

London School of Economics and Political Science

**INDIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST: CONSTANCY OF
POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING
PERSPECTIVES, 1947-1986**

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fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in International Relations

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to critically examine India's relations with the Middle East in terms of India's political, security and economic interests in the region between 1947 and 1986. It tries to define India's general foreign policy objectives and the means and strategies she adopted to realise them in relation to the Middle East. The study focuses on the misperceptions and fallacies that governed India's interaction with the region which over the years artificially restricted India's manoeuvrability and policy options in the region.

The first chapter provides a historical backdrop of independent India's foreign policy with special reference to the Middle East. The second and the third chapters focus on India's politico-diplomatic interests in the region by examining India's bilateral ties with four most important states in the region, namely Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The fourth chapter critically evaluates India's security concerns in the region with special emphasis on developments in the 70s and 80s and India's responses to them. The fifth chapter seeks to quantify India's economic interaction with the region and endeavours to put India's economic stake in the region in perspective. Chapters six and seven concentrate on India's relations with Israel and the PLO respectively and emphasise the need for India to take a fresh look at the problem in the light of new and far-reaching developments in the region.

This study takes the view that the constancy of India's Middle Eastern policy is more an outcome of lack of imagination and an absence of subtlety and sensitivity on the part of Indian political elite than any unwavering commitment on their part to any high principles and ideals. It also underlines the untenability of such policy in future in the context of rapidly changing political and strategic landscape of the Middle East.

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To My Father and Mother

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of India, like that of any other country, sought to maintain, since Independence, a balance between its long-term goals and short-term objectives through a variety of means, political, diplomatic, economic and military, either separately or in combination, depending on their appropriateness for the occasion and the existing national capabilities.

A detailed discussion of India's foreign policy objectives in general and the emphasis placed on the means to obtain them would throw considerable light on the question as to where the Middle East is perceived to stand in the eyes of the policy makers in Delhi in terms of its importance vis-a-vis India's politico-strategic, diplomatic and economic goals. However, the general objectives of India's foreign policy and their orientation towards the Middle East are best analysed in the context of the perspectives and attitudes that developed during the freedom struggle along with the geopolitical situation obtaining in the world at the time of independence.

The contacts between the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East almost dateback to the beginnings of recorded history and there have been extensive political, commercial

and cultural ties between the two regions over the centuries.¹ The great ancient civilizations of the Nile, Mesopotamia and the Indus valley were not only contemporaneous but also interacted with each other. The extensive trade relations between the two regions led to the establishment of Arab settlements on the Western and Southern coasts of India and that of the Indians along the Gulf as well as in Alexandria in Egypt. "Although there were periods when the two areas were relatively isolated, periods of intimacy have been more typical".² The advent of Islam and subsequent penetration of the subcontinent by successive Muslim adventurers from the Middle East reached its apogee with the establishment of the Mughal empire in India in the 16th century and brought the two regions closer than ever before in political and cultural spheres leading to the conversion of a large native population to Islam. "From the time of the first sustained Muslim influences in the eleventh century, the models for political structures and processes, as well as religious inspiration for an important segment of the subcontinental population and cultural influences came from Iran and the Arab Middle East".³

The onset of the Industrial Revolution in Europe marked the beginning of a new era in human history. The new and superior European technology and organization led to the gradual penetration and conquest of Afro-Asian societies by the Europeans. The the Middle Eastern land mass now con-

stituted a crucial link between the continents of Asia Africa and Europe and was called the "gateway of Asia and Africa". It was this unhappy but common experience of European imperial domination that brought the two regions together since the 18th century.

COMMON HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF IMPERIAL DOMINATION

Though the process of European domination, first commercial and later political, of the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East started more or less simultaneously, it was not until the end of World war I that the entire the Middle Eastern region came under European tutelage. The consolidation of the British rule in India sealed the fate of the the Middle East as well for the latter commanded the imperial communication lines to India. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 linking the Mediterranean and the Red Sea made the region a virtual nerve-centre of international communications both over land and sea. Till the First World War, Britain sought to protect its lines of communication to India through the Middle East by supporting the Ottoman Empire in order to prevent the other European powers from getting a foothold in the region and by establishing a series of protectorates in the Persian Gulf during the 19th century. However, towards the end of the 19th century, Britain recognized France as the dominant power in Algeria, Morocco and

Tunisia and Libya came under Italian control. After the First World War, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France divided the Fertile Crescent consisting of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq between themselves under the Mandates System.

However, the interwar period witnessed the rise of strong nationalistic sentiments in both the regions and helped to forge "new bonds of Comrederie". "While the nationalist movement in India sympathised with the national aspirations of the Arabs, the latter realised that their own emancipation was tied up with the outcome of the Indian struggle".⁴

For Gandhi, "India is the key to the exploitation of the Asiatic and other non-European races of the Earth Through the deliverance of India I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the Earth from the Crushing Wheels of the Western Civilization".⁵

Such sentiments were readily reciprocated by many the Middle Eastern freedom fighters. An Iraqi statesman, Kamil El-Chadirchi wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1938.

"We wholeheartedly appreciate your struggle, and wish we had the opportunity to share in it though in a small measure, for we, both are in the same boat. True endeavour in the campaign against imperialism and exploitation must not be considered in separate units, but rather that neither geographical frontiers nor political obstacles can suppress

it".6

Jawaharlal Nehru, who always considered India's struggle for freedom as part of a larger world drama, wrote to his daughter Indira in 1933-

"The Nationalist movements of India and Egypt have adopted different methods but fundamentally the urge for national freedom is the same. And the way imperialism functions in its efforts to suppress these nationalist movements is also much the same. So each one of us can learn much from the other's experiences".7

THE CONGRESS OF OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES, 1927

The Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held in Brussels in 1927 was a momentous event in the struggle against imperialism because for the first time an attempt was made to co-ordinate the freedom movements in various parts of the world and to create an institutional framework for such co-ordination. Jawaharlal Nehru, who attended the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels as the official representative of the Indian National Congress (The INC), took a very active and enthusiastic part in the proceedings of the Congress and was also made a member of the Presidium. The general agenda of the Brussels Congress included inter-alia;

"Co-operation between the national liberation movements

in oppressed countries and the labour and anti-imperialist movements in imperialist countries" and "Establishment of a permanent world-wide organization linking-up all forces against imperialism and colonial oppression".⁸

As Nehru pointed out "... the Brussels Congress can be considered to be very representative both of the countries being exploited and oppressed by others and of workers' organisations".⁹ Egypt, Persia, Syria, Morocco, French North Africa, the Dutch East Indies, Korea, Mexico, and the states of Central and South America were among the participants.

The Brussels Congress enabled Nehru to develop personal contacts with leaders of freedom movements from different parts of the world particularly from Asia which left a deep and lasting impression on him. "I had occasion to meet many delegates from Asiatic countries in Brussels. There was a very strong desire amongst them for a closer bond between Asiatic countries, but nothing practicable could be suggested".¹⁰

However, a permanent organization "the League against Imperialism" was formed to provide a sense of unity and solidarity to freedom struggles all over the world and Nehru was made an honorary president of the League as well as a member of the Executive Committee. In his report to the All India Congress Committee on the Brussels Congress, Nehru urged that India should develop close and direct contacts

with various nationalist organizations in Asia not only to publicise India's own struggle but also to broaden its outlook on foreign affairs. The INC responded by proposing a session of Pan-Asiatic Federation in India some time in 1930 which however, failed to materialise for various reasons. It also sent out letters of invitation to nationalist organizations in Egypt, Palestine, and Tunisia inviting "fraternal" delegations to annual Congress sessions and many such delegations from various countries attended the annual sessions of the INC in the 30s and 40s. Perhaps, the most important such delegation was the Wafd group from Egypt. Moreover, the 1928 annual session of the INC adopted a resolution declaring that Indian struggle for freedom was part of the general world struggle against imperialism and that India should develop contacts with freedom struggles elsewhere. Nehru's passion for Asian resurgence in world affairs which almost bordered on the romantic inevitably led to close personal rapport and friendship with leaders such as Mustafa Nahas of Egypt, Faris al-Khuri of Syria and Iraq, s Kamil al-Chadirchi.¹¹.

THE BRITISH POLICY OF DIVIDE AND RULE

The British policy of "divide and rule" was one of the most significant factors that made the Middle East loom large in the perceptions and calculations of the Indian leaders even

during the freedom struggle. This was not a policy devised exclusively for India by the British. They found it both expedient and effective to use such tactics by pitting one community against another or one tribe against another whenever such an opportunity presented itself anywhere in their vast empire in order to cling on to their imperial possessions. Commenting on the frequency with which the British resorted to these tactics Nehru once said "It is the same old game which we have seen in other countries under imperialist domination; it is curious how often it is repeated".¹²

The Muslims who constituted a substantial minority in India were particularly vulnerable to such tactics for certain historical reasons. The Muslim invaders from the Middle East were different from the earlier invaders of the Indian subcontinent in the sense that the former brought with them a new, vigorous and proselytising religion Islam which was fundamentally at variance with Hinduism, the predominant religion of the subcontinent. As a result, the Muslim community in the subcontinent successfully resisted the all-absorbing and integrating prowess of Hinduism and to a large measure retained its distinct identity. Though the two communities interacted with each other at a political and social level, there was very little meeting ground between the two and the accent over the years was on coexistence rather than integration.

The arrival of the British introduced a new element in to the picture. The British held the Indian Muslims largely responsible for the 1857 revolt and made a conscious attempt to sideline the community thereafter. The Muslims themselves, shattered by the failure of the revolt and the subsequent British oppression, withdrew in to their shell.

When Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started the "Muslim Renaissance" in the 1870s, he was a nationalist to begin with.¹³ The fact that he sought to achieve a rapprochement between the British and Muslim community in India by stressing the loyalty of the latter to the British rule somewhat diluted his nationalist sentiments. However, the prospect of progressive introduction of representative institutions in India by the British made him positively hostile to the idea of Indian nationalism. He wrote to Badruddin Tyabji in 1888

"I do not understand what the words "national congress" means. Is it supposed that the different castes and creeds living in India belong to one nation, or can become one nation , and their aims and aspirations be one and the same? I think it is quite impossible and when it is impossible there can be no such thing as a National Congress, nor can it be of equal benefit to all peoples".¹⁴

Referring to the logic of electoral politics in India he said "It is certain the Hindu members will have four times as many {votes} because their population is four times as numerous. Therefore, we can prove by mathematics that

there will be four votes for the Hindu to every one vote for the Mahomedan. And now how can the Mahomedan guard his interests? It would be like a game of dice, in which one man had four dice and the other only one".¹⁵

The fear of being reduced from proud overlordship to the status of a permanent minority haunted the Indian Muslims and found expression in their representation to Lord Minto in 1906 which urged that "... the position accorded to the Mahomedan community in any kind of representation, direct or indirect, ... should be commensurate not merely with their numerical strength but also with their political importance ... [and to] give due consideration to the position which they occupied in India a little more than a hundred years ago ...".¹⁶

The founding of the All-India Muslim League in 1906 was the logical consequence of such fears and aspirations and came as godsend to the British administration in India which was confronted with the increasingly militant tide of secular nationalism of the Indian National Congress. This development also sensitised the INC to the fears, aspirations and sensibilities of the Indian Muslims and it started taking an active interest even in issues that affected the Indian Muslims exclusively. This period also witnessed the INC's increasing interest in and attention to the Muslim states of the Middle East. While this could be partly explained in terms of the necessity of solidarity among anti-

imperialist movements world over, it was also partly aimed at the domestic Muslim constituency in India which was increasingly being used by the British to counter the growing popularity and strength of the INC.

THE KHILAFAT ISSUE

The arrival of Gandhi on the Indian political horizon heralded the dawn of mass-based politics. His basic strategy was to transform the INC into a political institution which would represent and reconcile the interests of the divergent religious, ethnic and ideological groups so that it could present a united front to the British imperialism. When the Khilafat issue came to the forefront in 1920, Gandhi grabbed it with both hands as a golden opportunity to forge Hindu-Muslim unity. He, in fact, considered it as providing "such an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Muhammedans as would not arise in a hundred years".

The issue itself was fairly simple.¹⁷ The Sultan of Turkey known as Caliph or Khalifa was considered by Muslims all over the world as their spiritual head. However, the first world war saw Turkey join the side of Germany in fighting Britain. This placed the Indian Muslims in a real predicament as they were torn between their fears about the fate of Khalifate and their loyalty to the British. Since the British Indian Army had a large chunk of Muslims, the

British government took pains to assure the Indian Muslims that Turkey would get a fair deal in any post-war settlement. However, the armistice which ended the war not only deprived Turkey of its lands but also put the Sultan under the control of allied powers. The khilafat movement was aimed at defending the Khilafat. In a nutshell, it sought "Muslim control over every portion of the Jazirat- ul- Arab, the Khilafa's wardenship of the Holy Places, and the integrity of the Ottoman empire".¹⁸

The Indian National Congress had been sensitive to the feelings of Indian Muslims towards the fate of Turkey from the beginning. At the annual session of the Congress in 1912, its President R.N. Mudholkar referred to the profound sorrow and sympathy which all non-Muslim Indians felt for their Muslim countrymen because of the misfortunes of the Caliphate. He hoped that it might be possible to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Christian provinces of the Ottoman empire without destroying the latter or making it powerless.¹⁹ At the next session of the Congress in 1913, the President Nawab Syed Mohammad made further reference to the troubles of the Islamic world outside India and the anxiety they caused among Indian Muslims.²⁰

However, with the advent of Gandhi, the entire complexion of the Congress started changing rapidly. The Congress was no longer content with passing resolutions. These resolutions had to be supported by mass action in or-

der to put pressure on the government. Gandhi found the time opportune for such movement following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre which shocked the whole country and the Khilafat issue which greatly agitated the Indian Muslims for a long time. In his letter to the Viceroy Gandhi said

"Events, which have happened during the past one month, have confirmed me in the opinion that the Imperial Government have acted in the Khilafat matter in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner and have been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immorality.... . The attitude of the Imperial and your Excellency's Governments on the Punjab question has given me an additional sense for grave dissatisfaction".²¹

The Non-Cooperation Resolution adopted by the INC at its Calcutta session in 1920 emphasised the importance of the Khilafat issue to the Indian Muslims and called upon the non-Muslim Indians to support their Muslim brethren in their hour of trial and tribulation.

