India’s political and economic support to the Palestine people in their search for a separate homeland is undoubtedly important and should be continued without any pause. But this alone would not solve the vexed Palestine issue. The problem can be amicably resolved only through a time-bound and result-oriented peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This chapter examines India’s role in the Israel Palestine peace process including the possibility of a mediatory role between the two parties to solve their long pending dispute.

**Role Before 1991**

Although India actively supported the Arabs against Israel both within and outside the United Nations and always stressed the need for the Arabs to seek a negotiated settlement with Israel on the Palestine issue yet the Indian leaders were not eager to play any mediatory role in the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the eve of Israel’s request for recognition Nehru, for instance, said, “India can play no effective part in this conflict at the present stage either diplomatically or otherwise”\(^\text{465}\). He perhaps realised that the demands of the Arabs and the Israelis were so irreconcilable that there was hardly any scope for meditation by

anyone\textsuperscript{466}. Similarly dismissing any role for India in the peace process, Rajiv in 1986 candidly admitted: “There are already so many parties involved, we would not like to add one more hand in the complicated situation. We prefer to watch for a while and see how things turn out before actively trying to take an interest in it.”\textsuperscript{467} Second, the absence of diplomatic relations with Israel, a party to the dispute also limited India’s role in the peace process. The Israelis made it clear that in order to play any meaningful role in the peace process; India had to first establish full diplomatic relationship with their country. Third, the absence of India’s role can be explained on the Indian apprehension that its quid pro quo could provoke activism on Kashmir by the countries in the region\textsuperscript{468}. Fourth, throughout the Cold War period, the India West Asia relationship remained one-sided. It was always India and Indians who were dependant on the region and not the vice versa. This also limited India’s role in West Asian conflict. Last but not the least, any sincere and substantial peace process to resolve the Arab Israeli conflict started only after the Madrid Conference not before it. However, India’s basic approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict during this period had been that the people of the region itself should decide and negotiate the problem. Therefore, India welcomed, for example, the Camp David agreements while stressing that all the people of the region have the right to self-determination and all states the right to exist within secure boundaries.

\textsuperscript{466} Punyapriya Dasgupta, “Betral of India’s Israel Policy, op cit. No. 92, p.769.

\textsuperscript{467} Kumarswami, India’s Israel Policy op cit., No. 176.

\textsuperscript{468} Abhyankar ed. West Asia and the Region op cit., No. 13, p. 54.
Role Since Madrid Conference

The Middle East Peace Process started with the Madrid Conference of October 1991 and India had played a limited role since then. It was invited to become a participant in the multilateral track of the Peace Process that began in 1991 and actively participated in all the five working groups discussing Middle East-Palestine question such as regional economic development, arms control and regional security and environment and water resources\textsuperscript{469}.

The slow-paced Madrid talks which were leading nowhere were upstaged by a series of secret meetings between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators hosted by Norway. These meetings produced the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between Palestinians and Israel, a plan discussing the necessary elements and conditions for a future Palestinian state "on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973)". The agreement, officially titled the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (DOP), was signed on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993 between Israeli Prime Minister and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. It provided for a two-phase time table. First was a five-year interim period during which Israel Defence Forces would incrementally

\textsuperscript{469} MEA Annual Report 1992-93, p. 6. The Middle East peace process is a complex web of international negotiations based upon the structure set up at the Madrid Conference that was held on 30 October 1991. There were two different but parallel negotiating tracks, a bilateral one and a multilateral one. The bilateral track consisted of four separate sets of direct negotiations between Israel, and Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians. The multilateral track aimed at building confidence among the regional parties and at solving a number of complicated issues which were addressed in five different forums comprising representatives from states in the region as well as of the international community. The working groups of the multilateral negotiations were focusing on water, environment, arms control, refugees and economic development.
withdraw from Palestinian areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, transferring administrative powers to a soon-to-be elected Palestinian National Authority. Second was the ‘final status’ negotiations, to begin at the start of the third year of the interim period. These negotiations would cover the remaining issues such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return of Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlements in West Bank and Gaza, security arrangements, final borders of the two resultant states, relations and cooperation with other neighbours and other issues of common interests.\textsuperscript{470}

India expressed its happiness on the signing of the Oslo Accord. An Official Spokesman of the MEA said that India welcomed mutual recognition by the State of Israel & the PLO, and the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement on Palestinian self-rule. India stressed that these were the notable steps towards ensuring peace & stability in West Asia, which had been troubled by strife and discord for so many generations. India with her historic ties of friendship and socio-cultural links with the peoples of the region would continue to extend its support to further efforts that would be undertaken towards peace in West Asia, and would lend its good offices whenever required towards confidence-building measures in the area. India expected that these historic steps forward would lead to further positive developments aimed at achieving the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.\textsuperscript{471}

\textsuperscript{470} “Oslo Accords”, Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords

\textsuperscript{471} Foreign Affairs Record op cit., No. 307, p.438.
India welcomed the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement in Cairo on 4th May 1994 (also known as Gaza-Jericho Agreement) which marked the first stage of implementing the Declaration of Principles provisions dealing with the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area and the transfer of powers to the Palestinian National Authority. An Indian delegation led by the Minister of State for External Affairs, R.L Bhatia was present during the signing ceremony.

On 30th September 1995, the Oslo Interim Agreement (Oslo II) was signed between Israel and PLO in Washington D.C and was the second stage in the process begun with the Declaration of Principles. This agreement extended Palestinian self-rule to significant portions of the West Bank and made it possible to hold elections and set up the Palestinian National Authority that would negotiate a final settlement with the Israelis. India greeted the agreement and reiterated the view that durable peace in the region was necessary to resolve all outstanding issues to the satisfaction of all concerned parties.

The signing of the Wye River Memorandum between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (after a lot of US pressure and personal intervention of President Bill Clinton on 23 October 1998) in Maryland which dealt with further Israeli redeployments in the West Bank,

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473 For the text of the Oslo Interim Agreement see Mid East Web at: http://www.mideastweb.org/meosint.htm
security issues and other concerns\textsuperscript{474} provided some relief to India on the vexed issue. While terming the agreement ‘an important milestone’ in the stalled peace process, India supported its unconditional implementation\textsuperscript{475}. The outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, however, put an end to the Wye River's understandings and goals\textsuperscript{476}.

During the initial months of the second Intifada in September 2000, both the PNA as well as Israel sought India's intervention in ending the escalating Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was done formally through letters both from Ehud Barak, (the new Israeli Prime Minister since May 1999) and Arafat to Prime Minister Vajpayee. While Israel sought India’s intervention in general terms—to exert its influence over the Palestinian leadership to ‘end violence’—the PNA suggested three specific areas in which India could play a role in resolving the crisis. These areas included India’s initiative for ensuring an expeditious functioning of the international fact-finding mission already set up in pursuance of the decision taken at Sharm-El-Sheikh, its influence in the creation of an observer force or protection force under the UN auspices and finally, India’s efforts to ensure the implementation of the UN resolutions 242 and 338 on the

\textsuperscript{474} The text of the Wye River agreement see Mid East Web at: http://www.mideastweb.org/mewye.htm

\textsuperscript{475} Foreign Affairs Record, No. 10, October 1998, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{476} Difficulties in Wye Agreement, says Arafat, India Express, Aug 17 1999 at: http://www.indianexpress.com/Storyold/115860/
Israeli Palestine conflict. Without tilting either way, India advised the two warring groups to give peace a chance in the embattled region.

A summit meeting was held at the Sharm El Sheikh in February 2005 between Israeli and Palestinian leaders to end the 2000 Intifada and resume negotiations under the roadmap. The Indian Trade and Industry Minister Ashwani Kumar participated in the summit. In a statement on 10 February 2005, the Government of India termed the meeting between the leaders of Israel and Palestine as “an important step in the resumption of the Israel-Palestine peace process which deserved the support of the international community.”

