Afro-Asian solidarity based on anti-colonialism; Israel's increasing identification with imperial powers and consequent alienation from the newly independent countries of the Third World; and the growing friendship between Nehru and Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser. As a result, Nehru, who was extremely circumspect in his public reaction to the Hungarian crisis the same year, was vociferous in denouncing Israeli aggression toward Egypt. The Suez crisis had, however, brought in a major impact on India's policy perspective on West Asia. Though it did not make any direct implication on India's Palestine policy, it hardened India's attitude towards Israel and brought Egypt and India closer to each other.

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


prevailing in West Asia’s squarely on Israel\textsuperscript{102}. Similarly, Indira Gandhi in a statement in the \textit{Lok Sabha} on 6 June 1967 said, “I do not wish to utter harsh words or use strong language. But on the basis of information available, there can be no doubt that Israel has escalated the situation into an armed conflict which has now acquired the proportions of a full-scale war\textsuperscript{103}.

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

\textsuperscript{102} Quoted in Mudian, \textit{op cit}, No. 96, p. 212.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid}, p. 211.

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

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

106 Minister of External Affairs Swaran Singh’s speech in the Rajya Sabha in reply to the debate, December 6, 1973, in Ibid., pp. 153-54.
107 Foreign Affairs Record, No. 3, March 1974, pp. 121-123.
multiracial and multi-religious groups. Further, as a follow up to the success and response to her efforts at the UN in favour of the Palestine cause, India introduced another draft resolution on 21st November, 1974. This resolution also affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestine people to self-determination without external interference. It also stood for the Palestinian national independence and sovereignty. Consequently, the PLO acquired observer status in the UN in 1974. India also joined as a co-sponsor of General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism in November 1975.

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

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


111 Mudiam, *op cit.*, No. 96, p. 185.
India’s Espousal of Palestine Issue at the NAM

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{112} Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Series II, Vol. 2, New Delhi, p. 511.

\textsuperscript{113} Asian Recorder, New Delhi, April 23-29, 1955, pp. 191-2.

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


116 NAM Documents, p. 51.

117 Ibid, p. 111.

118 Ibid, p.186.
Thus India had played a very significant role in getting the PLO recognised as the true representative of the Palestine people both in the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. According to Prithvi Ram Mudiam, India sought to help the PLO gain international political acceptanc e as a reasonable and moderate organization and live down its image as a terrorist outfit by canvassing its case in the UN and outside, so that when the time for the final settlement came, the PLO would have gained sufficient respectability and credibility to participate in the negotiations as an independent organization genuinely representative of the Palestine people\textsuperscript{119}.

**India’s Relationship with the PLO**

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

\textsuperscript{119} Mudiam, *op cit.*, No. 96, p.185.
groups, led by Arafat. This was because of the following reasons. First, Al-Fatah was essentially a nationalist organization which embarked on an ambitious effort to unite the Palestinians at every level. It wanted to establish a democratic state in Palestine regardless of race and religion to build a progressive society contributing effectively towards the creation of a progressive and united Arab society. These objectives were naturally to India’s liking. Second, its approach was secular. It did not give a religious colour to its struggle with Israel by characterising it as ‘Jihad’. Third, India believed that the pragmatic approach of Yasser Arafat and his charismatic leadership would be helpful in resolving the dispute.\footnote{Vincent, \textit{op cit.}, No. 86, pp. 166-67.}

In 1969, the Al Fatah delegation visited India at the invitation of the Indian association for Afro-Asian solidarity.\footnote{Nair, \textit{op cit.}, No. 31, p. 74.} During the visit, the delegation called the Indian Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh and requested permission to open an office in India. In December 1974, about 30 MPs demanded the granting of diplomatic status to the PLO to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the ‘Palestine Revolution’.\footnote{\textit{Hindustan Times}, December 23, 1974.} On January 10, 1975, India became the first Non-Arab country to recognize the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and permitted it an independent office at New Delhi which paved the way for an official Palestinian presence in India. Mrs. Gandhi told an interviewer that
this act had nothing to do with economics but was rather a political act “because we feel that injustice has been done”123.