"In view of the fact that on the Khilafat question both the Indian and Imperial Governments have signally failed in their duty towards the Musalmans of India and the Prime Minister has deliberately broken his pledge word given to them, and that it is the duty of every non-Moslem Indian in every legitimate manner to assist his Musalman brother in his attempt to remove the religious calamity that has overtaken him".²²

The Hindu-Muslim unity which Gandhi desperately tried to promote by making the Congress adopt the Khilafat issue proved to be extremely short-lived because it had very little to do with the real issue that haunted the Indian Muslims i.e., their position in the post British political dispensation in India. As long as this issue remained unsolved, no amount of support to Pan-Islamic issues was going to win the confidence of the Indian Muslims. As one writer points out " ... it [Khilafat] was a movement which might have taken the road towards some form of Muslim nationalism if it had not started on the wrong - i.e., Pan-Islamic - foot".²³

Nehru made a very accurate assessment of the Non-Cooperation movement in his Glimpses of World History. "Looking at this question from the point of religious groups, the Muslims had joined the movement, as a body, chiefly because of the Khilafat. This was a purely religious question affecting the Muslims only, and non-Muslims had nothing to do with it. Gandhi, however, adopted it and encouraged others to do so, because he felt it his duty to help a brother in distress. He also hoped in this way to bring the Hindus and Muslims nearer each other. The general Muslim outlook was thus one of Muslim nationalism or Muslim internationalism and not of true nationalism. For the moment the conflict between the two was not apparent".²⁴ Moreover, the shallowness of the Khilafat issue became quite clear

when the Turks themselves, under Kemal Pasha abolished the Caliphate and declared Turkey a Republic in 1923.

This approach of the INC to win the approval and confidence of the Indian Muslims by strongly supporting Pan-Islamic issues which had little more than an emotional appeal to them, which were essentially external in nature and had no relevance or bearing on the real issues confronting the Indian Muslims spilled over in to the thinking of the post-independent India as well and influenced its policy towards the Middle East, as we shall see later.

THE PALESTINE PROBLEM

The Palestine problem which came to the forefront following the Balfour declaration in 1917 was another issue related to the Middle East which caught the attention of Indian leaders during the freedom struggle. The attitude of the Indian leaders towards this issue was of considerable importance for the perceptions and predilections that evolved in relation to this issue have had an important bearing on the policies of free India towards the region.

As Turkey joined World War I on the side of Germany and Austro-Hungary against Britain, France and Russia, the Sultan of Turkey, who was considered the spiritual head of Muslims the world over, issued an appeal to all Muslims for loyalty in a jihad. This made the British jittery because

they feared that this appeal might touch a resonant chord among Muslims in the Middle East and even in British India. At about the same time, Arab nationalists sent feelers to the British to gauge their war aims. In 1915, an agreement was reached between the British representative, Sir Henry McMahon and the Arab leader Hussain who was the Sheriff of Mecca, under which Hussain was to call an Arab revolt against Turkey with the help of British funds, arms and advisors, while the British government committed itself in writing that once the Turks were defeated it would recognise one independent Arab state all over Syria (which then included Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon) and Iraq.

However, in 1916, Britain and France signed a secret agreement known as Sykes - Picot agreement which sought to divide the Eastern Arab World into British and French spheres of influence, partly under Arab suzerainty but subordinate to and subserving the dominant power concerned.

Britain also sought to woo the Jews for the allied cause because they were sympathetic to Germany out of their hatred for the Anti-Semitic Czarist Russia. It was felt that the pacifist tendencies of American Jews who played a crucial role in American industry had to be overcome. It was further argued that American entry into the War and at least American financial help would be encouraged by some promise to Zionism.

On November 2nd, 1917, Lord Balfour, the Foreign

Secretary of Britain, made an official statement in relation to the Jewish demand for a homeland, popularly known as the "Balfour Declaration". It stated that,

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish Communities in Palestine..."²⁵

The multiplicity of contradictory promises made to different parties by the allied powers in order to gain their support for the war effort were not meant to be kept. Even without waiting for the formal convening of the League of Nations which was supposed to bestow the mandates, the Allied Powers shared the mandates amongst themselves. Two independent states of Syria and Lebanon were created to be under the French influence. Iraq and Palestine were to be under British mandate with a special clause providing for giving effect to the Balfour Declaration.

However as Nehru points out "Palestine was not a wilderness or an empty, uninhabited place. It was already somebody else's home".²⁶ While expressing "sympathy for the Jews in the terrible trials they are passing through in Europe", Nehru did not lose sight of the basic fact that "Palestine is essentially an Arab country, and must remain

so, and the Arabs must not be crushed and suppressed in their own homelands".27. Nehru was also quite convinced that the real issue in Palestine was not religion but imperialism. "... England pits Jewish religious nationalism against Arab nationalism and makes it appear that her presence is necessary to act as a arbitrator and to keep the peace between the two".28 The future of Palestine could be secured only " on the stable foundation of Arab-Jew Cooperation and the elimination of imperialism".29

He bemoaned the fact that the Jews in Palestine chose to take the side of British imperialism "which had its day and was fading away" and warned that "it was not wise for the Jews to risk the displeasure, not only of the entire Muslim world, but also of most Asian countries for this vanishing support".30

Like Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi also had nothing but sympathy for the age old persecution of the Jews whom he described as the "untouchables of Christianity". However, this sympathy he had for Jews, he said should not obscure the requirements of justice. His reasoning was clear, simple and logical.

"Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs... Surely it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews

partly or wholly as their national home.

The nobler course would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews wherever they are born and lived. The Jews born in France are French in precisely the same sense that Christians born in France are French. If the Jews have no home but Palestine, will they relish the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they are settled ? or do they want a double home where they can remain at will ? This cry for national home affords a colourable justification for the German expulsion of the Jews".³¹

It is expected that the Indian National Congress would reflect the views of its two most important leaders, Gandhi and Nehru. As early as 1921, the congress Working Committee passed a resolution "to assure the Musalman States, that when India has attained self-government her foreign policy will naturally be always guided so as to respect the religious obligations imposed upon Musalmans by Islam".³². In 1922, the INC asserted that unless "the Jazirat-el-Arab (The Arab World) were freed from all non-muslim control there can not be peace and contentment in India".³³. The Congress session in Madras in 1927 asked for the withdrawal of Indian troops from Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran) and from all other countries.³⁴ In 1928, sympathy was extended to Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Iraq in their struggle against Western imperialism.³⁵.

In 1936, the Congress Working Committee sent its greetings to the Arabs in Palestine and expressed its sympathy for their struggle for freedom. At its instance, September 27, 1936 was observed as "Palestine Day" and meetings and demonstrations were organised all over the country. In 1937, the AICC protested vigorously against the reign of terror in Palestine and strongly supported the Arab opposition to the proposed partition of Palestine.³⁶ In 1938, it appealed "to the Jews not to seek the shelter of the British Mandatory and not to allow themselves to be exploited in the interests of British imperialism".³⁷ Again in 1939, the Congress in its annual session, adopted a resolution on Palestine expressing its sympathy with the Arabs and looking forward to the emergence of an independent democratic state in Palestine with adequate provision for the protection of Jewish rights. In the same year, it adopted another resolution condemning Hitler's pogroms against Jews and offered them asylum in India but criticised Jews for relying on "British armed forces to advance their special privileges in Palestine and thus aligned themselves on the side of the British imperialism".³⁸ While the consistent support of the INC to the Arab cause in general and the Palestine issue in particular can be explained in terms of anti-imperialism, a growing sense of Asian solidarity and the innate justness of the issues involved, it must be noted that there were more mundane and less altruistic motives behind this support. The

political stalemate between the INC and the Muslim League over the issue of the status of the Muslims in post-British India, and the skilful exploitation of this stalemate by the British in order to perpetuate their increasingly tenuous hold over the subcontinent necessitated such support. Gandhi himself made it very clear when he said the following with reference to the khilafat movement.

"If I were not interested in the Indian Mohammedans, I would not interest myself in the welfare of the Turks any more than I am in that of the Austrians or the Palestinians. But by helping the Mohmmadens of India at a critical moment in their history, I want to buy their friendship".³⁹ Similarly, leaders like Gandhi and Nehru and the Indian National Congress could not but have opposed the partition of Palestine on the basis of religion while repudiating and resisting such a demand from Indian Muslims. It should suffice to say that there was as much pragmatism involved in this approach as principle and it was one of those rare occasions when policy coincided with precept. However, the more the Congress tried to win over the support of Indian Muslims by supporting Pan-Islamic issues the less it addressed itself to the domestic issues that affected them. It was this stalemate which eventually led to the partition of the sub-continent and the creation of Pakistan.

THE CREATION OF PAKISTAN

The question of relative status between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority has always been an underlying current of the Muslim separatist tendencies in the Indian sub-continent. Muslim separatism and the subsequent demand for Pakistan was essentially a quest for parity on the part of Indian Muslims vis-a-vis Hindus who were numerically in a majority. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan broached this question as early as 1888. "Is it possible that under these circumstances two nations -- the Mohammedan and Hindu -- could sit on the same throne and remain equal in power ? Most certainly not. It is necessary that one of them should conquer the other and thrust it down. To hope that both could remain equal is to desire the impossible and the inconceivable".⁴⁰

This claim and clamour for parity on the part of the Muslims was based on certain historical grounds, of course as seen by the Muslims themselves. First, the Muslims conquered India from the Hindus despite the latter's numerical superiority. So, minority status which would have implied permanent political subordination and inferiority vis-a-vis the Hindus was not acceptable. As Sisir Gupta observes, "It ought to be remembered that the demand for Pakistan and the two-nation theory was advanced by the Muslim League as a culmination of its demand for parity, essentially parity of

status between the 25 per cent Muslims and the rest in India. It is because of the impossibility of solving the status problem in terms of majority and minority, which almost by definition determines the status of the two groups, that the two-nation theory was advanced".41

Secondly, since the English conquered India from the Muslims, it was incumbent upon the former to ensure that the Muslims got an equal share of the power which would benefit and be commensurate with their status as the erstwhile rulers of India.

Krishna Menon explains: "Their [Pakistani] minds work in this way -- that it was from the Mughals that the British took over. Now, the British having gone, they must come back".42

Thus, the partition of India on the basis of religion did not solve the problem of relative status of the two communities but only institutionalised it.43

Another factor that complicates Indo-Pak relations is the divergent ideological foundations of the two states. While India proclaimed itself as a liberal secular state, Pakistan declared itself to be an Islamic country. In a nutshell, the two states represented irreconcilable ideological conflict between secularism and theocracy. Prima facie, each country has a vested interest in the collapse of the other. If India's secularism is successful, given its large Muslim minority even after partition, the *raison d'être* for the

very creation of Pakistan is undermined. Further fragmentation of Pakistan along regional or linguistic lines would also dilute the two-nation theory. On the other hand, if India's experiment with secularism fails, it would only validate and strengthen the two-nation theory. In other words, if secular nationalism is an essential prerequisite for the survival of India's unity and integrity, religion is an inseparable part of Pakistani nationalism. This ideological antagonism would remain more or less a permanent feature in Indo-Pak relations.⁴⁴

Moreover, the bloodbath that accompanied partition and the mass exodus that took place across the border in both directions made it almost impossible to establish normal relations between the two countries.

THE KASHMIR ISSUE

The Kashmir issue⁴⁵ which closely followed on the heels of partition, more or less symbolised the underlying the conflict between the two countries and buried any hopes of rapprochement in the foreseeable future. At the time of Indian independence, the Princely states which enjoyed nominal independence under the British rule, were given the freedom of choice to join either India or Pakistan or remain independent. However, problems arose only in relation to three Princely states namely Junagadh, Hyderabad and Kashmir. In

case of Junagadh and Hyderabad, though the rulers were Muslim, both the states were predominantly Hindu and neither had geographical contiguity with Pakistan. Hence, their accession to India, though causing tension and acrimony, did not poison Indo-Pak relations as Kashmir did.

The case of Kashmir was unique. It was the only Princely state which was geographically contiguous to both India and Pakistan and had a Muslim majority with a Hindu ruler. The situation was further complicated by the existence of a popular movement, National Conference, led by Sheik Abdullah which fought the autocratic and oppressive Dogra ruler Hari Singh for decades. Sheik Abdullah was a secular nationalist who refused to subscribe to the two nation theory of Jinnah and was a close associate of Nehru and a sympathiser with the goals and values of the Indian National Congress.⁴⁶

Hari Singh, who initially toyed with the idea of independence, sought to buy time by signing a "Standstill agreement" with both India and Pakistan. While Pakistan agreed to the proposal, there was no response from the Indian Government because there was a delay in communicating the proposal. According to Mountbatten it was this initial reluctance of Hari Singh to accede either to India or to Pakistan that lay at the root of the problem of Kashmir as it unfolded later.

Suspicious of India's intentions and not trusting Sheik

Abdullah, Pakistan leaders tried to force the events by encouraging if not abetting a tribal invasion of Kashmir.⁴⁷ When the tribesmen were knocking on the doors of Srinagar, Hari Singh panicked and sought India's military assistance. India insisted on formal accession before any help could be rendered and Hari Singh had little choice but to sign on the dotted line, though the accession was to be later confirmed by a plebiscite after law and order had been restored in the state. Indian troops which were air lifted to Srinagar saved the city in the nick of the time and cleared three-fourths of Kashmir of raiders⁴⁸ before Nehru sought U.N. arbitration to settle the dispute primarily at the instance of Mountbatten, a decision which he regretted later.

The battle over Kashmir was as much ideological as it was over material gains in terms of security and economic advantage. As Josef Korbel sums up,

"The real cause of all the bitterness and bloodshed, the recalcitrance and the suspicion that have characterised the Kashmir dispute is the uncompromising and perhaps uncompromisable struggle of two ways of life, two concepts of political organisation, two scales of values, two spiritual attitudes, that find themselves locked in deadly conflict, a conflict in which Kashmir has become both symbol and battleground".⁴⁹

Pakistani leaders considered it almost axiomatic that Kashmir should join Pakistan without which the latter would be

incomplete both ideologically and geographically. For Nehru, Kashmir would "give a demonstration to all India and to the world how we can function unitedly and in a non-communal way in Kashmir. In this way this terrible crisis in Kashmir may well lead to a healing of the deep wounds which India has suffered in recent months".⁵⁰ India and Nehru had never accepted partition along confessional lines in 1947 but only as an established fact. They, therefore, did not allow religious concerns to guide their actions over Kashmir.