The next significant step in the Israel Palestine peace process was the Annapolis Conference which was held on November 27, 2007 at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and U.S. President George W. Bush attended the meeting along with over 40 other invitees including the Arab League, the European Union and the United Nations. The conference for the first time accepted a two-state solution for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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481 For more about Annapolis Conference see the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at: http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Historic+Events/The+Annapolis+Conference+27-Nov-2007.htm
India was invited as a participant in this conference and Kapil Sibal, the Minister for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, represented the country at Annapolis. Sibal was accompanied by Ambassador Gharekhani, the Special Envoy for West Asia and met among others, Amre Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League who gave the Indian Minister his assessment to about the Israel-Palestine dialogue, the role of the Arab League and related issues including developments leading up to the Annapolis Summit. The Minister also met the Brazilian and South African Foreign Ministers and the three leaders were of the view that the Annapolis Summit was a positive development that needed support by the international community, in order to assist the peace dialogue between Israel and Palestine 482.

From the above discussion, it is evident that while during the Cold War, India has played no direct role in the Israeli Palestinian conflict; it had only a limited role in the Middle East peace process since Madrid Conference of 1991 to the Annapolis Conference of 2007.

482 India to attend the Annapolis Conference for Peace in the Middle East, November 26-28, 2007, Annapolis, USA November 26, 2007, Indian Embassy, Washington, DC at:

Should India Play a Mediatory Role in the Israel Palestine Peace Process?

In recent years, there is a growing perception that India should play a mediatory role in the Israel Palestine Peace process. Before discussing this question, it is important to understand India’s position on the Israeli Palestine peace process, whether India is actually interested for such a big role and if yes, how is India’s new role perceived by the relevant countries in the region.

India’s Position:

India’s commitment to the Palestinian cause is an important component of its long established foreign policy. The country maintains following position on the Israeli Palestinian peace process.

- India considers the resolution of the Palestine issue as central to lasting peace in West Asia. As Vice President Hamid Ansari has recently said that “a primary cause of tension, instability and violence in the region is the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”\(^{483}\).

- India shares the perception that the Israeli Palestinian conflict is essentially political in nature which can be resolved through political negotiations and diplomatic means, rather than through the use of force\(^{484}\).

- India believes that a comprehensive peace process within a definite timeframe with all the stakeholders in the region can address the key

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\(^{483}\) India Supports Palestinian People’s Right for State, *Deccan Herald*, October 12, 2011 at: http://www.deccanherald.com/content/197550/india-supports-palestinian-peoples-right.html

issues of the dispute and lead to the establishment of a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestinian State, in accordance with the two-state solution\textsuperscript{485}.

- India has consistently supported the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign, independent, viable and united Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel.

- With this objective, India has supported the UN Security Council Resolutions (242\textsuperscript{486} and 338\textsuperscript{487}), the NAM Declarations, the Israeli “Land

\textsuperscript{485} “India Says Has High Stake in West Asia Peace, Backs Arab Plan”, \textit{Daily News Analysis}, March 1, 2010.

\textsuperscript{486} United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (S/RES/242) was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on November 22, 1967, in the aftermath of the Six Day War. The preamble refers to the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in which every State in the area can live in security”. Operative Paragraph One “Affirms that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the following principles: (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.” Resolution 242 is one of the most commonly referred UN resolutions to end the Arab–Israeli conflict, and the basis of later negotiations between the parties. For more see “United Nations Security Council Resolution 242”, Wikipedia Online Dictionary at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council_Resolution_242

\textsuperscript{487} The three-line United Nations Security Council Resolution 338, adopted on October 22, 1973, called for a ceasefire in the Yom Kippur War in accordance with a joint proposal by the United States and the Soviet Union. The resolution states: The Security Council, Calls upon all parties to present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy; Calls upon all parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts; Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at
for Peace" principle\textsuperscript{488}, the Quartet Road Map in April 2003\textsuperscript{489} (MEA Report) and the Arab peace plan under which Israel would withdraw to pre-1967 borders and that the state of Palestine would be established, but that this would have to be accompanied by recognition of Israel.

- India has delinked its bilateral relationship with Israel and Palestine from the progress in the Middle East peace process. This implies that even if the peace process does not make much headway in future, this would not affect its relationship either with Israel or with Palestine.

- India also maintains that "protracted negotiations over decades" have not achieved the national goals of the Palestinian people and have "fuelled disappointment and anger which is a matter of great concern to it."

Due to this anger and disappointment over the peace process, India is seriously considering for a mediatory role between the Israelis and the


\textsuperscript{488} Land for peace is an interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242 which has formed the basis of subsequent Arab-Israeli peace making. The name Land for Peace is derived from the wording of the resolution's first operative paragraph which affirms that peace should include the application of two principles; Withdrawal of Israeli forces (Giving Up Land), and Termination of all claims or states of belligerency (Making Peace). Since the resolution stipulates that both principles should apply they can be viewed jointly as giving up land for peace, referred to more concisely as 'land for peace'

\textsuperscript{489} The 'roadmap for peace' is a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict proposed by a "quartet" of international entities: the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations. The principles of the plan, originally drafted by U.S. Foreign Service Officer Donald Blome, were first outlined by U.S. President George W. Bush in a speech on June 24, 2002, in which he called for an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace: "The Roadmap represents a starting point toward achieving the vision of two states, a secure State of Israel and a viable, peaceful, democratic Palestine. It is the framework for progress towards lasting peace and security in the Middle East.
Palestinians to solve the Palestine issue. C.R. Gharekhan who served India’s Special Envoy to West Asia, for instance, stated that India is willing to play the role of a mediator if it is asked to, though it would still maintain its stand on settling disputes bilaterally. Since India has good relations with Israel as well as Palestine, it can talk to both parties candidly without compromising on its own position, he added\textsuperscript{490}. An indication of the new Indian strategic shift is the appointment of the veteran diplomat and former assistant to the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, C. R. Gharekhan, as India’s Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process-- a development that proves that India is concerned about the Palestinian – Israeli peace process more than the struggle of the Palestinian people for liberation. Moreover, India is also viewed by both the Israelis and the Palestinians as a trustworthy intermediary. During the second intifada in 2000, for instance, both Israel and Palestine had requested India to help broker truce in West Asia and save the peace process from collapse. While Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak telephoned Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee twice in those days, Palestine leader Yasser Arafat had sought Delhi’s intervention through its representative in the Gaza Strip\textsuperscript{491}.

During his India visit in October 2008, the Palestinian President Abbas made a request “to use New Delhi’s growing influence for giving momentum to


the West Asian peace process”. Similarly, the Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has urged India to play an active role in the Middle East peace process since “India has been one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement and has a sound recording of upholding democratic principles”. Echoing the same voice, the Palestinian Ambassador to India, Osama Musa said that India should play a greater role in putting an end to Israeli occupation. “We want India, and the international community, to see that the Israeli tanks are out of our bedroom”.

Israeli Ambassador to India, David Danieli said in an interview to PTI after electoral victory of Hamas that "India certainly can contribute by having a dialogue with Palestinians and with Israel. India maintains equally good relations with both. So the ears of both sides are certainly open to hear Indian views and advise". During a meeting in Jerusalem with India’s Special Envoy to West Asia, Chinmaya Gharekhan, the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told, "India’s voice carries weight in the international community. It is an important country and Israel attaches a lot of significance to its relations with India." Speaking along

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493 Weak Leaks India Cable, 110122: “India Balancing Relations with Israel and Hamas”, *Hindu*, March 15, 2011.


the same lines, Ahmed Salem Al-Wahishi, head of the League of Arab States mission, said “We are looking for a greater role for India in West Asia. India’s expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian cause will help support peace process in the region”\textsuperscript{497}. Hailing India as a supporter of the Arab cause, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has similarly said India can play a role in resolution of West Asia problem by using its "strong relations" with the US and Israel. As a "rising" country with important role in Asian and global affairs, India should not remain out of the West Asian peace process. To him "India has the credibility in the the West Asia peace process because of its objective position"\textsuperscript{498}.