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

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

123 Cited in Gordon, op cit., No. 89, p. 228.
124 Gopal and Sharma, op cit., No. 89, p. 147.
Arabs and Israel. It was during this period, Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defence Minister made an unofficial visit to India (August 14, 1977). During his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Moraji Desai told him, ‘You must make peace with the Arabs. The Israelis have suffered from the Nazi’s and from the prosecution in Europe, but the Palestinians should not be made to pay for it’\(^\text{125}\). The argument of Dayan that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state would be permanent threat to the peace and security of Israel was out rightly rejected by Desai. When he raised the question of establishing full diplomatic relations between the two countries, Desai pointed out that ‘India has mistaken.. in not having done this at the very outset, when Nehru had come to power with India’s independence. But this mistaken policy could now not be changed’. Desai said, according to Dayan, that the Indian people would rise against the government if there was an attempt at having diplomatic relations with Israel\(^\text{126}\).

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


\(^{126}\) Ibid.

\(^{127}\) *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 8, August 1977, p. 138.
The Camp David Accord that was signed between Egypt and Israel on 17th September 1978 was denounced by the PLO and the Arab world. Egypt was accused of destroying Arab solidarity by signing a separate treaty with Israel. In this context, the response of India was totally in tune with the Arab world. A. B Vajpayee, the Foreign Minister said at a press conference that India did not welcome the Camp David Accord because it suffered from three major shortcomings. First, Palestine was the key issue in the Middle East problem and there could be no lasting peace until the inalienable rights of the Palestine people were restored. Secondly, PLO had not been recognized by Egypt and Israel as the representative body of the Palestinians. Third, the Camp David Accord was silent on the status of Jerusalem. Such a response of India, no doubt, reiterated her full and unconditional support to the Palestinian cause and interests of the PLO.

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

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129 Foreign Affairs Record, No. 9, September 1979, pp. 173-180.
Another significant development of the period towards the commitment of the Palestine cause was the observation of the “International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine People” organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the PLO in New Delhi on 29th November 1979. Presiding over the function, the Minister of State for External Affairs, B Barua said, “Today when an increased number of people all over the world are coming to see and understand the justice of Palestinian demand, we Indians, not only feel a sense of gratification but also a sense of vindication for our long-standing and consistent policies”\textsuperscript{130}.

In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a thumping majority and continued her support to the Palestinian struggle. Her Foreign Minister P.V Narasimha Rao announced in Parliament on 26\textsuperscript{th} March 1980 that India had decided to accord full diplomatic recognition to the office of the PLO in New Delhi by upgrading its office to that of an embassy endowed with all diplomatic immunities and privileges\textsuperscript{131}. As a follow up to this, Arafat paid a three-day official visit to India between 28\textsuperscript{th} and 30\textsuperscript{th} March 1980. At a dinner given in honour of him, Mrs. Gandhi said that sympathy for the Palestinians ‘has been a part of independent India’s foreign policy from its very inception’. She also reiterated that a just peace and a comprehensive solution to the Middle Eastern crisis could be found only with the “full participation of the PLO as an equal partner in any

\textsuperscript{130} Foreign Affairs Record, No. 9, November 1979, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{131} Hindustan Times, March 27, 1980.
settlement. In turn, Arafat in his speech described India “as an eternal friend”. In an interview, he expressed the hope that Palestinians are sure of success if a great country like India steadfastly supports the Palestine cause.

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

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

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133 Hindustan Times, March 29, 1980.
described him as ‘the symbol of a people afire with the spirit of freedom’\textsuperscript{136}. On the other hand, Arafat expressed his gratitude for the ‘strong and very important support which you extended to our just cause and national struggle’\textsuperscript{137}. Further, in the same meet, the two leaders issued a Joint Indo-PLO communiqué on 23\textsuperscript{rd} May 1982. The communiqué expressed concern over the Israeli acts of violence and aggression against Palestinian people in the occupied territories and their continuous aggressive acts and threat of invasion of south Lebanon, aided by the regular flow of highly sophisticated imported weapons\textsuperscript{138}.

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

\textsuperscript{136} Foreign Affairs Record, No. 5, May 1982, pp. 152-54.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, pp. 154-56.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, pp. 156-58.
\textsuperscript{139} Foreign Affairs Record, No. 7, July 1982, pp. 183-84.
\textsuperscript{140} Foreign Affairs Record, No. 6, June 1982, pp. 163-4.
\textsuperscript{141} In an interview, Mr Hasseen said “There was a strong Muslim Arab lobby in New Delhi and the Arab ambassador was making use of Indian Muslims to bring pressures to bear on the Government”. He also opined that Israel was getting a bad Press in India because the Press was following the official line and that India was competing with Pakistan to impress the Arabs. For more see Times of India, April 3, 1982.
Subsequently, in September 1982, India declared the Israeli Consul *persona non-grata* and ordered him to leave the country.