The issue got further complicated by the fact that it got enmeshed in power politics once it was referred to U.N for arbitration. Nehru was furious that the "fundamental issue" i.e., the Pakistani aggression "has been slurred over and bypassed and passed over". He was convinced that- "The United States and Britain have played a dirty role, Britain probably being the chief actor behind the scenes".⁵¹ The general feeling in India was that the British support to Pakistan was a continuation of British support to the Muslim League in the pre-independence days and was at least partly aimed at winning back the support of the Muslim world which was alienated by the British policy in Palestine.⁵²

More importantly, what enabled India to take such a firm stand over Kashmir in defiance of Britain and the U.S. was the fact that the state power was securely in the hands of Indians and Britain could no longer act as an arbitrator between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League

as it did before independence.

INDIA'S GENERAL FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

At this juncture, it is essential to dwell at some length on two general tendencies which seem to permeate the whole gamut of India's foreign relations. The first is the status that was envisaged for India in the comity of nations by its leaders at the time of independence and the second is the centrality of security considerations to India's foreign policy endeavours from the very beginning.

First, the Indian elite either before the attainment of independence or after it, were anything but modest about India's future status as a great power.⁵³ They were aware of India's potential as a great power and were determined towards the attainment of such status for India in right earnest.

Nehru also believed that India had the wherewithal to become the fourth most important power in the world after the United States of America, the Soviet Union and China. In his own words, "Leaving aside for a moment these three countries, the United States, the Soviet Union and China, if you look at the world there are other great countries, very advanced countries, but if you peep into the future and if nothing goes wrong, wars and the like, then obviously the fourth great country in the world is India".⁵⁴

Secondly, it is no exaggeration to say that the overriding consideration of India's foreign policy has been the security of the nation, both in internal and external terms. This is but natural for a country which has experienced colonial domination for almost two centuries and whose servitude was at least partly due to its perennial and endemic lack of internal cohesion. Nehru conceived India's security interests in a very broad and comprehensive terms. For him, defence meant much more than mere military preparedness. His security perceptions were largely, as we will see, a product of India's freedom movement though they were adequately tempered by a strong sense of realism which he displayed in the handling of foreign policy issues.

It was Nehru's firm conviction that the greatest danger to the stability and security of the infant Indian state came from within and not without. He saw the danger on two fronts. First, he realised that India's groaning poverty made it a fertile ground for internal communist subversion and the most effective way of countering this threat was rapid economic development coupled with distributive justice. For him, this was essentially a political battle to be won or lost on the political plane. Hence, he considered India's economic development as an integral part of India's security in the long run.

Nehru also conceived India's development as a genuinely secular entity as an essential prerequisite for its long

term viability as a strong and stable state. In a multi-religious country like India, only a secular framework could ensure national unity, integrity and solidarity. The partition of the country on the basis of religion only confirmed Nehru's worst fears. It opened the Pandora's box which could potentially sound the death-knell of India's unity and lead to its Balkanisation. Secessionist voices were heard at the time of independence in different parts of the country particularly among the Tamils in the South, the Akali Sikhs in the Punjab and in the tribal North-East. Both Nehru and Congress adamantly refused to accept the thesis that accepting the creation of Pakistan was tantamount to accepting the two-nation theory. They knew full well that once two-nation theory was accepted, it would be illogical and untenable not to accept, at least in theory, a twenty-nation theory or whatever the number. For them, partition was the price the country had to pay to get rid of both the imperialist British and the intransigent Muslim League but certainly not the Muslims. This was the reason why they pooh-poohed any idea of exchange of populations as suggested by people like Rajagopalachari.

It is quite revealing that he once told Chester Bowles, the then US Ambassador to India that he personally considered the establishment of a secular state in India as his greatest contribution.⁵⁵ However, by failing to act decisively in this regard particularly in relation to the

Muslim community in India, Nehru left the job only half-done thereby creating problems for his successors in continuing with the process of political integration and modernization of the Indian state, as we shall see later.

NON-ALIGNMENT: RATIONALE AND RESILIENCE

Very few concepts in International Relations have, in recent times, evoked so much comment, controversy and confusion as that of non-alignment. From being labelled as "immoral" to the present status of "respectability", non-alignment has passed its uncertain youth to enter a more mature middle age. India, apart from being one of the founding members of the non-aligned group, has always been in the forefront of the movement. Non-alignment, in simple terms, is an assertion of India's independence and sovereignty, of its ability and desire to guide its destiny according to her own free-will without outside influence or intervention, both in external as well as internal affairs. "Non-alignment is simply an expression of the desire to attain maximum independence in national decision-making whether on foreign or domestic issues".⁵⁶

It is also necessary to emphasise the point that non-alignment has never had anything to do with either neutrality or isolationism. Nehru was aware that the technological revolution of the 20th Century has made the world

rather small and interdependent. Hence, isolation of any kind is neither feasible nor desirable. Moreover, Nehru, being aware of India's great potential, sought to place India in the thick of things by deliberately adopting a high profile in international affairs in order to develop a positive and profitable relationship with the rest of the world.

It is also a mistake to assume that non-alignment implies equidistance in any sense. For instance, Werner Levi sees in non-alignment a perennial trend towards the "middle of the road" with the "middle" determined by the positions of other nations.⁵⁷

However, non-alignment never had such a connotation. A cursory glance of India's attitude towards various international issues clearly demonstrates that while India tried to maintain a semblance of balance in its dealing with contending parties in order to play the role of an honest broker, it never lost sight of, or shied away from the fundamental question involved. Korea, the Suez crisis of 1956 and Algeria may be cited as examples in this regard. Hence, India did take a definite stance over an issue whenever the occasion demanded it. However, once that was done, India tried to achieve some sort of consensus on the procedures to be adopted in solving the problem.

As a corollary to the foregoing point, it is important to examine the relationship between alliances and non-alignment. Does non-alignment preclude any type of align-

ment or alliance? The simple answer is no. Non-alignment is merely a diplomatic posture which enables a state to keep its options open till the very last moment. For Nehru alignment was "war-time psychology" and he saw no reason why it should be imported into times of relative peace. States have no permanent friends but only permanent interests. "In international affairs", said Nehru, "one can never be dead certain, and the friends of today might be enemies of tomorrow". Hence, it would be diplomatically imprudent to foreclose one's options with regard to matters as serious as war. Nehru said as early as 1952, "It is open to us to be associated in an alliance with any country. We have avoided alliances that might entangle us....In an alliance, one inevitably takes something and gives something in return....An alliance, nevertheless, need not stand in the way of independence of the country".⁵⁸

On another occasion he was even more forthright. "We are not going to join a war if we can help it. We are going to join the side which is to our interest when the time comes to make the choice."⁵⁹

It follows from the above that non-alignment does not represent a rigid and doctrinaire approach to international relations but a flexible and pragmatic one. "It is flexible because it is a policy of independence and therefore, nationally determinable. It is flexible because it is based on mutuality of interest. It is flexible because it does

not involve ideological commitments to capitalism or communism. It is flexible because it is pragmatic and takes into account the dynamism of change."⁶⁰

Nehru himself once stated that while non-alignment was a basic policy, "its application to a particular circumstance or resolution is a matter of judgement".⁶¹

There are also strong psychological reasons beneath India's nonaligned stance as explained by Selig S. Harrison. Nehru "perceived in alignment the danger of psychological return to deep-rooted feelings of dependence and inferiority that he saw still lurking beneath the surface of the Indian national consciousness after the trauma of imperialism. Should India ever lose its sense of a great national destiny, Nehru reflected, it could all too easily succumb once again to divisive centrifugal stresses".⁶²

It is for these reasons that Nehru called non-alignment the "natural policy" for India. He had no doubt that India "would follow it even if there was no other country in the world that followed it".⁶³ He went to the extent that "he would rather India be reduced to dust than to give up Non-alignment."⁶⁴ Was Nehru being doctrinaire and fetish about non-alignment? No. Not at all. Nehru saw India as a great power in the making because of its history, civilization, size, population and resources. He simply could not envisage India playing anything less than an independent and assertive role in world affairs. It is her right and it is

her destiny. Non-alignment symbolizes and epitomises this urge and aspiration. That is why he once described non-alignment as a "summary description" of India's foreign policy.⁶⁵ It is in this sense, not in any ethical sense that he once remarked that it would be a "terrible moral failure" on the part of India if it ever gave up its non-aligned policy. To him, it was tantamount to admitting India's failure to live up to her potential and destiny which should be hers as a matter of right.

However, it must be noted that while Nehru's insistence on nonalignment for India was understandable and justified, his political and probably intellectual aversion to aligned nations did adversely affect India's relations with important Middle Eastern countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia which were otherwise well disposed towards India. Nehru also seemed to have made a distinction between radical and conservative states in relation to the Middle East which was unwarranted. Consequently, Indian policy lost some of its flexibility and adaptability, which in turn, circumscribed India's already limited options in the region as we shall see later.

NON-ALIGNMENT AND BALANCE OF POWER

At this juncture, it is essential to explain at some length the relationship between non-alignment and the theory of

balance of power. However, this will be done in two stages. First, we will consider the linkage between non-alignment and the theory of balance of power in general and later we will discuss the balance of power theory in specific relation to India which, of course, is our main interest.

Non-alignment is neither an abstention from nor an alternative to the theory of balance of power, but an integral part of it. "The doctrine and practice of non-alignment suggests that it is a form of power politics -- albeit a form that is suitable for a weaker state that either by inclination or compulsion, must be externally involved if it is to shape its immediate external environment and if it is to direct internal economic and social change through peaceful means."⁶⁶

However, the modern theory of balance of power is different from its classical version in so far as it takes into account three important new variables of the post-war era, namely the emergence of the super powers, the advent of nuclear weapons, and the crystallization of a Third World consisting of newly independent Afro-Asian nations, which make it a different sort of game altogether in the second half of the 20th century.

As Penrose explains, "A preliminary explanation...may best start by considering the position of the statesmen entrusted with the conduct of foreign affairs in any independent State. Obviously, their first concern must be the

survival of the State and the preservation of its independence....".

"In meeting these responsibilities statesmen are obliged to take account of the distribution of power in mind. They must strive to establish such relations with other countries as will ensure that no preponderance of power among the latter, singly or collectively, will threaten their independence or encompass their downfall. In the pursuit of this defensive aim they may decide, from time to time, to enter into or form alliances with other Powers, particularly when those countries whose designs they fear are linked by treaty engagements. In other circumstances they may eschew all alliances, fearing that by entering into one they would provoke a hostility of a rival group and be drawn into conflicts which they might avoid by remaining dissociated from either group. Much depends upon the geographical position and natural resources of the State in question: each State is unique in size, however defined in resources and in geographical position in relation to other States. Consequently the precise measure appropriate to the maintenance of a defensive balance of power differ in different countries. What is common is the aim of survival".⁶⁷

There can be very little doubt that the non-aligned countries as a group sought to exploit the rough balance of power that emerged in the world after the second World War between the Western countries led by the U.S., and the

Socialist bloc under the Soviet auspices. The material and military weakness of the non-aligned made it impossible for them to adopt a confrontationist attitude towards the power blocs. On the other hand, it was neither possible nor desirable for them to remain aloof from them, for they needed the goodwill and the assistance of both in the modernization of their nations. In other words, non-alignment made it both possible and feasible for the Third World countries to combine simultaneously their contradictory yearnings for strategic isolation and an active role in international affairs which "reflects at once a desire to avoid commitment --an understandable attitude for any people of meagre resources --and a wish to be among those who count in world affairs".⁶⁸

The Afro-Asian countries which had just become free from colonial control were in no mood to brook any interference in their affairs. The non-aligned stance enabled them to insulate themselves from cold war politics by minimising opportunities for outside intervention.

It also enabled them to shift the focus from power politics i.e., Cold war issues to issues which were more important and urgent to the Third World countries i.e., economic and social issues.

The non-aligned also facilitated the trend towards loosening of blocs and towards multi-polarity by providing an alternative to bloc politics through the formation of

what is termed as "the area of peace". The Non-aligned were never peace-makers in the conventional sense. They only facilitated it. The major powers knew the consequences of a global conflict and were as much interested as the non-aligned in de-escalating and localising conflicts so that they could stop short of reaching a point of no return without complete loss of face. And therein lay the strength, utility and relevance of the non-aligned.

The non-aligned countries were also able to increase their manoeuvrability vis-a-vis power blocs for non-alignment always carried within itself the implied threat of alignment. As Harrison points out, "Non-aligned countries as a whole enjoyed an artificially strong bargaining position during the early years of the Cold War".⁶⁹

Nehru was both annoyed and puzzled that the powers that were either failed or refused to take notice of the changing power equation between Western world and the newly emerged Afro-Asian world. He bemoaned

"...the countries which enjoyed the privileged position in that 19th century set-up, many of them have lost their position. It is not easy for them to adjust themselves to the new thinking, the new balance in the world, the new balances --apart from the giants coming up-- and the new renaissance in Asia and Asian countries becoming independent in their different ways, whether it is India or China, or Indonesia or Burma or other countries. The old balances go

on being changed and governments, very wise governments, cannot easily keep pace with those practical developments. Of course the most remarkable fact about this lack of awareness, proper awareness, (is) that a great country like China is there (and) of course they know it. Nevertheless, they seem to lack something, or otherwise, their policy would be different. But it is not merely a question of China. It is really a question of the outlook on all Asian problems or African problems and the idea that, as previously they have to be settled by the great Powers whom we all respect, hardly taking into consideration what the countries of Asia might feel about it....So this kind of difficulty is there and facts and events have gone on, bringing about enormous changes, and yet, the mind of man cannot keep pace, and it keeps in the old ruts....".70

As M.M. Rahman observes, "The greatest significance of non-alignment perhaps lies in the fact that it announced the desire of the Asian and African States to enter the balance-of-power struggle in their own right. Not all the Afro-Asian States had the geographical and other advantages to realise this aim. It was, therefore, fitting that those who had the advantage took the lead".71

It was, therefore, in the fitness of things that India, potentially the most powerful and important of the non-aligned countries, was the torch-bearer of this struggle of the Afro-Asian countries to redefine and refashion their

relationship vis-a-vis the West. This is the theme of the next stage of our discussion.