**The Domestic Discourse on India’s Role in the Peace Process**

The domestic discourse on India’s new role in the Israel Palestine peace process is sharply divided. There are four different discourses: the Radicals, the Nehruvians, the Pragmatists and the Status Quoits\textsuperscript{499}. These categorisations are designed to provide an outline of the competing lines of argumentation about India’s new role, rather than identify Radicals, Nehruvians, Pragmatists or Status Quoits per se. It is also important to note that it is difficult right now in India to associate these perspectives with particular political parties, think tanks, or ministries. Thus, these perspectives are individualistic and do not correspond to

\textsuperscript{497} “Envoy Seeks Greater India Role in Palestine”, *Indian Express*, March 13, 2008.


particular organisations. They do, however, represent the views of important public intellectuals, policy analysts, academics, journalists, diplomats, and government officials on an important foreign policy subject.

**The Radical Perspective:**

Deeply perturbed by the inhuman conditions of Palestinians in the Israeli occupied territories and greatly influenced by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, the Radicals take a different viewpoint on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and India’s role in this conflict. For them, the Israeli occupation of Palestine is the worst form of colonialism and the situation in the occupied territories represents apartheid in practice. According to Praful Bidwai, “the British exploited and oppressed India’s people through systematic loot, despotic rule, and destruction of institutions and occupations. But they didn’t come and grab your land, occupy your fields or steal most of your water. By contrast, Israel has confiscated 24 per cent of the area of the West Bank and Gaza and 89 per cent of East Jerusalem for settlements, highways, military installations, etc. It controls 80 per cent of the water resources of the occupied territories and also appropriates a large quantity, equal to one-third of its consumption, from the Jordan River. Fourth-fifths of the water from the West Bank’s sole underground aquifer go to Israel”500.

The Israelis have not only illegally occupied the Palestinian territory; they are also practicing an apartheid policy in the occupied territories as was adopted by the white regime in South Africa. This is clearly evident from their strategy to change the facts on the ground through a number of measures like:

- Confining Palestinians to small pockets (Area 'A', defined by the Oslo accords of 1995-96 to be under the PA’s full control, and Area 'B' under "joint" Palestinian-Israeli security), but keeping them out of the fully Israeli-controlled 'C' Area of Palestine.

- Obstructing the Palestinians’ movement even within Areas 'A' and 'B', through closures, checkpoints, barriers, roadblocks, trenches, etc.

- Breaking up the West Bank into some 300 enclaves, separated from one another, and joined by roads to which most Palestinians have no access. By contrast, Israeli settlers enjoy full freedom of movement in these, with state protection.

- Imposing a tight system of work-and residence-permits, like South Africa’s notorious "Pass Laws", which restrict people’s liberties in respect of work and life.
- Erecting a 700-km-long "Separation Barrier" (almost five times longer than the Berlin Wall), and in places eight meters tall, although this has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice.501

The Radicals resent that Israel has not only occupied the Palestinian and Arab territories in violation of international law, international opinion and numerous United Nations resolutions starting with 224 and 338 and inflicted every conceivable form of violence, injustice, ignominy and insult upon Palestinian civilians, it has also refused to stop the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem which shows its continued policy of delaying and obstructing the regional and international efforts in dealing with the peace process and negotiations.” Quoting Sharon's senior adviser Dov Weisglass who openly said "When you freeze the peace process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state", the Radicals believe that the ultimate Israeli goal is to "severely harm the Palestinians" and end "the dream of a Palestinian state".502

Sitaram Yechury argues in this context that Israel and the U.S. have hatched a four-pronged conspiracy to obstruct peace in the region. The first element in the conspiracy is the annexation of Palestine after formally agreeing to concede annexed territories to Palestinians. The settling of Jews in the colonised areas is the second element of the strategy. This is being done to pre-

501 Ibid. For more on Israel’s apartheid policy in Palestine see “Israel and the apartheid analogy”, Wikipedia online encyclopaedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_and_the_apartheid_analogy

empt the territorial claims of Palestinians in future. The third aspect of the strategy is aimed at limiting and constricting the scope of effective Palestinian sovereignty by herding the people into Bantustan-like enclaves reminiscent of apartheid-era South Africa, surrounded by a hostile Israel. The fourth component of the strategy is to attack mercilessly with the most sophisticated of weapons those who offer any resistance. The fascistic dimension of the Israeli regime, said Yechury, is evident from the brutal manner in which youth and children are systematically targeted by the Israeli security apparatus. By doing this, he accused, the Israeli state wants to wipe out the future of Palestine\textsuperscript{503}.

Describing Israel as a “rogue state” whose history is the history of violence and violations of human rights, the Radicals are sure that the Israelis on their own would never allow the Palestine state to become a reality. They therefore, think that growing international pressure on the Jewish state can bring it back to the negotiation table and make it fulfil its commitments towards Palestine. In this context, the Radicals are divided on what kind of role India should play in the Israel Palestine conflict.

Considering that no peace is possible in the world without solving the issue of Palestine, some Radicals want India to fully support the Palestine issue and end all cooperation with Israel. Ending cooperation with the Zionist country, to them, would serve at least three important purposes. First, any Indian alignment with the Jewish country not only means direct supports to its colonial

\textsuperscript{503} Quoted in Sridhar, “An Expression of Solidarity” \textit{op cit.} No. 328.
and brutal apartheid regime imposed on the Palestinian people but also subsidises the cost of Israeli war efforts against the Palestinian national liberation movement. For instance, an appeal in 2008 by a number of non-governmental organizations related to Palestine to the “Indian people and its government” to “Stop arms Trade with Apartheid Israel” said, “The Indian government which continues to reiterate its commitment to a just solution of the Palestinian question in accordance with international law, has unfortunately emerged as the major broker of Israel’s arms industry. This is tantamount to financing continued, illegal occupation of Palestinian and Arab territory as it helps subsidize the occupation regime. India’s arms trade strategically contributes to the perpetuation of Israel’s occupation and apartheid system.\textsuperscript{504} Nilotpal Basu, a CPM Member of Parliament, has similarly argued that India is indirectly supporting the Israeli atrocities on Palestinians by strengthening its economy through weapons purchase\textsuperscript{505}.

Second, India’s bilateral trade with Israel stands at approximately $5 billion annually and its defense ties are estimated to be worth $9 billion. India has become the largest client of Israeli military exports, with contracts totalling $9 billion, including $2.5 billion for the Air Force and several hundred millions in Ballistic Missile Defence systems\textsuperscript{506}. Severing these ties with Israel will hurt its

\textsuperscript{504} Cited in Koshy, “India: Israel And Palestine” \textit{op cit.}, No. 372.

\textsuperscript{505} “Need to Launch Public Movement in India to Support Palestine: Speakers” at: http://twocircles.net/2009dec23/need_launch_public_movement_india_support_palestine_speakers.html

economic interests and force it to come to the negotiating table. Third, Israel has used its military equipment, trade and other sources such as agricultural research, culture and academia, to increase its influence in India. Stopping all these would end Israeli influence in India which is detrimental to the Palestinian struggle\textsuperscript{507}.