The Indian stand on Israeli invasion of Lebanon was gratefully acknowledged by Faisal Ahudav, the PLO Ambassador to India. Later in September 1982, Mrs. Gandhi further sent a message to Arafat in which she praised the PLO’s spirited resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon\(^{142}\). Here one could see India’s deliberate diplomacy and political strategy in West Asia in favour of the Palestinian cause and thus to nurture and strengthen the PLO as the sole crusader of the rights and interests of the Palestinians.

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

\(^{142}\) *Foreign Affairs Record*, No. 9, September 1982, p. 277.

\(^{143}\) *Foreign Affairs Record*, No 3, March 1983, pp. 54-56.

\(^{144}\) *Ibid*, p. 60.
October 1983 and it urged that a process of negotiation should be launched without delay. In another meeting in New Delhi in April 1985, the committee recommended the convening of an international conference under the aegis of the UN in order to obtain a ‘comprehensive, just and durable peace in West Asia’.

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

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

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

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portrayed the act as a “threat to peace and security.” It also sent messages of solidarity and support to both Arafat and the Prime Minister of Tunisia\textsuperscript{146}. However, India was not prepared to go along with the Arab states in expelling Israel from the United Nations.

The outbreak of the Palestinian intifada (uprising) in December 1987 in Gaza and West Bank due to the ‘iron fist’ policies of Israel is counted as a major event in the history of Israel Palestine conflict\textsuperscript{147}. Given its historical disposition, India’s sympathy and support for the Palestinians was inevitable. Another outcome of the intifada was the Algiers Declaration of November 15, 1988, in which the PLO declared its belated acceptance of the 1947 partition plan and proclaimed the “state of Palestine.” India became one of the first countries to recognize the state of Palestine and received PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as a head of state\textsuperscript{148}. The intifada also influenced India’s refusal to play the Davis Cup delegation playoff tennis match in Israel in April 1988. The PLO leader was very much conscious of India and her role. He expressed ‘deep gratitude’ and ‘appreciation’ for the solid support of India for the cause of Palestinian self-determination and independent statehood. Arafat, who became a frequent visitor to India and was received as a head of state after India’s recognition of the newly proclaimed State of Palestine in November 1988, was presented the ‘Jawaharlal

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid}


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

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

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

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

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

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

India’s Palestine Policy: An Alternate View

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

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150 Mudiam, op cit., No. 96, pp. 177-78.
During the mid and late fifties, opposition parties in India from the Left (Communists and Socialist parties of all hues) to the Right (Jan Sangh and Swantantra Party) had supported the Arab cause and had demanded the ending of West backed military grouping in West Asia. However the stand of the Arab states during India’s armed engagement with China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965 & 1971 had convinced these parties that India, in spite of its full support to the Arabs, had not been able and was not likely to ensure Arab neutrality in her disputes with its neighbours. So they raised strong objections to what they called as the “one-sided and self-destructive position” taken by the Government of India on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Moreover, the opposition was against any national commitment to Indian initiatives which were not backed by a national consensus. However, since the Congress party led by Nehru, Shastri, and Mrs. Gandhi had always had a large majority in the Lok Sabha and remained in power for a long period of time, the opposition criticisms had usually not changed Government’s policy. But by pressing questions, criticizing government positions and offering alternatives, the opposition had made the Lok Sabha a debating forum and had let the Congress know that there were other viewpoints in the country.

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

\[151\] For an excellent discussion on opposition parties viewpoint see R.K Srivastava, “India and the West Asian Crisis”, Foreign Affairs Report, April, 1968.
criticised the official Indian position in the 1967 war. The news papers like Times of India, Indian Express, Statesman and Hindustan Times made some critical remarks on Indian policy vis-à-vis support for the Arabs\textsuperscript{152}. Their embittered mood had been shaped against a double back-drop of pan-Islamic sentiments and consequent pro-Pakistani feelings of some of the West Asian nations and the belief of a large section of Indians in the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state.

As far as the public perception was concerned, a survey conducted in mid-July 1967 by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion on the “West Asian Crisis” had revealed that two out of three respondents in the cities of Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras opposed India’s extension of unqualified support to the “Arab cause” and maintained that India needed to take a “more objective and impartial stand” on the Arab Israel issue\textsuperscript{153}. Similarly, some of occasional letters to the editor published in three important Indian newspapers—Hindustan Times, Statesman and Times of India—as of late July 1967, favoured the Israeli position\textsuperscript{154}.