INDIA AND THE BALANCE OF POWER THEORY

It goes without saying that Nehru was, from the beginning acutely aware of and alive to the realities and requirements of the balance of power game. "India talked about the undesirability of power politics during the 1950s, but in practice it did not try to exempt itself from the opportunities and obligations of power politics".⁷²

At the time of independence, Nehru realised that India's material and military weakness would come in the way of India playing an assertive and independent role in international affairs. Nevertheless, he also saw certain advantages, which were unique to India and would help her hold her own in the international arena despite her apparent lack of material power.

So he came up with the idea of nonalignment or an independent foreign policy. As Ashok Kapur asserts, "Indian non-alignment is nothing but a strategy of being engaged in power politics but of a doing so preferably through diplomacy, given India's military and economic weaknesses".⁷³

Krishna Menon explains, "This is a policy of independence and peace; that is, materially speaking, a weak man's

policy. In a sense...it is like Gandhi's non-cooperation".⁷⁴ In other words, "nonalignment is a strategy to gain influence on the cheap; it is a low-key strategy".

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Nehru also sought to take advantage of the general goodwill and sympathy that existed for India in the world at large. India's culture and civilization coupled with Gandhi's moral leadership obtained for India high and favourable standing in the international community. India should try and benefit from and reservoir of goodwill that existed for her.

More importantly, Nehru was quite conscious of the tremendous potential that India possessed and the sort of leverage that such potential would entail India even in the shortrun. He was quite confident of India's importance, her lack of physical strength notwithstanding.

"The fact of the matter is that in spite of our weakness in a military sense...India even today counts in world affairs....If we had been some odd little nation somewhere in Europe or Asia it would not have mattered much. But because we count and because we are going to count more and more in the future, everything we do becomes a matter for comment".⁷⁶

Ironically, India's non-aligned stance which sought to diminish and de-escalate the intense cold war tensions of the years immediately following the World War II, found sus-

tenance and gained in importance and stature from the same Cold War tensions. As Surjit Mansingh explains, "The unique configuration of world politics after the Second World War admirably suited the establishment of India's non-alignment and gave it greater significance than it would have had in other circumstances. The great power rivalry, which Nehru had almost prophetically anticipated before the war ended, tended to attract most states into one or the other of the antagonistic coalitions, each putting forward its ideological system to achieve global adherence. India would have pursued nonalignment vis-a-vis any greater powers as an assertion of its true independence, but when that posture was proclaimed, and later achieved, with respect to the two coalitions dominating the global arena India's uniqueness gained for it a special kind of influence or power".⁷⁷

Thus, the cold war was not one of the fundamental stimuli for India's non-aligned stance; it merely acted as a catalyst and brought non-alignment into sharp focus giving it a lot of verve and veracity.

India insisted upon each state actor, particularly the newly independent Afro-Asian countries, participating in the balancing process in their own right as independent and sovereign nations rather than taking shelter behind other powers or going on crutches. This must have been in Nehru's mind when he said in the Lok Sabha in 1957,

"It seems to me to really lead to the conclusion that

where circumstances compel an imperialist power to withdraw, necessarily you must presume that it has left a vacuum. If so, how is that vacuum to be filled? Surely if somebody else comes in, it is a repetition of the old story, perhaps in a different form. It can only be filled by the people of that country growing and developing themselves economically, politically, or otherwise".⁷⁸

Non-alignment seems to have served this purpose particularly well. "As a concept it [non-alignment] has subtlety and richness; and the policies which derive from it are eminently respectable, not only helping this large country to maintain its independence, but also helping international society to continue as a society of independent, sovereign, co-existing states; and this at a time, when that society has expanded enormously and yet bears more soft spots than during any of its past historical phases. Much of this help is effected without economic power and a military capability absurdly limited for such large objectives".⁷⁹

India's balance of power policy operates on three broad planes i.e., sub-continental, regional and global. It suits India to be non-aligned on all the three planes for different reasons. "Indeed, nonalignment is no new manifestation; it is but a particular balance of power policy to suit the particular circumstances of India's position in the World".⁸⁰

GLOBAL BALANCE

Nehru, long before independence, realised that India was protected by a global balance of power, if only she took advantage of it and played her cards shrewdly. Nehru saw no reason to change his views in 1947 when India entered the international arena characterized by bipolarity as a free nation. He implicitly acknowledged the existence of a rough but uneasy balance in the global context. "As things are today, we have reached a certain kind of balance -- it may be very unstable balance, but it is still some kind of balance -- when any kind of major aggression is likely to lead to a world war. That itself is a restraining factor."

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It was Nehru's appreciation that such unstable balance could easily be disturbed with grave consequences for the world at large. He was also aware that this acted as a restraining factor on all the major powers in general and on the super powers in particular. Hence, he sought to take advantage of the nuclear paralysis of the super powers to carve out a niche for India and the materially weak Third World by creating and enlarging what he called an "area of peace" not geographically but "politically, diplomatically, morally". Super powers themselves took notice of and availed themselves of the "cushioning effect" that the non-

aligned produced and paraded.

Nehru was only too well aware of India's great potential. He also appreciated the fact that it really did not require great weight to tilt the scales in the unstable balance that existed in the world. For these two reasons India counted despite its weaknesses.

As Surjit Mansingh explains, "India's non-alignment was the main source of its power in international political relations. The power derived from non-alignment existed only in relation to those states whose peculiar interests were affected when that posture was assumed by another state. That came to be the case with the US and the USSR.... Neither side was able to obtain any sort of commitment from New Delhi to provide support, and therein lay India's power".⁸²

REGIONAL BALANCE

China has been India's principal rival for regional influence and leadership. Nehru saw this much earlier than others. He said in 1927, "The Chinese Revolution is not an event of local interest and importance. It is a world phenomenon of the greatest historic importance....the country which will be most affected by the issue will be India".⁸³ He told Frank Moraes in 1952, "Never forget that the basic challenge in Southeast Asia is between India and

China. That challenge runs along the spine of Asia".

Nehru saw quite early that, at least, in military terms, the regional balance between India and China was adverse to India. He had two options before him for responding to this potential threat to India's security, physical as well as ideological. The first was to join the western alliance aimed at containing China. This option had two serious shortcomings. First, joining any such alliance, apart from incurring the immediate wrath of China, would inevitably alienate the USSR and that was the last thing that Nehru wanted. In fact, he anticipated the Sino-Soviet schism much earlier than many and joining the Western alliance would have meant that India foreclosed the option of exploiting Sino-Soviet differences to its advantage.

Secondly, he was also aware that any alliance would entail mutual obligations which would inevitably lead to a dilution of India's independence of action. Neither India nor Nehru, just free from Western colonial domination, were prepared for such a possibility.

Nehru, however, reasoned that China, despite its current military superiority, could not pose an immediate threat to India. To quote Bowles, "Nehru expressed concern over the long-term problem Communist China posed for India....He staked his hopes for a peaceful relationship, not on Chinese goodwill, but on the assumption that the Chinese leaders needed a period of peace in which to solidify their

revolution".84

Nehru's strategy was to buy time for India so that India would be able to take on the Chinese challenge on its own when the time came. He told the Lok Sabha in 1958,

"Security can be obtained in many ways. The normal idea is that security is protected by armies. That is only partly true; it is equally true that security is protected by policies. A deliberate policy of friendship with other countries goes further in gaining security than almost anything else".85

Hence, he made an unceasing and unabashed effort to cultivate and woo China without losing sight of India's primary interests. So non-alignment became India's first line of defence vis-a-vis China. However, the regional plane proved to be the most tricky ground for the operational efficacy of non-alignment. As Surjit Mansingh points out,

"...non-alignment was powerless against such states as Pakistan and China whose interests vis-a-vis India would have been constant regardless of New Delhi's diplomatic stance".86

SUBCONTINENTAL BALANCE

India always considered the sub-continental sphere as its own backyard. It has always been the predominant power in

this sphere from the beginning and it could pursue and protect its interests on its own without any alignment. In fact, its endeavour, has been to keep the sub-continent free from outside influence so that outside powers could neither restrict nor restrain India's freedom of action nor bolster other powers in the sub-continent vis-a-vis India. India also had the material and military strength to back up its policies in this sphere and it never shirked or shied away from doing so when the occasion demanded it. Since independence it has been India's endeavour to preserve the balance that existed in its favour in the sub-continent and to increase it progressively with the passage of time. It is in this context that Indo-Pak relations acquire significance for Pakistan almost has a mirror-image of India's perceptions, policies and interests.

This three-fold division of India's balance of power approach is not rigid and in fact, there is, of necessity, a lot of overlapping and interaction. Nevertheless, it serves as a useful analytical framework. Nor should it be forgotten that India also shifted its emphasis on non-alignment on the three planes depending on the exigencies of the situation. In other words, India sought to take advantage of the existence of rough global and regional balance to preserve and promote the sub-continental balance which was in its favour by insulating the sub-continent from outside intervention or influence. Nehru propounded a Monroe doctrine for

the sub-continent when he said in 1955, "Any attempt by a foreign power to interfere in any way with India is a thing which India can not tolerate and which subject to her strength, she will oppose. That is the doctrine I lay down".⁸⁷

India's approach to the concept of balance of power can be summed up in the words of G.S. Bajpai, the Secretary-General of India's External Affairs Ministry in 1952, "India ... has to develop her strength to support her foreign policy. The inherent goodness of that policy is insufficient to sustain or further it. On this view the inference that politics cannot be divorced from power holds true also for India....Today, India is the major stabilising factor for peace in Asia; the measure of stability that she can impart to this part of the world is not a matter of good intentions but of power....It is not power but its misuse or abuse which is morally reprehensible....Thus viewed the ideal of balance of power is nothing evil or incompatible with India's highest ideals".⁸⁸

It goes without saying that Pakistan and the Middle East constituted important factors in India's balance of power calculations at the subcontinental, regional and global levels. Indian policy makers perceived that Pakistan had a direct and the Middle East a derivative bearing on India's internal cohesion and regional aspirations. Hence, this had a more direct impact on India's foreign policy than its more

general nonaligned stance because of the immediacy of its consequences. India's contest with Pakistan also had an effect on her relations with China. Both China and Pakistan considered India's nonaligned stance to have no bearing on their respective interests vis-a-vis India. It was this basic community of interests between Pakistan and China that alerted India to a potential adverse balance of power at the regional level. Pakistan and the Middle East were also factors in India's global balance of power concerns. Pakistan joining the Western alliance in the 50s and its close relations with the Middle Eastern states such as Iran which were part of the Western alliance system caused concern to the Indian policy makers of a possible adverse global balance and the problems that a nonaligned India might face in countering such adverse balance. It is in this three-fold balance of power framework that we would examine India's relations with the super powers, China and Pakistan respectively in order to explain and appreciate India's interactions in these spheres in the context of its overall foreign policy objectives.

INDIA AND THE SUPER-POWERS

India's relations with the two super powers, the USA and the USSR, more or less epitomise India's great power aspirations and also throw considerable light on India's preferred means

of achieving them.

As we have already seen, Nehru saw India's opportunity in the rough global balance that existed between the two power blocs at the time of Indian independence. Nehru was quite convinced that the cold war primarily represented the conflict of geopolitical interests between the United States and the Soviet Union with ideological divergence only adding a sharp edge to it. Nehru saw quite early the awesome potential of the United States and its implications for the rest of the world. He wondered whether "the great problem of the near future will be American imperialism, even more than British imperialism, which appears to have had its day and is crumbling fast. Or, it may be, that the two will unite together in an endeavour to create a powerful Anglo-Saxon bloc to dominate the world".⁸⁹

Nehru no doubt saw the Soviet Union as the only credible and effective countervailing force to the ever increasing and all-pervading power and influence of the United States. His instructions to the Indian Ambassadors to USA and China about sums up India's approach to the two power blocs. "The two leading groups today are the Russian bloc and the Anglo-American bloc. We must be friendly to both and yet not join either. Both America and Russia are extraordinarily suspicious of each other as well as of other countries. This makes our path difficult and we may well be suspected by each of leaning towards the other. This cannot

be helped....". India needs America because "There is much goodwill for America and expectation of help from her in many fields, especially technical". Nor could India afford to antagonise the Russians. "The Soviet Union being our neighbour, we shall inevitably develop closer relations with it. We can not afford to antagonise Russia merely because we think that this may irritate someone else".⁹⁰

Explaining the geopolitics of India's approach to super powers, Nehru said, "Situated between the vast Communist land mass of Eurasia and the Indian Ocean controlled by the West we had to cooperate with both".⁹¹

However, the fact remains that Nehru generally speaking displayed a greater sensitivity to Russian sensibilities than to that of the Americans. The reasons for this are not far to seek.

First, Nehru considered the United States "too far away for effective action". The Americans on the other hand felt that their interests in South Asia were only marginal, it would follow that the incentive for United States to intervene in the region on behalf of India would also be limited.

The USSR, however, is a different kettle of fish. Nehru was aware of the proximity of the USSR to India and realised that it could easily be a "thorn in India's side" if relations became strained. In 1940, Nehru surmised that the Russians "were not likely to ignore India which touched their frontiers in Asia". If Russia had greater stake in

South Asia than the US, then it follows that the Russian need to intervene in the region either on behalf of or against India was also greater to that extent. Hence, the need not to antagonise the USSR. This, at least, partly explains India's rather mild and muted criticism of the USSR when it chose to intervene militarily in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Nehru, at least from the mid-50s began to consider the USSR as the most effective counter against the growing Chinese pressure vis-a-vis India both because of the Chinese dependence on the USSR and the ability of the USSR to intervene physically in any future Sino-Indian conflict to the advantage of India if USSR so desired.