For some other Radicals, India should not only cut off all its ties with Israel but also boycott Israeli goods and services and call for a combination of global isolation, sanctions and external pressure against the Jewish country by the international community\textsuperscript{508}. India must demand a complete cessation of military purchases and joint ventures with Israel, a boycott of Israeli goods and services beginning with those made in the occupied territories, and seek tough sanctions against the Jewish country. Just as it was in the case of the international call against South Africa in the apartheid years, they are confident that this boycott would be effective in contributing to international pressure on Israel to rein its colonisation and apartheid policy towards Palestine and implement the accords it has signed with the Palestinians leading to the establishment of an independent and viable Palestine state. The Radicals believe that these acts against Israel at this moment will have better impacts as the Jewish country is isolated world-wide

\textsuperscript{507} Achin Vanaik’s Interview to Aditi Bhaduri at: http://www.himalmag.com/Why-not-Palestine_fnw85.html

\textsuperscript{508} “India must seek sanctions against Israel: Karat”, \textit{Hindu}, July 21, 2006.
for the “oppression and expulsion of the indigenous Palestine population through its military aggression, legal discrimination and economic persecution”\textsuperscript{509}.

Other Radicals are however less optimistic that India which has developed such a close relationship with Israel over the years would easily reverse its policy and go for the international boycott of Israel. They think that India would cease its growing strategic and defence ties with the Jewish country only when a strong people’s movement is launched in the country by all like-minded political parties, civil society organizations and intellectuals to pressurise the Government to reverse its Israel policy. This movement should also mobilize people against the brand Israel campaign for the boycott of both Israeli products and services and the Israeli academic and cultural institutions which are the major instruments of Zionist propaganda. The Asian Forum at its recent meeting in Delhi has passed a resolution to reinforce the boycott of Israeli products and financial divestment from companies directly implicated in the occupation and/or Israeli industries.

**The Nehruvian Perspective:**

The Nehruvian perspective traces its roots to India’s traditional Cold War foreign policy. It is based on the view that ideas about universalism, liberal internationalism, and solidarity with fellow national liberation movements that influenced independent India’s early foreign policy thinking should also guide India’s present and future policy posture on international issues. On the issue of

\textsuperscript{509} “India Chapter Formed to Campaign against Israel”, *Hindu*, July 12, 2010.
Palestine, the Nehruvians want India to provide more vigorous support and play an active role in the Israeli Palestinian peace process because this is dictated by both principle and national interest. They argue that India should not forget its own history or abandon the high ideals of its foreign policy such as support to self-determination and anti-colonialism in the world on the basis of which it traditionally supported the Palestinian people.

Sharing the Radical concern that (a) Palestine is a just and humanitarian cause (b) there has not been any change on the ground situation in the occupied territories and (c) Israel continues its crimes against the Palestinian people (the brutal and continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, its inhumane siege of the Strip from time to time and the policies of ethnic cleansing and ghettoization of the Palestinian people) in violation of international law and morality, the Nehruvians argue that India has historically played a key role in garnering international support for Palestinian self-rule, the South African anti-apartheid struggle and other anti-colonial struggles. Now as the leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, with its proud de-colonisation history, India should once again play a key role in the Palestinian struggle for justice and against Israel’s occupation, colonization, and apartheid policies.\(^{510}\)

Bansidhar Pradhan argues that support for the Palestine cause is part of India’s legacy of opposing the illegal occupation of someone else’s territory in

\(^{510}\) Call for the Conference on “A Just Peace for Palestine”, New Delhi, 22-23 September, 2010 at: http://www.focusweb.org/content/invitation-conference-%E2%80%9C-just-peace-palestine%E2%80%9D
violation of international legality and morality. The \textit{Hindu} writes, “given India’s historical standing as a leader among the non-Western countries, New Delhi should do well to live up to its moral stature and offer vigorous support to the genuine Palestinian cause in spite of the growing warmth in official ties between India and Israel”\textsuperscript{512}.

The Nehruvians deplore that there has been a decline in India’s traditional support to Palestine due to India’s growing ties with Israel but unlike the Radicals they don’t prefer India to cut off all its relationship with Israel or isolate and impose sanctions against the Jewish country. They want India to have normal state-to-state relationship with Israel as distinct from the present close relationship and retain its earlier pro-Arab and anti-Israel policy as well as the Nehruvian tradition of bold support to the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination’. In other words, the Nehruvians want India to maintain relationship with Israel strictly to the extent that it contributes to the Middle East peace process and not to deviate it in any way for its strong traditional support to the Palestinians who are still living in the occupied territory and fighting for an independent state. For them, India should use all of relations in the Middle East toward the peace process, toward the end of the occupation, toward the peaceful settlement of all conflict. For this, they prefer India to play an intermediary role between the Israelis and the Palestinians. They cite the following reasons for this. First, as the leader of the Third World through the Non-Aligned Movement in

\textsuperscript{511} Pradhan, “Changing Dynamics of India’s West Asia Policy” \textit{op cit.}, No. 5, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{512} “India’s Stake in Palestine Cause”, \textit{Hindu} Editorial, April 5, 2002 at: http://www.hindu.com/2002/04/05/stories/2002040501151000.htm
the General Assembly and the G77 in UNCTAD, India has acquired considerable respect as the ‘voice of the voiceless’ and the leader of the developing world\footnote{Amrita Narlikar, “Peculiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation? Explaining the Negotiating Strategy of a Rising India”, \textit{International Affairs}, Vol. 82, No.1, 2006, p. 75.}.

This image of India would help it to bridge the gulf between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Second, with its historic and cultural links with the Arabic world, Persia, Central Asia, East Asia and the Anglo-American west, India occupies a position of cultural confluence and can help bridge civilisational differences between states and societies. Considering India as a “bridging power”, Sunil Khilnani writes “as India grows economically and its status rises in the global arena, it can play a balancing and bridging role in the world. It can bridge the divides and differences between rich and poor nations, east and west, powerful and less powerful\footnote{Sunil Khilnani, “Bridging Identities: India As A Positive Power?” in \textit{Through A Billion Voices: India’s Role In A Multi-Polar World}, Foresight Group, Berlin, 2010, p 13-16 and his “India As A Bridging Power” in \textit{India As A New Global Leader}, Foreign Policy Centre, 2005.}.

Third, India has friendly relations with both Israel and Palestine and its views and positions on Middle East issues are carefully observed by all sides. These can be used in pushing the peace process forward.

Fourth, India is one of the few countries which have relevant expertise to facilitate effective negotiations, especially through informal channels\footnote{M.L. Sondhi, “A Task For India, Israel And Syria”, \textit{The Pioneer}, September 24, 1997.}. India had historically demonstrated this capability in the days of super-power rivalry in Korea and the Congo, and earlier in the case of the transfer of power from the Netherlands to Indonesia. In more cent times, it stood bravely resisting the agenda of the West in the WTO, UN Climate Summits and many other
international forums. This hardline negotiating stance may have imposed some short-term costs on India, but it also helped build its reputation as a tough, credible and principled negotiator which can be used in West Asia. Finally, based on India’s status as a leader of the Nonaligned crowned by its consistent support to the Palestinians, India has considerable political capital in West Asia built up over the Nehru years. Moreover, India’s international standing as a non-interventionist nation and its image of having no regional hegemonic ambitions place it in a better position in West Asia than the Americans and Europeans. These countries’ deep historical interventions and occupations in the region have led to perceptions of them being non-objective actors in the peace process. Also despite Israel’s blatant contempt for international law and its continued crimes against the Palestinian people, the US and EU continue to hold out a shield of impunity for Israel and their aim is to permanently sustaining and deepening their dominance over the Middle East.