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

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


\textsuperscript{154}Richard J Kozichi, “Indian Policy towards the Middle East”, Orbis, Fall, 1967, p.107.
Pakistan, all Arab countries supported the latter irrespective of the merits of the dispute because of religious considerations. That Jordan and Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan openly and that several other Arab countries did so only a little more discreetly at the time of the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 and 1971 had confirmed to this conviction. The *Jan Sangh*, for instance, argued that there was no reason why India should unnecessarily continue to alienate Israel for the sake of the undependable Arabs. It wanted New Delhi to establish full diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv so that the closest collaborations could develop between two non-Muslim countries in this pre-dominantly Muslim region.\(^{155}\)

Another reason for opposition was that India’s ‘one sided’ policy on Arab-Israel conflict was inconsistent with its avowed foreign policy of non-alignment. If non-alignment is defined as independence in foreign policy and judging every international event on its merits, then many argued that India’s continuous and automatic support to the Arabs had made “screaming nonsense of its non-alignment” policy.\(^{156}\) Though Egypt and Syria had launched a coordinated attack on Israel in 1967, the Indian Government conveniently ignored certain

\(^{155}\) For more on this see Balraj Madhok, “India’s Foreign Policy: The Jan Sangh View”, *India Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, January-March 1967, p. 11.

\(^{156}\) C Rajagopalachari, for instance, argued that “the non-alignment of India had become indeed a joke”. He cited the Government of India’s blind support to Nasser against Israel in regard to the Aqaba Gulf-*Swatantra*, *Newsletter*, No. 61, July 1967, pp. 4-5. The Jana Sangh leader Balraj Madhok similarly said that government must pursue a policy of non-alignment in the Arab Israeli dispute as the Arabs pursued the policy of non-alignment vis-à-vis India’s conflict with Pakistan and China-- Madhok’s statement in Parliament, *Indian Lok Sabha Debates*, Vol.6, No. 4, June 15, 1967, cols. 12150-12162. The *Swatantra* Party called India’s standing alignment against Israel as unfortunate and declared that India’s role in the world as a crusader for peace and non-alignment has come to an end-- *Swantra Newsletter*, No 61, July 1967, pp. 4-5. *Swarajya*, the party mouthpiece maintained that India’s support for the Arabs stood against the principle of peaceful coexistence as these states were out to destroy Israel--. *Swarajya*, Vol 11, No 50, 10 June 1967, p. 2.
unpleasant facts\textsuperscript{157} in relation to the conflict and blamed Israel for encouraging the Arab countries to attack it. The fact that Arabs had initiated the conflict was by-passed and no reference was made to the Arab refusal to negotiate. Moreover, India’s stand at the UN seemed to suggest that the Arab had no option but to use of force to regain the lost territory. According to Mohammad Ayoob “instead of advising caution to Egypt, the Indian leadership seemed to have told Nasser only what he wanted to hear. Similarly, instead of advising its Arab friends on the realities of the situation after the 1967 war, India, nevertheless, steadfastly upheld the position of upholding the Arab stand of non-recognition of Israel”\textsuperscript{158}.

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

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

Israel. President Nasser undoubtedly played a helpful role at the Colombo Power’s conference, but his role during the Indo-Chinese war in 1962 had saddened many in India. Similarly his Prime Minister Ali Sabry took up a blatantly pro-China line and Heykal, a close confidante and editor of Al-Ahram, indulged in cheap criticism of India. The response of other Arab states to the Sino-Indian conflict was also disappointing. In a resolution on Kashmir at the UN in 1962, several Arab countries endorsed Pakistan’s position. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, Jordan served as Rawalpindi’s mouthpiece in the Security Council and Saudi Arabia reportedly provided funds for the purchase of arms.

At the Casablanca Conference of the Heads of Arab States in September 1965, several Arab states endorsed the Pakistani position. They also voted against India in the UN Security Council election in 1966 as Syria was a candidate. The huge disappointment encountered by India at the Rabat Conference of 1969 left

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159 Girilal Jain, “India’s West Asia Policy”, Times of India, November 22, 1967.