At the height of the cold war, India along with the other nonaligned countries tried to act as a "bridge" between the USA and the USSR. The existence of a rough global balance and the advent of nuclear weapons both necessitated and facilitated such a role.

Nehru was quite aware of the similarity of interests between the US and the USSR. Hence, once detente, however limited, was achieved between the two super powers, India manoeuvred to become an area of agreement between them. This process was facilitated by two factors: 1) the acceptance of super powers of India's middle path based on ideological as well as methodological moderation; and 2) the rise of China as an independent factor in international politics.

Explaining the international significance of India's internal experiment Nehru said, "...today there is almost universal understanding and appreciation of what we are trying to do on the economic plane --that is, planning under a democratic pattern of socialism. This has set a new pattern for Asian and African development and it is significant that economists and other experts from both the worlds...are extremely interested in our development plans and progress. We are giving a lot of consideration to this issue and are tackling it in a big way with organised thought behind it. This makes of India itself a kind of an area of agreement between the opposing ideological forces".⁹²

Consequently, both the super powers developed a stake in the stability and security of India and sought its cooperation in countering China on two planes. First, both the super powers sought to cultivate India's active cooperation in moderating the Third World's political and economic demands and keeping the radical elements within the movement under check. India too became a willing partner for it eminently suited India's interests. India even bilaterally needs to maintain a working and workable relationship with both the super powers and continue to be an area of super power agreement to the extent possible. This would not be possible if third world countries, of which India is the unofficial spokesman and leader, overtly show a tilt in favour of one super power or the other. Secondly, the ad-

vent of nuclear weapons, according to Indian perceptions had changed the rules of the game which the nations of the world can ignore only at great peril to themselves. The most important issue confronting the mankind is the threat of a nuclear holocaust. And if the USA and the USSR should come to some sort of understanding in order to avoid nuclear catastrophe, third world countries should also moderate their demands and the means of achieving them, however justified and urgent they may be, in order to avoid disaster. As Nehru argued, "The only way to avoid conflicts is to accept things more or less as they are. No doubt, many things require to be changed, but you must not think of changing them by war".⁹³

There were at least two occasions when the nonaligned movement appeared to have confronted the problem of divisions within between radical and confrontationist elements on the one hand and moderate and reformist elements on the other.

The first occasion was in the early 60s, when Indonesia's Sukarno under the Chinese influence and inspiration sought to persuade the third world to adopt a more militant and confrontationist attitude towards the developed countries in making their demands and tried to wrest the leadership of the Third World from moderate and reformist oriented leadership. Addressing the Non-aligned Conference at Cairo in October 1964, he made it clear that he saw no

special need for the third world to strive for better understanding between the two super powers. He also saw nothing evil or unnatural in the third world adopting a confrontationist approach. Sukarno just as if to prove his point later withdrew Indonesia from the United Nations.

However, the ascendancy of the radical elements in the Third World movement proved to be short-lived. First, the radical approach did not find favour with most Third World leaders. The fall of Sukarno was also a great blow to the radical elements. More importantly, moderate countries like India seized this opportunity to assert themselves and bring the movement back under their control.

In 1966, as if to make a formal assertion of their ascendancy, the moderate elements within the Third World saw to it that "an explicit declaration was made by the developing countries in their meeting at Algiers that there was no need for a confrontation between the developed and the developing countries for the creating of what was called a just economic order".⁹⁴

The second occasion was when the nonaligned movement showed a slight drift to the left under the Chairmanship of Cuba on the basis of the argument that Socialist bloc was the "natural allies" of the Third World. India was not amused. As soon as India took over the Chairmanship from Cuba, she made an assiduous and persistent effort to restore balance to the movement and put it firmly on the middle path

once again. Thus, whatever may be their differences with India, neither the US nor the USSR can afford to ignore the moderating role that India has been playing in the politics of the Third World.

Secondly, both the super powers, at one time or the other wanted India to play a more active regional role in opposition to China. USA, from the beginning wanted India to take Southeast Asia under its wings vis-a-vis China.

In 1969, after serious clashes between the Russian and Chinese forces along the Ussuri river, the Soviet Union proposed what it termed as the Asian Collective Security as a counter to China and tried to rope in India.

On both the occasions, India shied away from the responsibility. India, perhaps, does not want to enter into any overt anti-Chinese alliance sponsored by either of the super power for it could seriously restrict its own diplomatic options and freedom of manoeuvre.

India also possibly does not want to get entangled in regional issues which could be a drain on its scarce resources and distract its attention from domestic reconstruction which remains her top priority.

India would also not like to alienate China at a time when sensitive border talks have been going on and Sino-Pak collusion causing considerable concern. It may be that India discounts China to be a very real threat to Southeast Asia under the changed circumstances.

Though India resisted the overtures of both the USA and the USSR to enter into any formal alliance with either of them to protect Southeast Asia from a possible Chinese threat, the fact remains that both the USA and the USSR have a stake in the stability and security of Southeast Asia and hence this makes it another important area of agreement between them with regard to India.

While India certainly desired and worked to remain an area of agreement between the super powers and sought to solve its own problems as well as those of the Third World in concurrence rather than in confrontation with them, the last thing it ever wanted was a super power condominium. Though the existing differences in the perceptions and policies of the super powers make such a possibility rather remote, nevertheless India stoutly resisted any such tendencies, however incipient, on the part of the super powers.

India's policies, both individually and in concert with other Third World countries have been geared to check and curtail the power and influence of the super powers and to ease gradually their stranglehold over the international system. This objective has been pursued relentlessly on different planes through different forums.

Politically, this manifests itself in the Nonaligned movement (NAM) which came into existence in defiance of the cold war logic of inevitability of bloc polarisation and carved out a niche for the Third World in international

politics despite their military and material vulnerability.

Economically, this urge culminated in the demand for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) which seeks to alter the structure and functions of the existing economic order which, according to the Third World, is heavily loaded and oriented in favour of the developed world and tends to perpetuate the Western dominance and the Third World dependency. This objective is pursued through various forums such as NAM, UN, North-South Dialogue and the Group of 77.

Diplomatically, the Third World sought to tame the super powers through the strengthening of the United Nations thereby limiting their opportunities to intervene unilaterally and arbitrarily. The overwhelming strength that the Third World enjoys in the UN proved to be a stumbling block for the super powers on many an occasion and put them on the defensive in a diplomatic sense.

Strategically, the Third World tried to diminish and circumscribe the influence of the super powers by gradually loosening the rigidity of bipolar politics and helping the trend towards multi-polarity. It is in this context that the rise of Western Europe, China, Japan and India as independent power centres must be seen. The enthusiasm of the Third World for regional organisations and groupings must be understood against this background.

Militarily, the Third World chose to check the super power domination by their crusade against military bases and

by their persistent demand for general and global disarmament though not very successfully. They also sought to place limits on their military expansion by declaring space, Antarctica and different oceans as Zones of Peace.

The Third World also sought to neutralise the domination of the world by the Western mass media, which it thought was giving a negative and distorted image to events in the Third World. A "New Information Order" was declared as the avowed goal and the "Nonaligned News Pool" was created as the first concrete step towards the realisation of this goal. In fact, "...military defense, aspirations for regional and global influence, leadership in the building of a new international economic order, and the gradual curtailment of super power dominance over world affairs have been the central policies of the Government of India since its founding in 1947".⁹⁵

Another important area where India has serious disagreements with both the super powers and stubbornly and persistently refused to yield to their pressures and blandishments is on the issue of nuclear technology. India has pursued a zealously independent line with regard to the nuclear issue ever since independence and defied both the super powers in refusing to sign the NPT which it branded as discriminatory. India's approach to the issue can be summed up in the words of V.C. Trivedi. "The problem of negotiating a treaty on non-proliferation has implications far beyond

the realm of proliferation of nuclear weapons or even of general and complete disarmament. The attitudes that we take and the approaches we adopt on this will reflect our attitudes and approaches on international relations in general. It is therefore imperative that we take a global approach on this issue, take into account the needs and requirements of all members of the international community and follow an approach which reflects our firm adherence to the sovereign equality of all nations and to the principles of equality and mutual benefit".⁹⁶

India's approach to the issue of Indian Ocean is yet another example of India's ability and willingness to differ from and oppose both the super powers wherever and whenever she considered her own vital interests to be at stake. India considers Indian Ocean to be her own lake and considers any intrusions from outside as unwarranted and undesirable. Since she would not possess the naval strength to dominate the Indian Ocean in the near future, India utilised her diplomatic means to persuade the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution declaring "Indian Ocean to be a Zone of Peace". Though India has been putting a lot of diplomatic pressure on both the super powers to leave the Indian Ocean alone, she has been particularly worried about the American base at Diego Garcia which would make it that much more difficult for India to nudge US out of Indian Ocean some time in future when India is ready to take on the responsibility her-

self. An American official acknowledged this in an interview with an Indian scholar while discussing India's objectives in general. "Obviously regional supremacy in South Asia and in the India Ocean region". He went on to add, "India wants to be the dominant power. It opposes Diego Garcia because it affects its position".⁹⁷

India has also been fairly ambivalent to the super powers, particularly with regard to the United States, in relation to two issues. The first issue is India's desire to evolve as an independent and autonomous power centre and the response of USA and USSR to such a desire. It has been India's experience that USSR rather than the USA has appeared to be much more sympathetic and helpful in assisting India achieve this goal. The United States, in the 50s and 60s, refused to help India in setting up basic industries like steel mills and refused to transfer technology for the establishment of an indigenous arms industry whereas the Russians helped India on both the counts.

In the words of Baldev Raj Nayar, "...in its economic aid programme the US refused to provide such aid as would help in the building of an independent centre of power in India, first in the economic sphere and later in the military sphere as well, even when India was confronted by a security threat from China, the supposedly ideological antagonist of the United States".⁹⁸

The second issue is the attitude of the super powers to

Pakistan in relation to India. While both the US and the Soviet Union at some time or the other tried to follow an even-handed policy with regard to India and Pakistan and used economic aid and arms sales for this purpose, it was the US again that the Indians suspected of shoring up Pakistan under the illusion of maintaining parity between the two countries and what was worse of trying to build up Pakistan as a counter to India.

As Baldev Raj Nayar sees it, "In its surge towards extending American power and influence and in forcing India to come to terms with it, the United States adopted the policy of containment toward India by building up Pakistan militarily, thus neutralising Indian power in the region. This was not a novel element in American foreign policy specifically forged for India, but was part of an axiomatic principle in U.S. foreign policy to create regional balances favourable to the United States in order to ensure American influence and control".⁹⁹

These are very sensitive issues and the attitude of super powers to these issues would significantly determine the nature and content of future interaction between the USA and the USSR on the one hand and India on the other. However, generally speaking, for most Indians "an appropriate environment for India's strategic interaction with the great powers is one that simultaneously precludes their country from being ignored or coerced".¹⁰⁰

INDIA AND CHINA

As we have already stated, China has been India's rival for regional leadership and non-alignment was most vulnerable and least effective against China in a diplomatic sense. Hence the policy of deliberate friendship with China.

It appears that at least, initially, Nehru considered China to be a counter to Russia and not vice versa. Nehru reasoned that China was beset with internal problems and would need time to consolidate its revolution whereas Russia, which was already a super power, appeared to be potentially a greater threat to India¹⁰¹. Hence cultivating China would be useful counter to any possible Russian threat.

Nehru was also swayed by his strong sense of Asian solidarity. He was piqued by the fact that Asia's view point was not being given the attention that it deserved. For him the treatment that was being meted out to China was at least partly due to the arrogance and ignorance of the Western powers with regard to problems relating to the independent and resurgent Asia.

Nehru did envisage some sort of Sino-Indian coalition as a counter to the West in a political and diplomatic sense if not military. However, being conscious of potential Sino-Indian regional rivalry, Nehru must have been aware of

the serious limitations of such a coalition if ever it materialised.

India's championing of China's case in international forums has a less noble and more pragmatic side to it. Nehru foresaw the Sino-Soviet rift and was keen on facilitating if not hastening it. The best way to do it, as he saw it, was to reduce China's exclusive dependence on the Soviet Union for political and diplomatic support. The first step towards a friendly relationship with China was India's immediate recognition of the Communist regime. As Krishna Menon describes "The recognition of China was an act of political maturity; not to do so would be just closing your eyes to stubborn reality."¹⁰²

When the Chinese armed forces marched in to Tibet in 1950, there was very little that India could have done to stop it India refused to represent Tibet in the United Nations and discouraged it from taking the issue to the UN. India, however, mediated a 17 point agreement which envisaged large degree of autonomy for Tibet coupled with an assurance to preserve the distinct culture and traditions of the Tibetans. In other words, the Tibet episode was deliberately played down in order not to alienate China.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, the Indian Government was quite alive to the changed strategic situation on its northern borders and "responded to the altered Himalayan situation in a manner that must be described as politically discreet, diplomati-

cally cautious, economical of financial and material resources and projected over a long time."¹⁰⁴

Moreover, the Indian Government also tried to avoid a "vigorous and publicised program of Himalayan security measures" which it thought would be contrary to the "government's professions of friendship and goodwill toward China and provoke the very response which Indian diplomacy sought to prevent an overt challenge along the long Himalayan frontier".¹⁰⁵

The outbreak of the Korean War and China's involvement in it also gave Nehru an opportunity to demonstrate his goodwill towards China. He refused to brand China as an aggressor and was critical of the US for bringing the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan straits. He was also opposed to the American policy in Indo-China. This was not exactly designed to please the Chinese but it couldn't but have gone down well with the Chinese who were actively involved in the region.

The Panch Sheel which was signed in 1954 was the high water mark of the "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai era". The five principles which constituted the Panch Sheel were: 1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2) mutual nonaggression; 3) mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs; 4) equality and mutual benefit; and 5) peaceful coexistence.

Nehru seemed to have been quite keen on committing the

Chinese formally to these principles which he thought might act as a restraint on the Chinese future behaviour. Explaining the significance and utility of Panch Sheel he said that it was "a question of following a policy which...makes it more and more difficult progressively for the other country to break trust we can create an environment wherein it becomes a little more dangerous to the other party to break away from the pledges given".¹⁰⁶ However, it is difficult to assess as to what extent Nehru considered the Panch Sheel effective in moderating the Chinese behaviour.