Shikha Bhatnagar writes in this context that “there may be an intermediary role for India across the continent that neither Europe nor the U.S. can employ as effectively. These countries’ deep historical interventions and occupations in the region have led to perceptions of them being non-objective actors in the peace process. India has the unique ability to utilize its growing global and regional influence, strengthened alliance with Israel and its continued support for the Palestinians, to discreetly encourage further dialogue that helps push the two
sides closer to an acceptable compromise. This could lead to much needed, and thus far elusive, stability in the region.\textsuperscript{516}

However, the Nehruvians caution that India should never expect reciprocity from Palestine for its support because while Israel is an independent state and that Palestine is yet to emerge as one. For them, what India would get for its support to the Palestine cause is the goodwill of the Palestinians and the entire Muslim world. In some cases, the Nehruvians agree that it would be beneficial for India’s interests. Pradhan writes that the continuation of the conflict due to Israeli intransigence is the fundamental source of instability in the West Asian region where India has huge stakes. Hence it would be in the interest of everyone to seek an end to it. Moreover, at a time, when religious extremism is sweeping through the region, a secure Palestine would serve India’s interests better. He suggests that the real challenge for Indian diplomacy lies in ending the occupation rather than providing mere economic and technological help to the already defunct PNA.\textsuperscript{517} Muchkund Dubey suggests that “India should support all resolutions which call for the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people and for a just and fair solution of the problem. This is not a matter of principle but also guided by wider political considerations relating to India’s relations with other countries and the sentiments of a vast segment of India’s own population.” \textsuperscript{518} In an editorial, the Hindu wrote “both principle and national

\textsuperscript{516} Shikha Bhatnagar, “India-Israel: BFFs or Fair Weather Friends?, New Atlanticist, August 1, 2011 at: www.acus.org/new.../india-israel-bffs-or-fair-weather-friends

\textsuperscript{517} Pradhan, “Changing Dynamics of India’s West Asia Policy” \textit{op cit.}, No. 5, p. 87.

\textsuperscript{518} Dubey, “West Asia: India’s Neighbouring Region” \textit{op cit.}, No. 297.
interest dictate that India should not dilute its traditional support for the Palestinian campaign for self-determination. This principled position will not hamper the development of relations with Israel over the long term. Many countries have interacted with Israel at a controlled pace in the hope that the peace camp could be strengthened. India too followed such a course over most of the 11 years since full diplomatic relations were established with Israel. Delusions about a new strategic equation, which would enable the two countries to dominate the geographical region between their territories, have brought about a policy imbalance that needs immediate correction.\(^5\)

**The Pragmatic Perspective:**

The end of the Cold War led to new challenges and new debates about India’s foreign policy. Some Indian strategists, referred here as the pragmatists, argued that India’s traditional foreign policy was no longer relevant to the post-Cold War world, and pushed for the unabashed consideration of the Indian national interest rather than global justice, ethics or ideological positions. As Shashi Tharoor, India’s former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, once put it, traditionally India “seemed to take greater satisfaction in being right than being diplomatic.”\(^6\) More recently and controversially he criticized Nehruvian foreign policy for being a “moralistic running commentary.”\(^7\) Others believe that Indian

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policy is often geared toward consistency with past positions without recognizing India’s changed circumstances. But as strategist C. Raja Mohan suggested, Indian foreign policy debates are so focused on semantics that “they have little time for the ‘grammar’ of global power politics”\(^5\). He argues that this focus on semantics was understandable when India was weak, when “rhetoric compensated for power,” but unnecessary for an India that has become far more consequential in global affairs.

The pragmatists admit that India’s shift in its Middle East policy has reaped good dividends for New Delhi especially that the 'Israeli card' is becoming useful in dealing with the Arab states. It has helped India to assume an added importance for the Arabs, including the Palestinians. As the two sides compete to extract favorable statements from New Delhi during the crisis situations, India has a useful opportunity to carve out a role for herself in the volatile Middle East. Moreover, close relations with Israel could counter moves by those Muslim countries which were inclined to act against Indian interest if instigated by Pakistan. The pragmatists however caution that this new approach does not mean New Delhi to abandon its efforts to seek political support from the Arab world on Kashmir or a permanent seat in the UNSC. What it implies is that, unlike in the past when the Indian support for the Arabs was taken for granted due to its automatic support in their dispute with Israel especially at the United Nations and allowed them to influence India’s policies in the region, India should now

forcefully assert its interests in the Arab world conveying to the Arab leaders that in their dispute with Israel, they cannot take Indian support for granted, especially at the United Nations, unless they reciprocate by taking India's interests into consideration.

On Israel Palestine peace process, the pragmatists want India to play a leading role both for the sake of its own rising power profile and on the ground of national interest. The pragmatists argue that India’s voice carries more weight today in global forums than in the past. The country has outgrown its Cold War role as a third world, non-aligned nation to exercise influence as an emerging power through global governance institutions—be it as part of the Five Interested Parties in the World Trade Organization (WTO); the Brazil, South Africa, India, and China (BASIC) group at the Copenhagen climate change negotiations of 2009; or the Group of 4 (G4) coalition of countries (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) demanding permanent membership in the UN Security Council.\(^{523}\) Besides, several major countries like the United States, China, European Union, Russia, Japan etc have signed regional trade arrangements or bilateral strategic partnerships with India.\(^{524}\) This is largely due to its enhanced economic power, political stability, and nuclear capability.

For the pragmatists, India’s heightened profile at this juncture provides a golden opportunity for the country to play a competent leadership role in the

\(^{523}\) For more on this see Rohan Mukherjee and David M. Malone, “From High Ground to High Table: The Evolution of Indian Multilateralism”, *Global Governance*, No. 17, 2011, pp. 311–329.

world and help in solving important global problems like Palestine. In other words, if India sees itself playing a larger role in the world, it has to increase its clout in its proximate or what the government calls the ‘extended’ neighbourhood\textsuperscript{525}. As C Rajamohan argues that unlike in the past, India need not to be a mute spectator to the changes in the balance of power around it. It is in position to influence the direction and shape of the content of the structural change unfolding in Asia and elevate its own standing as a great power\textsuperscript{526}. According to Bharat Karnard “to be recognised as a great power, India will have to do what other great powers have done throughout history: Think big, act big, take risks, and back up its diplomacy with force. To believe India will attain great power by lesser means is to be delusional”\textsuperscript{527}. Dhruva Jaishankar is of the view that India is investing considerable diplomatic capital in its bid for a permanent membership of the UNSC, so it should be better attuned to the expectations which that privilege entails. Abstaining on key decisions is hardly a marker of leadership and weakens India’s claims to what it sees as its rightful position on global affairs. Moreover, India’s own growing security amid increasing regional instability means the possibility of India having to intervene in another country is today far greater than that of India being at the receiving end of such an intervention. With an eye on the future, setting a precedent for intervention on


\textsuperscript{526} C Rajamohan, Tournament of Shadows, Indian Express, November, 17, 2011.

\textsuperscript{527} Bharat Karnard Endless delusion, The Asian Age, Sep 29, 2011.
dire humanitarian grounds may be prudent. According to Rajiv Sikri, India’s shyness in offering its mediation and good offices for playing a conflict-resolution role through the Non-Aligned Movement or directly in the areas of specific concern like Palestine do not augur well for its aspirations to play a larger global role. P R Kumaraswamy writes “a seat in the UNSC is not about membership in an ivy-league or high-power body but it is about shouldering responsibilities, exhibiting maturity, evolving nuanced positions on sensitive issues and skilful use of diplomacy to minimize, if not resolve, major problems confronting the world. It is about working for a more peaceful world and in the process helping India and not other way around”. He suggests that abandoning the temptations of high-sounding rhetoric, India needs to get down to the nitty-gritty of negotiations, compromises and bridging proposals. Bluntly put, foreign policy is not about ignorant rhetoric, simplistic worldviews and wishful thinking but about evolving a more detached and non-sentimental view of the world and its challenges.

