

India-Palestine relations

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Manifest Pedagogy

India and Israel relations in recent times on a rise. Questions have been repeatedly asked in Mains and Optionals too. In this topic students should focus on two dimensions

1. Indo-Israel relations
2. Palestine problem and India's stand

In news

India recently voted in favour of a decision introduced by Israel in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) against a Palestinian NGO.

Placing it in syllabus

India and the world – bilateral relations (not explicitly mentioned)

Static dimensions

India's traditional stand on Palestine

Current dimensions

- What is the issue all about?
- India's voting and its implications
- India's revived policy with Israel

Content

Recently **India voted in favour of a decision introduced by Israel** in the ECOSOC that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian NGO, after the Jewish state said the organisation did not disclose its ties with Hamas. The decision was adopted by a recorded vote of 28 in favour to, 15

against, with five abstentions. Countries voting in favour of the decision were Brazil, Canada, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States.

Traditional stand of India on Palestine

India's support for the Palestinian cause is an integral part of the nation's foreign policy.

- In 1974, India became the first Non-Arab State to recognise Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
- In 1988, India became one of the first countries to recognize the Palestinian State.
- In 1996, India opened its Representative Office in Gaza, which was later shifted to Ramallah in 2003.
- India co-sponsored the draft resolution on "the right of Palestinians to self-determination" during the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and voted in favour of it.
- India also voted in favour of UNGA Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the separation wall by Israel.
- In 2011, India voted in favour of Palestine becoming a full member of the UNESCO.
- India co-sponsored and voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution in November, 2012 that enabled **Palestine to become a 'non-member Observer state' at the UN** without voting rights.
- India supported the **Bandung Declaration on Palestine** at the Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015 as well as supported the installation of the Palestinian flag at UN's premises in September 2015.
- In the recent years there have been regular high level bilateral visits between India and Palestine.
- A Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) was held in Ramallah in

November 2016.

- Government of India supported the construction of Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-student activity centre at the Palestine Technical College in Gaza.
- India is also financing the setting up of Palestine India Technopark in Ramallah.
- India, Brazil, South Africa (**IBSA**) Fund has also financed five projects in Palestine.
- From 2013 onward, the Representative Office of India in Ramallah started issuing Visas. Palestinian nationals can also avail e-Visas to visit India.

Hence, apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at bilateral and international levels, India has extended various forms of economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

What is the issue all about?

The Palestinian NGO named Shahed ('Witness') had applied for **consultative status** at the UN's ECOSOC. While a consultative status gives a NGO special standing at the UN, it also comes with the responsibility of providing a full picture of its activities. The application got rejected as the organisation failed to present important information when its credentials were being considered during the Committee on Non-Governmental organisation.

Consultative status to an NGO is granted by ECOSOC upon recommendation of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, which is composed by member states. The Committee on NGOs reviews new applications for consultative status twice a year, in January and in May and only recommends and not decides. These recommendations are reviewed by ECOSOC, which finally decides them.

Though Israel posed no objections to the NGO's application initially, after the end of the session, the UN learned that the organisation omitted several important facts, including its ties with militant group Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip. Israel was of the belief that the NGO promoted Hamas' goals in Lebanon and hence Israel submitted the draft to allow the Committee to seek further information.

India's voting and its implications

The broader historical and institutional context of India's vote needs to be considered to completely assess its long-term significance for India's ties with Israel and Palestine.

- Consultative status to an NGO is granted by ECOSOC upon recommendation of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, which is composed by member states . Hence India's stance with Israel's position is being driven mainly by a reflection on the merits of the case and problems related to the particular NGO.
- Over the recent years, India had already broken with its previous systematic voting stance on issues connected to Israel-Palestine by already abstaining on votes against Israel as well as Palestine at the UNGA, UNHRC and at the UNESCO. E.g. In 2011, India voted in favour of Palestine becoming a full member of the UNESCO. In July 2015, India chose to abstain in the UNHRC vote on alleged 'war crimes' being committed by Israel as well as by Hamas during the 2014 war.
- This is undoubtedly a significant gesture as India had traditionally voted in favour of all anti-Israel resolutions at UN institutions.
- India's **West Asia policy**, can be seen as constant balancing exercise rather than tilts and realignments with specific countries or blocs in the region.
- This pragmatic position of India to move away from past strong ideological lines such as its traditional support for the Palestinian cause, is in line with the situation

in West Asia which is currently in flux. India has been one of the rare extra-regional actors to have cultivated substantial ties with most countries in the region.

India- Israel revived relationship

India and Israel gained their independence within months of each other, but found themselves headed in pointedly different directions for nearly four decades. New Delhi voted to recognise Israel in 1950, but due to Cold War alignments and its need to maintain strong ties with the Arab world for oil, remittances made New Delhi to adopt an unsympathetic posture towards Israel. India and Israel established full diplomatic relations in 1992 and since then the bilateral relationship between the two countries has blossomed at the economic, military, agricultural and political level.

Relations between India and Israel are experiencing a diplomatic renaissance.

In the BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, India reaffirmed its commitment to “a **two-State solution** with a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel, within mutually agreed and internationally recognised borders with East Jerusalem as its capital”. However, in July 2015 India chose to abstain in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) vote on alleged ‘war crimes’ being committed by Israel as well as by Hamas during the 2014 war. India once again abstained in March 2016 when the UNHRC voted on a similar resolution.

PM Narendra Modi’s visit to Israel in July 2017, the first by an Indian Prime Minister after establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 gave a message to the world that India is no longer willing to view its Israel policy through the traditional Palestinian prism. For Israel, in addition to the huge market for its technology as well as defense products that India represents, the enormous intangible benefit is the

acceptance it receives from the largest democracy. More than 30 countries of the UN do not recognize Israel. Hence, being accepted as a friend by India holds special value and significance for Israel.

However India has reiterated India's support for "a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestine, co-existing peacefully with Israel". This is an extremely powerful message and most of the international community including India is committed to a two-state solution, with both Israel and Palestine co-existing side by side with peace and security.