India also adopted a deliberately low-key approach to Southeast Asian security problems, at least partly, not to offend China. The United States was quite keen on India taking Southeast Asia under its wings in order to protect it from any possible Chinese threat. Though, Nehru was aware of India's need to protect its flanks, he was convinced that China posed no immediate threat to the region. Nor was he prepared to take on new responsibilities which had no direct or immediate relevance to India and distract attention from the more pressing needs of economic development.

The general policy of deliberate friendship with China was also greatly responsible for India's low-key and ostrich like approach to the border question which led to disastrous consequences later¹⁰⁷. When India protested to the Chinese about maps showing large tracts of territory claimed by India as its own, the Chinese non-committal reply was that

they were published by the previous government and that the Communist government did not revise them for want of time. On another occasion the Chinese expressed the opinion that the time was not yet "ripe" to settle the border issue. But the Chinese gave the impression that they accepted the MacMahon line as the boundary in general. As Krishna Menon explains, "They [the Chinese] had told us that there was no dispute between us and that since they had agreed to the MacMahon Line in regard to Burma, they would do the same thing in regard to us, and that there was no question of frontier disputes".¹⁰⁸

In the event, the Chinese were to claim in 1960, "It is both illogical and inconceivable to argue that an outstanding issue will automatically cease to exist merely because it is not mentioned during certain negotiations".¹⁰⁹

It was not until September 1957 that the Indian Government came to know about the existence of the Karakoram highway linking Tibet with Sinkiang which ran through Aksai Chin area of Ladakh which India claimed to be its own territory. In October 1958, India protested against the Chinese "violation of its territorial sovereignty". In March 1959, "a full scale popular uprising" in Tibet followed a high-handed Chinese attempt to "Sinicization" of Tibet. The subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama to India vitiated the atmosphere further. Chou En-lai's visit to Delhi in April 1960 failed to break the deadlock. In the meantime, public

opinion in India hardened against the Chinese and the criticism in Parliament of Nehru's China policy became virulent leaving him with little elbow room.

The more extravagant the Chinese claims became, the more difficult it became for Nehru to keep incensed Indian public opinion in check. The Chinese were in possession of more or less all the territory they claimed in Ladakh and made wild claims in the eastern sector as a sort of bargaining chip. In other words, they presented Nehru with a fait accompli and made it clear that any attempt on the part of India to change the status-quo would be met with force. They did not appear to be keen on even going through the motions of a compromise based on a give and take approach. It is clear that the Chinese wanted a settlement on their terms and also wanted the world to know that it was so.¹¹⁰

Krishna Menon was to say later, "They the Chinese] could have got whatever they wanted within reason from us at any time to our mutual advantage had they only tried to get it in a different, more reasonable way".¹¹¹

Why, then, were the Chinese so implacable and intransigent? By 1962 the Sino-Indian border issue had advanced well beyond bilateral territorial dispute between the two countries and got enmeshed in the quagmire of international politics. With the thaw in the cold war in Europe and a limited detente between the USA and the USSR, the focus of attention shifted to Asia and Africa. In order to insulate

the region which provided many an opportunity for super powers to fish in the troubled waters, the nonaligned declared the Third World as an area of peace on the basis of super power agreement which was fairly status quo oriented. China, fearing a super power condominium and having failed to convince the Third World that it was one of them, proved a new threat to the idea of Third World as an area of peace which generally speaking acceptable to the US and the Soviet Union. There were also countries within the Third World such as Indonesia which accepted the Chinese line. Here again India played a moderating role and checked the radical elements within the Third World movement. This was one of the reasons for Chinese wrath against India. This left China rather isolated. Once moderation and accommodation became the watch-words for the capitalist, the Soviet Communist and the Third World, led by the USA, the USSR and India respectively, China could not fit into any of these categories. While joining the capitalist bloc was out of question for obvious reasons, sticking to the Communist bloc meant playing second fiddle to the Soviet Union which was not acceptable to China. Nor could China sell itself as a developing country to the Third World and replace India as its leading light because of its ideological militancy and its clamour for major power status which was confirmed when it accepted with alacrity the permanent membership of Security Council. The emerging order was an anathema to

China for it tended to push China into political, diplomatic and military isolation. What it feared was a super power condominium with India lending a helping hand to the exercise on behalf of the Third World. So China chose to strike against India, the weakest link in the chain, in order to demonstrate its ability to act independently of both the super powers and to expose the hollowness of India's claim as a rival to China and undermine India's status in the Third World by exposing its nonalignment in reality to be bialignment. The Chinese were to say later, "They [the Indians] thought that with the backing of the imperialists and the support of the Soviet leaders they had nothing to fear".¹¹²

The serious military reverses that India suffered at the hands of the Chinese in the winter of 1962 were the result of a combination of factors. Nehru and Menon refused to believe till the very end that there could be a large scale conflict with China. Hence, precious little was done by way of strategic thinking and tactical refinement in case of a general war with China.¹¹³ Nehru also placed too much faith in the Russian ability to restrain China. The more he flaunted the Indo-Soviet friendship to deter China, the more the Chinese felt compelled to put India and through her the Soviet Union in its place.¹¹⁴ The emphasis on self-reliance, though justified in the long run, was taken to such absurd limits that it came in the way of buying weapons and equipment abroad to meet a possible emergency in the short

run.115

India's military debacle on the Himalayan frontier brought India's nonalignment and Nehru's China policy under close scrutiny and review. Nehru vigorously defended both and reiterated their continued utility and relevance for India.¹¹⁶ The Sino-Indian conflict, if anything strengthened India's nonaligned stance in the sense that India could now depend on both the United States and the Soviet Union to come to its aid in case of a massive Chinese attack. Exclusive alignment with any one of them would needlessly alienate the other.

India resumed diplomatic relations with China in 1976 and intermittent talks have been going on between the two countries over the border issue with no solution in sight. In the light of Sino-Indian rivalry for regional influence, it is difficult to see how even a satisfactory solution to the border issue can really give a big boost to the relations between the two countries. More than the border issue, the Chinese attitude to Southeast Asia and the internal developments within China are likely to influence the future relations between the two Asian giants.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Perhaps, the most crucial segment of India's nonalignment policy has been India's passionate search for self-

sufficiency. Self-sufficiency constitutes an integral part of India's nonaligned stance and is its very core and essence.

India's search for self-sufficiency can be broadly divided into three categories, i.e., economic, technological and military. It goes without saying that these three categories are not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, so closely interrelated and interwoven that it is almost impossible to discuss any of these categories without a reference to or implications for the others. Moreover, there has been in India, over the years a deliberate, conscious and systematic attempt to integrate these categories into a comprehensive and compact whole. At this stage, it would be suffice to state that India's Five Year Economic Plans are supplemented and supplanted by Five-Year "Technological" and Five-Year "Military" plans.

However, it must be noted that India's goal of self-sufficiency is only a relative one. No country in history has ever been able to achieve absolute self-sufficiency and no country is likely to achieve it in future either. Hence, India's endeavour has been to achieve self-reliance at least in those critical areas where dependence on foreign assistance is neither possible nor desirable.

Another interesting element in India's approach to the issue of self-sufficiency is the principle of diversification. India, ever since independence, sought to diversify

its sources of economic assistance, technological transfer and military hardware in order to overcome the problem of dependence in the short run. Though this created problems in terms of integration and maintenance this was considered a relatively small price to pay for the relative autonomy that India gained which would not otherwise be available to her.

The philosophy behind India's crusade for self-sufficiency and self-reliance can be best described in the words of an "Indian official" who wrote in Foreign Affairs in 1949: "India, at any rate, is too conscious of her responsibilities, and of the need to preserve and develop the innate strength and self-reliance of her people, to participate in any arrangement that might induce a sense of dependence or compromise her freedom of action".

"It is time for a wider recognition in the west that we have come to the end of an historical epoch. The eclipse of India in the eighteenth century was not an isolated phenomenon; it was part of the world movement by which the science and technology of Europe captured Asia and turned it, under different forms, into an appendage of the west. India's re-emergence is likewise related to the revival of the entire continent Its ultimate result must necessarily be to transform the politico-economic map of the world, and establish a new relationship between east and west".¹¹⁷

BILATERALISM

Bilateralism is another important and striking feature of India's political and diplomatic stance over the years which has its roots in India's nonalignment or India's policy of independence. It is but another facet of India's nonalignment and represents India's desire to emerge as an independent and autonomous actor in international politics who could hold her own in matters that are of relevance and significance to her. However, India's application of the principle of bilateralism lacked conviction and verve in relation to the Middle Eastern states. The exaggerated fears of an Islamic bloc and an overemphasis on Pakistan and Islam as factors in India's interaction with the Middle East made the Indian policy makers place too much premium on anti-imperialist rhetoric and on extending vociferous support to general Arab causes such as Palestine. This, in turn, resulted in India paying less than adequate attention to cultivating the Middle Eastern states on a more durable bilateral basis as we shall see in the subsequent chapters. It is against this general framework of India's foreign relations since independence that we need to critically evaluate India's policies and postures towards the Middle East, the motives and assumptions that prompted them and as to how realistic and effective these policies were in serving India's perceived interests in the region.

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CHAPTER 2

INDIA'S POLITICO-DIPLOMATIC INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The fact that India had substantial and enduring politico-diplomatic interests in the Middle East has been recognised by the Indian political leadership from the early days of independence in 1947. Addressing the Constituent Assembly in 1949, Nehru underlined the importance of the linkage between the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent when he said: "If you have to consider any question affecting the Middle East, India inevitably comes in to the picture. If you have to consider any question concerning South-East Asia, you can not do so without India.... While the Middle East may not be directly connected with South-East Asia, both are connected with India".¹

The fact that both the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East had experienced centuries of imperial domination created an emotional bond between the leaders of the two regions and fostered a certain similarity in their political outlook and orientation after they attained their independence from colonial rule. This, in turn, provided opportunities as well as challenges for the Indian leadership towards the region in the post independence era. How well and how effectively did India seize these opportunities and try to counter and overcome the challenges constitutes the main theme of this chapter.

THE PAKISTAN FACTOR

Pakistan or no Pakistan, the Middle East would have been an extremely important and crucial region for India in politico-diplomatic terms. It constituted about a dozen independent states of varying sizes and potential, occupied some five million square miles or one-tenth of the earth's land surface and inhabited by about a hundred million people.²

However, the creation of an avowedly Islamic state in the Indian subcontinent and the fact that a large number of Muslims remained in India after partition added a sharp edge to Indo-Pak rivalry and made it almost imperative for them to vie with each other to cultivate the states of the Middle East. This, in turn, put the Indian policy makers on the defensive from the word go and made them extremely sensitive and cautious in their dealings with the Middle East. Pakistan, of course, enjoyed a natural advantage over India in wooing a predominantly Muslim Middle East because in a manner of speaking, the creation of Pakistan "undercut the most obvious basis for unity between post-independence India and the Muslim states of West Asia: a continuous land bridge and a common religion. Pakistan inherited the advantages of both and used them for its own benefit".³

Hence, one of the most overriding objectives of India's foreign policy goals in the Middle East from the outset has been to counter and neutralise the sympathy and support that Pakistan was likely to evoke as a Muslim country. India also had to safeguard its secular credentials against the Pakistani "propaganda" onslaughts of ill-treatment of Muslim minority in India. According to K.M.Panikkar, this propaganda did have some effect in the region initially and as a result Arab governments were "suspicious" of and the Arab public "anti-pathic" to India. However, general Indian support for Arab causes in due course changed their attitude to India.⁴

a) Fears of an Islamic bloc

The Indian government also conjured up visions of the entire Muslim Middle East including Pakistan acting as one single bloc to the disadvantage and detriment of India. Nehru expressed such fears to a veteran journalist Durga Das. Eminent Muslim leaders like Chagla and Ali Yavar Jung were critical of Nehru for supporting progressive Muslims among the Arabs while he chose to lend his ear to conservative Muslims in India.

Nehru defended this dichotomy in his approach by explaining to Durga Das that his friendship with Nasser and other progressive Arab leaders was "designed to counterbalance the

conservative Muslim bloc, which stretched from Pakistan to Jordan and posed a threat to India's security and secularism".⁵ However, he was hesitant to attempt any reforms in the domestic sphere because of his fear that Muslim obscurantists would rise the cry "Islam in danger".

It should, however, be admitted that Pakistan did make a strenuous and persistent effort to forge an alliance of the Muslim countries of the Middle East in order to bolster its own political and diplomatic strength vis-a-vis India which was much bigger in size and enjoyed considerable prestige and goodwill under the premiership of Nehru.

Between the years 1947 and 1954, Pakistan tried to bring various Muslim countries of the Middle East and beyond together on the basis of religious solidarity by playing host to various conferences.

In 1949, Pakistan invited the members of the Arab League as well as other Muslim countries to a "government level" Islamic Conference at Karachi to be held in the following winter for the purpose of "signing treaties of formal alliances" with them. But the Conference never took place for want of sufficient support for the idea.⁶

The third and fourth Matamar-e-Alam-e-Islami sessions were held in Karachi in 1949 and 1951 respectively and were moderately successful.

The International Islamic Economic Conference was held in Dec. 1949 and was attended by delegations from North Africa

and the Middle East. However, Indonesia chose to stay away from the Conference. Despite high expectations at the inaugural session, the Conference "did not have lasting results". The second session of the Conference was held in Tehran and the third in Karachi in 1954. After the 1954 meeting, the Conference "silently expired".⁷

Chaudhuri Khaliquzzaman, the then President of the ruling Muslim League party, undertook a two month tour of the Middle East in 1949 and advocated the forming of "United Islamistan" which he described as an "Atlantic Pact" embracing all countries of the Middle East from Pakistan to Turkey. This idea, of course, proved to be a non-starter.⁸

While Pakistan did enjoy considerable sympathy and good will in the Middle East because it was a predominantly Muslim country, its efforts to forge an alliance on the basis of religion in the region were bound to fail for various reasons.

First, the imperial rule that preceded the independence of the countries of the region over a period of time resulted in strong nationalistic sentiments based on anti-imperialist and territorial loyalties.⁹ The disappearance of the Ottoman empire and the abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish nationalist Kemal Pasha was ample proof of this.