Amrita Narlikar similarly argues that even after certain structural conditions are met, such as large market size and rapid economic growth, the rise of a country to a recognised great power is not automatic. Rather, the process

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528 Dhruva Jaishankar, Rocky Road to Damascus, *Indian Express*, November 16, 2011.
531 Ibid.
whereby a state’s rise is negotiated matters, both in terms of recognition by other parties as well as the outcomes that the state is able to generate. The pragmatists further argue that it is mainly because of India’s increasing power profile, the country has been called upon by the international community to play a larger role in the West Asian affairs. This is evident in the pressure on India to adopt a more visible role in Iraq and to use its leverage on Iran to curtail its pursuit of nuclear weapons. In a first of its kind, India was invited by the US to participate in the West Asian peace conference at Annapolis in November 2007 as a recognition of India's growing stature in the international system. Most countries in the region are also now seeking comprehensive partnerships with India based on a recognition and appreciation for India's role in shaping the emerging regional and global order.

The pragmatists also want India to play an active role in West Asia as it has a huge stake in sustaining the peace process in the region. C. Raja Mohan feels that there is a big danger today that extremist forces on both sides will push the region into a renewed conflict that will undermine the Indian interest in pursuing good relations with both Israel and the Arab nation. He suggests that India needs to stick with some broad principles, support pragmatic moves to defuse tension, and lend whatever support it can for a restoration of the peace process. According to Harsh Pant, from energy security to defence ties, from

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countering China to pursuing stability in the region, India now has an array of interests in West Asia. He suggests that as India tries to re-define its interests in West Asia, Indian diplomacy should become more outcome-oriented\(^\text{534}\). M. L Sondhi writes that “from India’s point of view, an out and out conflict in the West Asian area could have the gravest consequences for Indian economy and society”\(^\text{535}\). According to Narendra Sisodia, "West Asia is strategically located, focal point of diplomacy and a destination of export of India’s manpower, technical know-how and expertise. India can't feel safe if West Asia is in turmoil"\(^\text{536}\). Shebonti Ray Dadwal argues that if an Israeli–Palestinian peace settlement can be made permanent, a sure sequel will be a free flow of goods between Israel and the Palestinian entity that will emerge from the settlement. If former Prime Minister Shimon Peres’ “New Middle East” can become a reality, and a common market comprising Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian entity can be set up, this would logically be the biggest growth area in the next decade. With India’s relations with both favourable, it can be beneficial, both politically and economically for India. Therefore, it is in New Delhi’s interest to promote peace between both parties and encourage them to abandon their mutual

\(^{534}\) Harsh Pant, “India Redefines Ties in West Asia”, \textit{Rediff News}, October 14, 2008 at: \url{http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/oct/14guest2.htm}

\(^{535}\) Sondhi, “A Task for India, Israel And Syria” \textit{op cit.}, No. 515.

\(^{536}\) “India Has an Abiding Interest in Peace in West Asia”, \textit{Times of India}, January 30, 2006.
suspicions and hostilities. India should take a more active interest in the current negotiation and do what it can to push it forward\textsuperscript{537}.

Thus, the pragmatists want India to follow an active role in the Palestine Israeli conflict that matches India’s profile as an emerging great power. Besides, such a role, they argue is also beneficial for India’s national interests. Thus, there is a commonality between the Nehruvians and the Pragmatists in so far as both argue for an interest based approach to India’s policy towards Israel and Palestine but unlike the Nehruvians, the Pragmatists do not think high ideals and lofty principles should dictate India’s policy. Rather under the certain circumstances, these should be altered to serve India’s national interest.

The Status-Quoits Perspective

This perspective owes its origin since early 1990’s when India decided to establish full diplomatic relationship with Israel and followed a more balanced policy towards Israel and the Arab world. According to this perspective, India should not change its present policy of keeping a low profile in the Middle East peace process because such a posture better serves its national interests. In other words, India should continue to resist any temptation to play any overt role in the peace process as it helps to maintain normal ties with all parties of the conflict without forcing the country into unpleasant situations.

There are several reasons why the status-quoits prefer India to keep a low profile in the region and avoid active involvement in the Middle East conflict. First, they believe that there is no shortcut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades,” and that “ultimately, it’s the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side.” Second, keeping strict neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict is crucial for India to gain the confidence of both sides and thereby enhance its profile in the region and beyond. Third, India’s choices are actually limited in the context of West Asia as it needs the support and co-operation of both sides of the dispute for its own interests. For its energy security, it needs the hydrocarbon resources of the Arab countries. At present, India imports 60 percent of its crude oil requirement, from the Middle East\textsuperscript{538}. Moreover, the Gulf Cooperation Council accommodates over 5.5 million Indian nationals who send back $ 30 billion annually\textsuperscript{539}. Indian companies are also executing major projects across West Asia in energy, infrastructure and services. Similarly, India’s relations with Israel have acquired a depth and diversity which cannot be rolled back. This has happened because Israel has been able to meet crucial Indian needs in the field of defence, agriculture and technology without pre-conditions or succumbing to pressures from other countries. Recently Israel has replaced Russia as India’s top military supplier and the trade relationship between India

\textsuperscript{538} “India Has an Abiding Interest in Peace in West Asia: Pranab”, \textit{Times of India}, January 30, 2006.

and Israel is one of the most dynamic in the region. Thus, the status-quoits argue that unlike the past when India followed a one-sided policy towards the Arab world and could freely voice her opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, now it has to maintain good relations on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide and this makes it necessary for the country to follow a policy of equidistance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Girijesh Pant argues in this context that ‘for India, West Asia is a region to augment its power rather than to display or assert its power. The thrust of India’s West Asia policy and diplomacy thus has to be geared towards mobilizing resources - political, strategic, economic and cultural - from the region to contribute in its emergence as global power’.

Others argue that India is actually not in a position to play the role of a mediator due to its own domestic constraints. Ramachandra Guha, for instance, argues that India is still a developing country, with many problems, and should concentrate on internal challenges rather than focusing on external matters.

Rajiv Kumar similarly writes that other global powers will not give sufficient credence to India’s role if the country’s human development and social indicators

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remain at sub-Saharan levels. He cites four critical challenges facing rising India: governance deficit, human resource development imperatives, infrastructure weaknesses and rising disparities in personal and regional incomes and suggests that continued global clout is a direct result of progress at home\textsuperscript{543}.

Some other status-quoits argue that even without being actively involved in the Middle Eastern peace process India has benefited from it the most, so there is no need for any direct Indian role. For instance, the September 13 1993 agreement between the PLO and Israel on their mutual recognition and on Palestinian self-rule provided a good opportunity to the Rao government to justify its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel and its balancing act in the Israel-Palestine conflict\textsuperscript{544}. Another section argues that if the US could not bridge the gap between the two warring sides, India could not even dream of playing such a role. To one scholar, “Indian policy makers should not forget that West Asian sensitivities have been offended and hurt by aggressive US intervention in the region”\textsuperscript{545}. Another scholar argues, “over the last several years, India has sought close relations with the United States, especially in the area of nuclear cooperation. Therefore, it is hardly in a position to deviate from the line of the US in West Asia”\textsuperscript{546}.


\textsuperscript{544} John Cherian, “A Breach of Trust” op cit., No. 437.

\textsuperscript{545} Abhyankar, 'India & West Asia' \textit{op cit.} No.13.