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

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


163 Ibid.
a bitter taste and the opposition parties took it up to flog the government for its pro-Arab stance vis-à-vis Israel.\textsuperscript{164}

There were many voices in the Arab world carelessly pouring scorn at Indian leaders and suggesting that India was already, or was on the way to becoming an American colony. Pictures of India disintegrating into chaos under the weight of obscurantism and incompetence were gleefully drawn by some Arab commentators.\textsuperscript{165} Similarly, during the Indo-Pak war in November 1971 that eventually led to Pakistan’s dismemberment and the rise of an independent Bangladesh nation, countries like Egypt and Syria took a neutral stand while nations like Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia condemned India.\textsuperscript{166}

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

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

\textsuperscript{165} Jain, \textit{op cit.} No. 162.

a limited quantity of mortars and ammunition from Israel\textsuperscript{167}. Similarly, Israel took a pro-India stand by criticizing Pakistan during its war with India in 1965 & 1971 and backed India’s stand that the 1972 Shimla agreement between India and Pakistan could be the only basis for a final settlement of the Kashmir issue. In view of this, a section among Indians thought that an Indian policy of all-out support to Arabs against Israel was not only needless but also unjustified.

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


policy, it alleged, was conditioned by the ruling party’s obsession with the communal vote\textsuperscript{169}.

The fifth reason for opposing India’s West Asia policy arose from the misplaced ‘fear of the Government that if India displeased the Arabs, the latter would take the side of Pakistan and will eventually support Pakistan’s demand for Kashmir\textsuperscript{170}. Finally, it was argued that the Arabs and the Palestinians had made a historic ‘mistake’ in rejecting the 1947 UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which paved the way for the partition of the British-ruled mandate Palestine. This was admitted none other than Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority in a recent interview to an Israeli TV channel\textsuperscript{171}. That rejection was meant a Jewish state was created while the Palestinians were left without a state. Palestinian and Arab leaders had then called for resisting Resolution 181; with Arab neighbours invading Israel at the declaration of the latter’s independence in May 1948, threatening to occupy the entire Mandate territory. At the end of that war, the Arab armies stood defeated and Israel had increased its land area by half as much as its original allotment. Thereafter, the Arabs had

\textsuperscript{169} As quoted in Gopal and Sharma, \textit{op cit.}, No. 75, pp. 200-01.


\textsuperscript{171} “State of Recall: Why Mahmoud Abbas’s Regret on Palestinian’s 1947 Stand is Historic”, \textit{Indian Express} editorial, November 1, 2011.
aggravated the situation in the Middle East by following a policy of “no recognition, no negotiation and no peace with Israel”\textsuperscript{172}

Although it is difficult to dismiss all the points mentioned above, now the question is had India not followed a pro-Arab policy as it did over the years what would have been the consequences? According to Girilal Jain, the consequences of a change of policy would have been highly adverse for India. It would have earned the hostility of all Arab countries irrespective of their internal differences including India’s trade relationship and oil imports from the region, confirmed the unhappy and erroneous impression in the Soviet bloc that India had for all practical purposes abandoned the policy of non-alignment, facilitated the task of Pakistani and Chinese diplomacy in isolating India in the Third World, created an anti-Soviet alliance of the Muslim countries of West Asia by the West with Pakistan cast in a leading role which would have acquired strong religious and therefore anti-India overtones and alienated the Muslim intelligentsia at home\textsuperscript{173}.

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


\textsuperscript{173} Girilal Jain, \textit{Times of India, op cit.}, No. 159.
expected to ignore. The pro-West Arab governments also tend to be pro-Pakistan. It is instructive to note that all Arab countries sided with India on various issues relating to the abortive second Afro-Asian summit at Algiers in the summer of 1965.174

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

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

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

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

The third phase started with the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and India’s recognition of it in 1950. From the very time of recognition, India’s approach to the Palestine cause was conditioned to the reality of the existence of Israel. No doubt, India endorsed Israel’s right to exist as a free and independent state. However, right from the Suez crisis of 1956, the expansionist and aggressive tendencies of Israel prevented
India from coming closer to the Jewish state which indirectly cemented the political and diplomatic understanding with the Arab world. Even then, during this phase, India’s Israel policy was something different from that of the Arab states, which never recognized Israel as a state and resorted to extreme options to liquidate the Jewish state. India was against this and stood for a peaceful settlement of the dispute between the Jews and the Palestinians. However, the absence of an Arab consensus towards the role and status of the PLO led India to support Arab countries on Palestine rather than to directly deal with the PLO.

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

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