The first Arab regional organization which was formed in 1945 was called the "Arab League" not "Muslim League". Azzam Pasha, the first Secretary General of the Arab League who

was an Egyptian declared "We are Egyptians first, Arabs second and Muslims third". President Nasser too made his priorities clear when he placed the Islamic brotherhood in the third and last circle after the Arab circle and the African Continent circle.

"The Arab world experienced a sharp clash between territorial and pan-Arab loyalties, but Islam as a basis of regional or international political alliance had clearly receded in to the background".¹⁰ Hence, in such a political environment, Pakistani efforts to cultivate Middle Eastern countries on the basis of religion were overly optimistic and not surprisingly unsuccessful.

Secondly, the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan did not find much support in the Middle East for it conjured up the examples of partition of Ireland, proposed partition of Palestine and the separation of Sudan from Egypt. For the Arabs, the partition of India was "yet another manifestation of the same imperialistic strategy of divide and rule".¹¹ The Muslim League, by demanding Pakistan "was playing in to hands of British imperialism, while the Congress Party was putting up a genuine fight for freedom, just as they themselves were doing".¹²

Thirdly, Middle Eastern countries saw in Pakistani efforts to forge an Islamic alliance a thinly disguised attempt at the leadership of the Islamic world. Some Pakistanis referred to Pakistan as the "biggest Muslim country" and the

"natural leader" of the Muslim nations. This naturally did not go down well with many Middle Eastern countries which themselves entertained leadership ambitions. King Farouq ridiculed Pakistan's overzealous devotion to Islamic causes when he told his courtiers "Do n't you know that Islam was born on 14 August 1947 ?" Thus, Pakistan's ambition to the leadership of the Muslim world was "wholly unrealistic and ... tactics manifestly amateurish" and did precious little to improve its image and standing in the Middle East.¹³

Finally, the countries of the region were far too seasoned politically to be unaware of the power realities of the sub-continent. Unfortunately for Pakistan, the general impression in the early days of its creation was that "India was going to be a world power while Pakistan might very well be a transitory phenomenon...".¹⁴ Hence, most of these countries were reluctant to make an absolute choice between the friendships of India and Pakistan. However, if a choice were to be made , as Keith Callard pointed out "India as more powerful, more stable and more influential was likely to have the advantage".¹⁵

Besides, Pakistan had to contend with a bitter border dispute with Muslim Afghanistan which exposed the chinks in the Islamic solidarity which Pakistan was trying to propagate. Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, found itself more in tune with India politically in the 50s because it made secularism, socialism and nonalignment the

pillars of its own policy.

The Arab world itself was a divided house with Arab- Non-Arab, Shia-Sunni and Progressive-Conservative divides and power rivalries cutting across the apparent unifying force of Islam.¹⁶

Against this backdrop, it is amazing, at least in retrospect, that India's leaders entertained fears of a unified Islamic bloc siding with Pakistan in its bilateral disputes with India, primarily on the basis of religious solidarity. Such fears were greatly exaggerated and misplaced because realistically the Muslim Middle East could never attain the sort of unity that the Indian policy makers feared nor were Middle Eastern countries so naive or romantic as to automatically side with Pakistan in her rivalry with India just because Pakistan happened to be an Islamic state.¹⁷

"Curiously, there was a tendency both in Pakistan and in India to rate the political efficacy of pan-Islamism higher than was warranted by empirical realities".¹⁸ However, Pakistan was the first to realise the limitations of pan-Islamism as a political force and started looking for an alternative source of support in its dealings with India. Pakistan's joining of the Western alliance in the mid 50s was the clearest proof, if any was needed, of its disillusionment with pan-Islamism as a means of achieving political objectives.

But it was India's fears of Pakistan making use of the "Islamic card" which persisted much longer than they should have. While India's initial misgivings were understandable, its persistence in this folly to this day is as incomprehensible as it was then.

What is worse is that these unwarranted and far-fetched fears not only led to a distorted and self-conscious policy towards the region, but also introduced an element of inflexibility to it.

"In order to counteract the threat of being completely isolated from the Islamic world, India opposed the mixture of religion with politics, publicised its secular state doctrine, and deplored international ties based on religion alone. But at the same time, it tried to project the image of India as the third most populous Muslim country, thereby courting the approval of traditional Islamic leaders".¹⁹

India's attempt to have it both ways was neither practicable nor desirable. There was no way India could have convinced anyone that it was as Islamic as Pakistan if not more. Playing the Islamic card would only mean playing in to Pakistan's hands for that was its trump card. Nor was it necessary. It may be politically expedient to refer to India as the second or third largest Muslim state in the world. "How much violence it tended to do to its secular character, which was the real strength of India, is another matter".²⁰

It was this rather curious and naive logic that led India to seek representation at the Islamic Conference held in Rabat in 1969. "In the misplaced fear of isolation among the Muslim countries and an unfriendly resolution on the Kashmir issue, the External Affairs Ministry energetically pursued the chimera of an invitation to participate".²¹ Pakistan firmly opposed India's participation and threatened to boycott the Conference if India was allowed to participate. Pakistan's viewpoint finally prevailed and India was kept out cutting a rather sorry figure.

The Indian government, in its anxiety to forestall any Pakistani attempt to score diplomatic points over India at Rabat, failed to take note of the significant fact that quite a few important Muslim countries declined the invitation to the Rabat Conference. Nasser could not attend the Conference because of "influenza". Iraq and Syria too absented themselves from the Conference. The Presidents of Turkey and Indonesia declined to attend on the ground that they were secular states. Against this background, India's clamour to attend an Islamic Conference on overtly religious lines was a "disgrace".²²

Secondly, these Islamic Conferences, in reality were anything but "Islamic". "The game was being played in international forums with an air of urgency and an eye on the political advantages to be gained for the delegates' own nation".²³ The Rabat Conference itself was plagued by the

rivalry between King Feisal of Saudi Arabia and King Hassan of Morocco.²⁴

Moreover, the whole exercise was the brainchild of politically conservative states like Saudi Arabia and Iran which found it politically convenient to use the Islamic card to counter the growing influence of radical pan-Arab ideology represented by Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Indian policy makers, however, betrayed a pathetic lack of appreciation of inter-Arab rivalries and jealousies and hence failed to get over the outdated and worn-out assumptions of their predecessors. This was borne out by the fact that even though the later Islamic groupings attracted more countries their "net impact on world developments has been politically nil".²⁵

Lastly, the Indian government, in its indecent haste to secure an invitation to Rabat in this game of political one-upmanship with Pakistan ignored a very practical and realistic approach that Nehru laid down for India in relation to attending Muslim Conferences of pan-Islamic nature. In a directive issued in 1955, Nehru emphasised that while India should oppose any Islamic grouping, it could send non-official delegations to such conferences.²⁶

Such an approach would have at once emphasised the secular credentials of the Indian state, would have been politically consistent with India's opposition to mixing religion with politics and given an opportunity to Indian Muslims to renew their emotional and cultural bonds with fellow Muslims

elsewhere without such occasions acquiring significant political overtones.

It is easy to describe Rabat episode as an "aberration". While the incident itself is not very significant, the misplaced fears and assumptions which prompted such an attitude on the part of the Indian government are. If anything, the Rabat episode demonstrated that the Indian policy makers even with the passage of time failed to absorb and assimilate the realities of Arab politics and continued to allow imaginary fears and anxieties to distort and debase their approach to the region.

b] KASHMIR

Another issue that made the Indian political leadership tread gingerly in relation to the Middle East was the problem of Kashmir the outlines of which have already been mentioned in the first chapter. Three elements in relation to the Kashmir dispute made it difficult for India to treat the issue either as an internal affair of India or even as a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan and led to its internationalization. This, in turn, made it imperative for India to solicit the support at best and neutrality at the least, of the Middle Eastern countries in relation to Kashmir.

1] Kashmir has always been portrayed as a religious issue

between the Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan by the latter. The partition of India on the basis of religion, the fact of Kashmir being predominantly Muslim and its geographical contiguity with Pakistan gave some substance to such claims. Pakistan's use of Islam in supporting Kashmir's right to self-determination was designed to make it a pan-Islamic issue and thereby internationalise it. Such tactics are understandable in view of India's superior size and resources and thus power in relation to Pakistan. Consequently, "Kashmir as an ideological obsession will remain an obstacle not only in Indo-Pak relations but also more generally in Pakistan's aim to achieve a flexible foreign policy".²⁷

Thus, Indian policy makers in addition to dealing with Kashmir as an ideological battle had to contend with the rigidity that the Kashmir issue had introduced in to the foreign policies of the two countries. Since both countries saw it as a zero-sum game, they saw no alternative to drumming up support for their respective stands on the issue in the world in general and the Middle East in particular. The fear that Pakistan would score over India in such endeavours in a predominantly Muslim Middle East made Indian policy makers extremely touchy in dealings with the region.

2] India's decision to take the Kashmir issue to the UN gave a legal basis to the internationalization of the Kashmir issue. Once the issue got enmeshed in power politics at the UN, it became imperative for both India and Pakistan to cul-

tivate member countries for voting purposes. Under the circumstances, the twelve or so votes that the Arab countries possessed at the UN became crucial for both countries. These votes became particularly important for India in view of the unsympathetic attitude of the Western powers, particularly the US and the UK to the Indian position.

3] The very division of Kashmir with India in possession of 3/4 of it and Pakistan the rest kept the issue alive for various reasons. First, the line of control that divided Kashmir is arbitrary and hence quite porous and not easily defensible. Secondly, the line of control separates families and friends from each other in their own land. The human tragedy that resulted as a consequence kept the issue boiling and attracted international attention.

India sought to counter Pakistani attempts to gain the support of the Muslim Middle East in its dealings with India in general and in relation to Kashmir issue in particular by extending vigorous support to Arab causes in general and to the Palestinian issue in particular.

Apart from sustained support for the just rights of Palestinians, India tried to neutralise at best and minimise at the least the Arab support to Pakistan by using its nascent relationship with Israel as a bargaining chip. Upgrading relations with Israel has always been an implicit threat in India's posture towards the region, if Arab support to Pakistan extended beyond what India might consider as

tolerable or acceptable.

Nevertheless, India failed to obtain such a quid pro quo from the Arabs over the years either in relation to Kashmir or in relation to Indo-Pak disputes in general.²⁸ Most of the Arab states, generally speaking, either supported the Pakistani position or tried to take a sort of neutral stance whose only virtue, from the Indian point of view, was that it was not anti-Indian. This was true of even Egypt which was considered a close friend of India under Nasser. Even during the Sino-Indian war of 1962 when Pakistan was not a direct factor, most of Arab countries including Egypt adopted a more or less neutral stance.²⁹

"That the twin obsession with Pakistan and Kashmir prevailed and Pakistani influence in Arab circles was thus sought to be neutralised during Nehru's tenure is not as surprising as the fact that having found this quid pro quo arrangement with the Arabs to be a failure, later Indian leaders persisted in it".³⁰

While Kashmir has been an important foreign policy consequence for India over the decades and it is quite understandable that it sought to gain the support or at least the neutrality of Muslim countries of the Middle East over the issue, it is difficult to fathom why Indian policy makers adopted such a defensive posture in relation to Kashmir.

India has had considerable advantage over Pakistan with regard to Kashmir. First, the word partition was anathema to

the Arabs because they had opposed it vehemently in Palestine. India, therefore, should have made a more effective use of this Arab opposition to the "divide and rule" policy of Britain by drawing an analogy between Kashmir and Palestine. That would have made the Arab countries think twice before lining up behind Pakistan.

India was also in effective physical control of 3/4 of Kashmir and Pakistan was in no position militarily to wrest it from India. This ground reality gave India a tremendous advantage which any number of unfavourable UN resolutions could not neutralise.

More importantly, the change in the Soviet attitude towards India and subsequently to Kashmir in the early 50s strengthened the Indian position substantially. Till 1952, the Soviet participation in the Security Council debates over Kashmir was not extensive and generally remained non-committal. The Soviet representative occasionally used the opportunity to question the motives of the US and the UK as they wrestled with the problem and tried to score points over them.

However, in 1952, the Soviet representative openly alleged that "... the purpose of these plans in connexion with Kashmir is to secure the introduction of Anglo-American troops in to the territory of Kashmir and to convert Kashmir in to an Anglo-American colony and a military and strategic base".

Thus, the Soviet Union perceived strategic advantage of Kashmir remaining in Indian hands and started supporting the Indian stand. In 1957, the Soviet representative extended total support to the changed Indian position on Kashmir that the elections held in the Indian part of Kashmir were an expression of the will of Kashmiri people to stay with India when he stated that "the Kashmir question has in actual fact already been settled in essence by the people of Kashmir themselves, who consider their territory an integral part of the Republic of India".³²

A couple of days later, the USSR cast the first ever veto of the Kashmir dispute when it vetoed a draft resolution submitted by Australia, Cuba, the UK and the USA. The consistent Russian support to India over Kashmir since at least the mid 50s should have made Indian policy makers more confident and relaxed in their dealings with the Middle East but that was not to be.

Even after the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 when Pakistan's pretensions to parity with India were finally put to rest, India as the dominant power in South Asia failed to show any flexibility and dynamism in its policy towards the Middle East. All this makes one wonder whether it was really fears over Kashmir which made the Indian policy makers adopt the sort of policy that they actually did. While Kashmir could have been a contributory factor, it alone can not explain the whole rationale behind the policy as we shall see

later.

NONALIGNMENT

India, quite predictably, sought to take advantage of the anti-colonial sentiments that existed in both the regions to project the concept of nonalignment to provide community of interests between India on the one hand and the Middle Eastern countries on the other. Externally, nonalignment sought to emphasise the independence of these countries by eschewing military alliances with either of the two super powers in the context of the cold war. Internally, it sought to reinforce territorial nationalism in these countries by de-emphasising religious or political orthodoxy.

In a nutshell, India sought to reinforce secular and nationalistic forces in the region in the political garb of nonalignment in order to counter the possibility of religious resurgence in the region and to preclude Pakistan from exploiting its religious affinity with the region to its political advantage.