Other status quoits are against any Indian involvement in the peace process because it would make the country unnecessarily controversial. For instance, a direct Indian role in the conflict could lead to accusations of an “American-Zionist-Hindu Communal Parties” alliance against Islam. According to one scholar, an Israeli government that is less flexible on peace negotiations would make it harder for India to get the desired outcome. This would adversely affect its relationship with the Jewish country which is smooth at the moment. Similarly an undesirable outcome could trigger anti-Indian sentiment in the Arab world and undermine the goodwill of the Palestinians. Another scholar has written that India as an emerging power has significant interests with Israel, the source of most of the Indian military’s advanced technology edge, by joining in the peace process instead of leaving it to the two sides to thrash it out in negotiations, in the manner Delhi would prefer the Kashmir issue to be settled, it would only harm its own interests. He cites the recent example when India joined the call for a sovereign Palestinian state in the UN General Assembly which led the US President Barack Obama to reject a meeting with Manmohan Singh in New York and made the Israelis hurt. Moreover, Pakistan would certainly

547 Ronak D. Desai & Xenia Dormandy “Indo-Israeli Relations: Key Security Implications”, Policy Brief, July 10, 2008 at: http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/18414/indoisraeli_relations.html?breadcrumb=%2Fexperts%2F1631%2Fronak_d_desai%3Fgroupby%3D1%26page%3D1%26hide%3D1%26id%3D 1631%26back_url%3D%252Fexperts%252F%2526%2Bback_text%252F%2526%2Bt%2526list%2526id%2B2%2Bexperts

exploit from any Indian role in the peace process. For instance, even during the absence of diplomatic relations, Pakistan accused India of conspiring with the ‘Zionist enemy’ to threaten and undermine the larger Islamic world. After normalisation, ‘Hindu-Jewish’, ‘Brahmin-Zionist’ or Indo-Israeli conspiracies have periodically become a prime theme in the Pakistan media. Internally, India’s active role in the peace process would put it into a difficult situation. There are several left-wing political parties in India that are openly hostile toward Israel and sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Moreover, as a functioning democracy with a sizable Muslim population, no government in India could ignore the influence of its Muslim constituency. Indifference toward their views and sentiment would undermine the country’s democratic credentials. Also, the Muslim factor does play a role in the calculation of India’s political parties. For instance, a large section of India’s Muslim population has traditionally voted for the Congress party in India’s national elections, and the party fears it would lose the support of these voters if it adopted an overly friendly attitude toward Israel. Thus, due to all these reasons, the status-quoists want India to remain neutral in the Israel-Palestine conflict and follow a low profile posture in the peace process.


Which streams of thought would be close to the future Indian role in the Palestine Israeli peace process? This study has found that India took part in multilateral initiatives such as the Annapolis Conference in November 2007 when invited by the Americans. Otherwise it has confined itself to generalities, highlighting the need for negotiations and accommodation. This posture would continue in future as argued by the status-quoists. A recent U.S. Embassy cable on India, accessed by *The Hindu* through WikiLeaks revealed that as an emerging global power, New Delhi recognises that it cannot afford to alienate either the Palestinians or Israelis, as this could endanger Indian defence interests or provoke a domestic backlash. It further suggested that India hopes to avoid being forced publicly to choose between its pragmatic strategic relationship with Israel and its commitment to the Palestinians. India’s bilateral relationship with Israel continues to flourish with growing defence ties, trade links and opportunities for high tech collaboration. However, with a large Muslim population that plays a critical role supporting the ruling Congress in national elections, India has historically supported Palestinians in multinational fora and considered itself a strong supporter of Palestinian self-determination.\(^{553}\) In another raw cable dated March 31, 2006 (58913: confidential), US Ambassador to India David Mulford wrote that “the underlying straddle of meek statements about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict combined with full-steam-ahead engagement with Israel on

\(^{553}\text{India Balancing Relations with Israel and Hamas, WeakLeaks India Cable, 110122: Hindu, March 15, 2011 at: http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/article1539484.ece}
practical and strategic matters is unlikely to change in future. Jim Colbert similarly argues that while India can be expected to pursue bilateral ties with Israel, its regional approach will always employ rhetoric that pleases the Arab states and Iran. Pratap Bhanu Mehta calls such an Indian Foreign Policy posture as cautious prudence. It is cautious in recognising a limit to its own ability to affect change elsewhere. It is also a prudent power, in the sense that, contrary to standard narratives, it understands that power does matter.

From the above analysis, it is evident that while India has been playing a limited role in the Middle East peace process, there is a growing perception that India should play a larger role in the Israeli Palestinian conflict although the Radicals have a different viewpoint on this issue. The Nehruvians and the pragmatists differ in important respects but they adopt a common position for an active Indian role in the peace process both for the sake of Palestine people and for India’s own interests. The status quoits perspective is different on this important issue as they consider India’s has its own limitations to play a mediatory role between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The real challenge for India in future would be how to balance its domestic concerns with the actual requirements at the extended neighbourhood.


CONCLUSION AND MAIN FINDINGS

This study demonstrates that India has had a consistent and unwavering record of support for the Palestinian cause since the days of its freedom struggle. Right from the very beginning, Indian leaders regarded the Palestinian question as a colonial question and considered the elimination of colonialism, in terms of the termination of the British Mandate and establishment of an independent state of Palestine. India’s position here was primarily anti-colonial and directed against the British policy of ‘divide and rule’, that is, exploitation of Arab-Jewish differences to perpetuate the domination of Palestine. In this phase, India viewed the Palestine question in the light of its own colonial experiences. In an expression of solidarity, the Congress Working Committee sent its greetings to the Palestinian Arabs and observed September 27, 1936 as the Palestine Day.

India’s perception of the Arab-Jewish issue in Palestine registered a shift with the large-scale migration of Jews from Eastern and Central Europe to Palestine, between 1935 and 1947, primarily owing to Nazi persecution. While India deeply sympathised with the sufferings of the Jews, it was opposed to a separate state for the Jews in Palestine on two grounds. First, it regarded any state exclusively based on religion as untenable. The foundations of a secular India are laid on this principle. Secondly, it considered a remote historical connection with the area as an insufficient ground for the creation of a separate Jewish state in Palestine.

This Indian view spelt out during the freedom struggle by the Indian National Congress and its top leadership like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal
Nehru and Maulana Azad laid the foundation to India’s foreign policy on Palestine and on the Jewish question which was pursued more or less with the same verve for many years in the post-independence era. The first sign of this policy was seen on November 29, 1947, when India along with 12 other nations voted against the UN General Assembly resolution 181 for the partition of Palestine. India supported the Minority Plan which called for the establishment of a federal Palestine with internal autonomy for the Jewish illegal immigrants.

On May 11, 1949 India voted against the U.N. resolution for admission of Israel into the United Nations. This time, India stood alongside six Arab states, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Burma. Explaining India’s stand, the Indian delegation stated that “India could not recognise an Israel which had been achieved through the force of arms and not through negotiations.” But soon after, Pandit Nehru watered down his stance and the Government of India accorded *de jure* recognition to Israel on September 17, 1950. The Jewish government was allowed to open an office in Mumbai that was converted into a consulate in 1953. Nehru, however, made it clear that recognition did not mean endorsement of Israeli position on its frontiers and India would continue to support the cause of the Palestinians.

The Indira Gandhi era witnessed an all-round development of Indo-Arab relations. She evinced keen interest in the affairs of the Arab world and especially showed a great concern for the people of Palestine. India supported the Arab stand on the Palestine issue in the United Nations and Non-Aligned Summits. India became the first non-Arab State to recognise the Palestine
Liberation Organisation (PLO) as ‘the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people’ and allowed it to open its office in New Delhi in January, 1975. She invited PLO leader Yasser Arafat to New Delhi and established formal diplomatic relations.

When Janata party came to power in 1977, there were speculations about a possible shift in India’s Palestine policy. Belying all expectations, the Janata Government reaffirmed India’s support to the Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular and was supportive of any peace initiative between Arabs and Israel. In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned to power with a thumping majority and continued her support to the Palestinian struggle. Her Foreign Minister, P.V Narasimha Rao announced in Parliament on 26th March 1980 that India had decided to accord full diplomatic recognition to the office of the PLO in New Delhi by upgrading its office to that of an embassy endowed with all diplomatic immunities and privileges. Rajiv Gandhi (1984-89) followed the footsteps of his mother and grandfather. He accorded recognition to the State of Palestine in November 1988 and the PLO office in New Delhi started functioning as the Embassy of the State of Palestine.

Thus, India’s West Asia policy from 1947 to 1991 was characterized by a pro-Arab and anti-Israeli foreign policy. This stance reflected India’s own interest in the Middle East as well as its traditional sympathy with the Arabs; it was further influenced by India’s commitment to the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the sentiments of its own minority population.
However, the Government of India’s policy on the Arab Israel conflict remained a subject of deep dispute within the country as it was challenged by the political parties in opposition --- the right wing Jan Sangh and the Swatantra Party and the middle of the road Praja-Socialist Party (PSP) and the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP)--, the national media and the informed Indian citizens. The Congress party itself was also divided on the issue and even senior Cabinet Ministers had been known to entertain serious reservations regarding the unqualified support extended by the Prime Minister and the External Minister to various moves made by the West Asian nations on different occasions especially during the Chinese aggression in 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1965 & 1971.

There was however, a shift in India’s foreign policy towards Israel during P.V. Narasimha Rao’s tenure as India announced its decision to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992. But the Indian Government’s decision to normalize ties with Israel did not happen all of a sudden. The move in this direction was undertaken in mid-1980 when Rajiv Gandhi, known for his non-ideological approach to foreign policy, met his Israeli counterpart Shimon Pares during the annual UN General Assembly session in September 1985 and undertook a number of steps afterwards. The ideological rhetoric of the past had no attraction for the young leader who sought to carry forward the country into the next century as modern and technologically developed country. But a series of events stalled the process of normalization with Israel. With the change of the international scenario caused by the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of
the Soviet Union, the emergence of the United States as the only super power, the change of PLO’s strategy towards Israel, the start of the Middle East peace process, India’s own economic liberalisation, delinking of Pakistan from its Middle East policy, the rising problem of terrorism in the country, the change in India’s domestic politics and a strong domestic discourse in favour of establishing full diplomatic relationship with Israel, also influenced India’s decision in favour of Israel. After the release of Israeli hostages held in Jammu and Kashmir in summer 1991, along with the publicly reported visit of the Deputy Director General for Asia of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Moshe Yegar, the Indian media, right-wing political leaders and intellectuals came out openly in support of full diplomatic relations with Israel leading to the normalisation of relations with the Jewish country since January 1992.

Although India’s relation with Israel started at a low profile during the Congress regime, the relations between the two countries reached new heights during the BJP led National Democratic Alliance regime of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998-2004). When the United Progressive Alliance Government under the Congress leadership came to power in mid-2004, it decided to follow the same line of the policy adopted by the earlier NDA regime. The growing ties between India and Israel and its consequent effect on New Delhi’s posture towards Palestine have generated another lively debate in the country. There are two different viewpoints on this issue. According to one view, India’s growing ties with Israeli has neutralised its traditional support to the Palestine issue. The other
view argues that India’s friendship with Israel has not affected its support to the Palestinian cause.

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

Besides supporting the cause of Palestine through several bilateral visits, India also espoused the cause of Palestine at various international forums such as the UN and NAM. India supported numerous Palestinian-related resolutions at the United Nations from time to time. It also helped to pass several Non-Aligned Movement-sponsored resolutions on the Palestine issue. In addition to securing international support, India also provided much needed economic, technical and humanitarian assistance to the PNA, especially after its establishment in 1994 in pursuance of the Oslo principles. India also continues to financially contribute to the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) for undertaking relief work in the occupied Palestinian territories from time to time. Besides, the Government of
India has recognised the passport/ travel documents issued by the PNA and established a Representative Office to the Palestine National Authority in Gaza in 1996 which was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.

However, the Government’s claim that it continues to provide diplomatic and political support to the Palestinians in their effort to have a separate homeland and help them in "the reconstruction of their nation" through economic, technical and humanitarian assistance from time to time, has not been shared by a number of leaders, scholars, journalists and activists who on the contrary argue that India’s support Palestine has now been reduced to mere statements, resolutions and occasional economic assistance. In other words, it is clear that India, under the given the circumstances, is no longer supporting the national struggle movements that it used to do in the past. In the garb of so called 'pragmatism', India is steadily getting sucked into the vortex of Western design and quagmire. Whether India is under the NDA or UPA rule, the Government has diluted the country’s principled foreign policy for certain interests that are not going to pay it in the long run.

In addition to the Government support, the people of India have always come forward in support of the Palestine issue. This is evident from the numerous campaigns and demonstrations against Israel's actions in Palestine by several civil society groups from time to time. Moreover, frequent seminars and conferences have also been organised in the country in the recent past to raise awareness and garner support for the just cause of Palestine.
India has also played a limited role in the Middle East peace process to solve the problem of Palestine. It was invited to become a participant in the multilateral track of the Peace Process that began in 1991 and actively participated in all the five working groups discussing Middle East-Palestine question such as regional economic development, arms control and regional security and environment and water resources. India welcomed the mutual recognition by the State of Israel & the PLO and the signing of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement on Palestinian self-rule on 13 September 1993. It welcomed the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement in Cairo on 4th May 1994 (also known as Gaza-Jericho Agreement). An Indian delegation led by the Minister of State for External Affairs, R.L Bhatia was present during the signing ceremony. India also greeted the Oslo Interim Agreement (Oslo II) signed on 30th September 1995 and reiterated the view that durable peace in the region was necessary to resolve all outstanding issues to the satisfaction of all concerned parties. Terming the Wye River Memorandum signed between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat on 23 October 1998 as ‘an important milestone’ in the stalled peace process, India supported its unconditional implementation. The Indian Trade and Industry Minister Ashwani Kumar participated in the Sharm El Sheikh summit in February 2005 between Israeli and Palestinian leaders to end the 2000 Intifada and resume negotiations under the roadmap. India was invited as a participant in the Annapolis Conference which was held on November 27, 2007 and Kapil Sibal, the Minister
In recent years, there is a growing perception that India should play a more direct and mediatory role in the Israel Palestine Peace process. While India has shown some interest in the regard and this is welcomed by the Israelis and the Palestinians, the domestic discourse on India’s new role is sharply divided. There are four different discourses: the Radicals, the Nehruvians, the pragmatists and the status quoits. The Radicals want India to fully support the Palestine issue, end all cooperation with Israel and call for a combination of global isolation, sanctions and external pressure against the Jewish country by the international community. The Nehruvians want India to provide more vigorous support and play an active role in the peace process because unlike in the past, it is now in a better position to play such a role. They support an active role for India in the Palestine issue because the Palestinians are not only fighting for a just and humanitarian cause but there has also not been any change on the ground situation in the occupied territories. The pragmatists, like the Nehruvians, want India to play a leading role in the peace process but for the sake of its own rising power profile and national interest. According to the status-quoits, India should not change its present policy of keeping a low profile in the Middle East peace process because such a posture better serves its national interests. In other words, the status-quoits maintain that India should continue to resist any temptation to play any overt role in the peace process as it helps to maintain normal ties with all parties to the Middle East conflict without forcing the country
into unpleasant situations. In view of these differing perceptions, the real challenge for India in future would be to balance its domestic concerns with the actual requirements at its extended neighbourhood.

However a small comment is needed on ‘national interest’ since it is the buzzword which has united people from mutually opposed viewpoints. Foreign policy does not automatically or routinely pursue national interest. Ideas of pragmatism and national interest pre-suppose a socially neutral state which can look after the interest of all its citizens. This is problematic. States, even democracies, are biased in favour of certain classes, castes, patriarchy and so on.

Therefore unless pressured from below, states tend to pursue the sectional interest of the powerful and pass it off as national interest. Foreign policy is a combination of morality and pragmatism and just what the mix will be will depend on the nature of the country’s political leadership. It is not at all coincidental that leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi were so pro-Palestine and would strongly consider morality, decency and dignity in foreign policy in comparison to Rajeev Gandhi, Atal Behari Vajpayee or Manmohan Singh.