However, it must be admitted that India's propagation of nonalignment did not make much impact on the Arab states in the initial years. But within a decade or so nonalignment made considerable headway in the region though its acceptance was less than universal. "After the conclusion of the Baghdad Pact, which deeply embittered Arab nationalist

opinion, the concept of non-alignment found vigorous and widespread support in the Arab world. It also helped to create conditions for active cooperation between India and the Arab states in political, economic and commercial spheres".³³

Be that as it may, nonalignment was essentially India's posture towards the super powers in the context of cold war. India still had to evolve its policy towards the rest of the world on a bilateral basis. It is here that Nehru's penchant for political proselytising in favour of nonalignment got in the way of India cultivating even a working relationship with the so called conservative or aligned states in the Middle East.

Nehru's attitude to aligned nations, in the words of former Foreign Secretary of India Mr. A.P. Venkateswaran, was "self-righteous".³⁴ Hence, he failed to appreciate the genuine fears and suspicions of countries like Iran, Turkey and even Saudi Arabia which prompted them to seek external props for self-defence. This is not to say that India should have approved or even acquiesced with either the domestic or external policies of these countries. Far from it. However, realism required that India should have tried its utmost to make the best out of a bad bargain by trying to cultivate these countries bilaterally by a willingness for greater accommodation and understanding of the reasons that necessitated their aligned posture without only being moralistic.

This would have given the Indian political leadership a better chance of keeping in check the support that Pakistan could have managed to obtain from these countries since there were no serious bilateral disputes between India and any of these countries. But that was not to be.

Consequently, India's rather unrealistic policy towards these countries introduced an element of rigidity in India's approach and severely restricted India's manoeuvrability in the region and foreclosed a number of potentially promising diplomatic openings.

a] A Cairo-centric policy

As a corollary to the foregoing analysis, Nehru's strong political preference in favour of nonalignment and his political prejudice against aligned nations adversely affected the flexibility of Indian approach to the Middle East in two ways.

First, it made Nehru throw his entire diplomatic lot with Nasser whom he once described as "the most prominent symbol of Arab nationalism". This was tantamount to India putting all her political eggs in the Egyptian basket with regard to the Middle East, a folly Nehru sought to avoid in relation to super powers by propounding the concept of nonalignment.

Secondly and more importantly, "the close tie with Cairo seemed to hamper New Delhi's interest in cultivating other West Asian states more actively".³⁵ This led to unnecessary and avoidable complications with a number of other states in the Middle East. India's vocal and personal support for Nasser "was taken amiss by many an Arab state which otherwise swore by Arab unity and neutralism".³⁶

To sum up, it goes without saying that Indian policy makers displayed a singular lack of sophistication and finesse in understanding the complexity of the political process in the post-colonial Middle East. India's exaggerated fears of a unified Muslim bloc favouring Pakistan solely on the basis of religious affinity and Nehru's passion in favour of non-alignment which needlessly alienated the so called conservative or aligned nations seriously cramped the style and substance of Indian diplomacy in the region.

It is against this backdrop that we shall now analyse India's bilateral ties with the four most important states in the region namely Egypt and Iraq (the supposedly radical states) in this chapter and Iran and Saudi Arabia (the so-called conservative states) in the next in order to establish as to how India's imaginary fears and anxieties and a rather rigid ideological posture got in the way of India adopting a more flexible and imaginative policy which would have served her politico-diplomatic interests in the region much more effectively than it actually did over the years.

INDIA AND EGYPT

It is a truism to say that cultivating Egypt has been the corner-stone of India's foreign policy pursuits in the Middle East in the 50s and the 60s. The "special relationship" that evolved between Egypt and India in the two decades following India's independence was anything but an accident. It was, in fact, a product of historical circumstances, political affinity that existed between the leaders of the two countries and the exigencies of the international situation that was obtaining at that time.

The struggle against British colonial role brought the two countries together even before India attained its independence. This common crusade against imperialism gave birth to similarity of political outlook among the political elites of the two countries which was essentially anti-colonial, anti-racist and emphasised the solidarity of the newly independent nations.

The advent of the cold war and the pressures and blandishments that the super powers applied in the third world to find converts to their respective causes was seen by the Afro-Asian nations as infringing on their newly won independence. Hence their gravitation to nonalignment was a logical corollary. "A new core was formed, Nehru, Nasser and Tito.

Together they began to provide the political impulse, the elan, the dynamism and the guidance to the non-alignment movement; at once sober but sufficiently radical, for peace as well as for liquidation of colonialism, taking initiatives to assert independence of the newly emerging countries and resolve world tangles but at the same time trying to moderate the cold war and bring great powers in dialogue with each other".³⁷

The mutual respect and admiration and the personal friendship that developed between Nehru and Nasser, no doubt, gave an extra thrust to the relationship between the two countries. Nasser's own outlook on foreign policy and economic planning by his own admission bore the imprint of Nehru.³⁸

Besides, both India and Egypt saw each other as leading countries in their respective regions destined to play a positive and a progressive role which would be to mutual advantage. "Egypt, lacking Western support and cautious of a too deep involvement with the communist states, relied on India's prestige and support for its own independent foreign policy and its standing in world affairs. It courted India's pro-Arab stance on the Palestine issue. India gained the goodwill of the largest Arab state and thereby undermined any Pakistani plans to promote a pan-Islamic bloc hostile to India".³⁹

"THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP"

At this stage, it is essential to critically evaluate India's "special relationship" with Egypt in order to assess its advantages and costs for India and see if India's close ties with Cairo served India's overall and long-term interests in the region.

FEARS OF ISLAMIC BLOC

The first and foremost gain, it is argued, that accrued to India because of its close friendship with Egypt was the latter's firm and consistent opposition to the formation of any Islamic bloc for political purposes. It must be granted that Egypt's secular approach to politics acted as a check on Islamic resurgence in the region and was at least partly responsible for checkmating the persistent Pakistani moves to forge an Islamic alliance with an anti-Indian slant in the region.

However, the secular approach to politics was not the exclusive preserve of Egypt in the Middle East. Countries like Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, despite occasional lip service to Islam, were essentially secular and nationalistic in their outlook. Moreover, the so called Islamic groupings, as we have already seen, were anything but Islamic. They were mere projections of the rivalries, suspicions and jealousies of various states in the Middle East, with each state trying

to promote its own interests in the garb of Islam.

Egyptians were also aware of and proud of their pre-Islamic civilization which was one of the most ancient and sophisticated in the world. So they were reluctant to overemphasise the importance of Islam to the point of overshadowing their pre-Islamic cultural heritage.

Egypt also considered itself the natural leader of the Arab world because of its size, population and history. Too much accent on Islam might have diluted such leadership ambitions by bringing countries like Saudi Arabia, the custodian of Muslim Holy places who had greater claims to Islamic credentials than Egypt to the forefront of Arab politics.

Also, Egyptians, because of their geographical location, considered themselves part of both Asian and African continents. Hence, nonalignment provided them with an opportunity to play a much larger role on the bigger Afro-Asian stage rather than to tie themselves down to the Middle East in the name of Islamic solidarity.

The idea of an Islamic alliance has been a recurrent theme in Middle Eastern politics. It was first mooted by the British after the world war II in order to organise conservative elements in the region to perpetuate their imperial interests culminating in the Baghdad Pact of 1955. The Pact countries, predictably, opposed Egypt's claim to sovereignty over the Suez Canal and supported the Anglo-French invasion of Suez in 1956. The Iraqi revolution in 1958, however,

sounded the death-knell of the Baghdad Pact. Subsequently, the Headquarters of the Pact was shifted to Tehran and the Pact was renamed Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

Thereafter, the idea of an Islamic alliance, whenever it was resurrected, acquired a definitely anti-Nasser slant. For instance, in 1965, the idea resurfaced at a conclave in Tehran between the Shah of Iran and King Feisal of Saudi Arabia. It was stated that Iran and Saudi Arabia would jointly exert themselves to hold a Conference of Islamic countries bound together by common interests.⁴⁰ When Mrs. Gandhi visited Cairo in July 1966, she reportedly discussed the move to form an Islamic alliance with Nasser and fully appreciated and supported the UAR's opposition to the move.⁴¹

During a visit to New Delhi in October in the same year, Nasser denounced the move for an Islamic alliance as "a new edition of the Baghdad Pact". He contended that the main purpose behind the move was to use Islam "in the interests of conservatives and reactionaries in collaboration with colonial powers".⁴²

Though Nasser's opposition to the so called Islamic alliance was principally aimed at preserving Egypt's dominance of Arab politics by preventing his opponents in the region from coming together against Egypt, he must have also realised how much such denunciation would please his Indian hosts and earn their goodwill for Egypt at practically no cost.

When an Islamic Conference did finally materialise in Rabat in 1969 in the aftermath of the burning of the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, Nasser stayed away because of "influenza". It is revealing at this stage to see as to how seriously and nervously the Indian Government reacted to these attempts at forging an Islamic alliance in the Middle East.

The Indian Foreign Minister Mr.Dinesh Singh, addressing the Lok Sabha in April 1970 stated: "It (Pan-Islamism) is one of the most dangerous thoughts that has been prevailing in that part of the world ... It is the mixing up of the religion with politics and the creation of a Pan-Islamic bloc. It constitutes a danger not only for us in India but for other countries in Asia, Africa and the world as a whole".⁴³

While it must be admitted that Nasser's opposition to the creation of an Islamic bloc suited India admirably, it should not, however, be forgotten that the stimulus for such a policy came from Egypt's own conception of its national interests and ambitions rather than from any goading or coaxing from India. Nor should it be forgotten that India did pay a price for closely identifying itself with Nasser by alienating politically conservative states like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Jordan which had no animosity towards India but felt threatened by the Arab radicalism espoused by Nasser and were loathe to accept Nasser's leadership of the region entirely on his terms which India seemed to endorse

unequivocally.

This is borne out by the fact that after the rout of Arab armies by the Israelis in the six day war in 1967, there was a general realisation in Cairo that it was a mistake to seek unity in the region on an ideological basis. The unrelenting hostility towards monarchical regimes only forced them to lean even more heavily than before on Western support for survival. The new strategy was to revolve around a broad Arab nationalist front based on an entente between Nasser, Hussein and even King Feisal. Socialism and the struggle against feudalism were to take a back seat in this new strategy.⁴⁴

THE PAK-EGYPT EQUATION

Also, Pakistan's less than satisfactory relationship with Egypt in the 50s and 60s was understandably comforting to India in political terms. However, Nasser's antipathy to Pakistan had much less to do with his aversion to Islamic groupings which Pakistan was trying to promote in those days. His annoyance with Pakistan was primarily the result of the fact that he considered Pakistan's policies and attitudes at that time to be inimical to Egypt's interests and ambitions. India was little more than a marginal factor in this Pak-Egyptian equation.

Firstly, the general belief that Pakistan was aspiring for the leadership of the Muslim world irritated Egypt most be-

cause Egypt considered itself the most prominent country in the region and hence its natural leader. "Pakistan with a population five times that of UAR and economic resources more varied and developed than of any of the Arab countries was suspected to be a constant obstacle, if not a possible rival, to Egyptian leadership of the area".⁴⁵

Secondly and more importantly, there was a definite clash of interests between Egypt and Pakistan in the 50s and the 60s primarily because of Pakistan's alliance with the Western powers. When the proposal for a Middle East Defence organization was mooted by the British in the early 50s, Egypt demanded the evacuation of the Suez base by Britain and a satisfactory settlement of the Sudanese question as conditions for joining such an alliance. Egypt was anxious that other powers in the region should not join any such alliance until Anglo-Egyptian differences were settled to Egypt's satisfaction. If Western countries were to make progress in forging such an alliance without Egypt, it was feared that there would be less need and incentive for Britain to come to terms with Egypt.

Egypt, therefore, was furious when Turkey and Pakistan announced their intention to join the alliance in February 1952 while Britain was still holding the Suez base and Anglo-Egyptian talks were at a critical stage. The Cairo Radio described it as a "catastrophe for Islam ... the first stab in our back".⁴⁶ Nasser was also furious that during the

crisis itself, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Hamidul Huq had gone back on his promise of full support to the Egyptian position. Nasser later complained to Frank Moraes of the Times of India : "Do you know that before the London Conference the Pakistani Foreign Minister, who came to see me, spoke for three hours and he vowed support for Egypt's cause ? You know what he did ?"⁴⁷ Nasser retaliated by rejecting the Pakistani offer of a contingent for the UNEF While accepting a similar offer from India. A little later, when the Pakistani Prime Minister Suhrawardy was about to leave for Cairo, the Egyptian Ambassador warned him that Nasser did not consider it a suitable time for a visit to Cairo. Later, Nasser "pricked Pakistan's tenderest spot" when he declared "Suez is as dear to Egypt as Kashmir is to India".⁴⁸

These events generated bitterness and ill-feelings in both the countries and Pak-Egyptian relations failed to take off despite a few feeble attempts at reconciliation later. The fact that this suited the Indians was a stroke of political good fortune because Nasser was primarily guided by Egypt's own interests and was not in any sense trying to curry favour with India.

INDO-EGYPTIAN COOPERATION

Nevertheless, India and Egypt did try to help each other on a number of occasions, though either side was not prepared

to go overboard in assisting the other in spite of the so called "special relationship" that existed between the two countries.

In 1961, when the Indian army marched in to Goa, the UAR moved a resolution in the UN Security Council supporting the Indian position that the Portuguese enclaves in India came in the way of Indian unity and constituted a threat to international peace and security.

Regarding Kashmir, Egypt though never totally endorsed India's position, it did maintain a discreet neutrality over the issue which itself was not unhelpful to India. Egypt also occasionally tried to bloc resolutions at the UN which could have caused embarrassment to India. To cite just one example, in June 1962, Egypt refused to sponsor a draft resolution inimical to India and also influenced the other non-permanent members not to press too hard for it. The usefulness of the Egyptian stand from the Indian point of view was highlighted by the reaction of the Pakistani newspaper "Dawn" which observed that "the UAR's resolve not to go along with the text of the draft which had been agreed to after several weeks of intense discussions has created a critical situation on the eve of the resumption of the debate" and added that "this great Middle East nation has now become a principal obstacle in the way of the Security Council adopting a fairly constructive resolution".⁴⁹ Eventually, when the resolution was moved by Ireland, the USSR

vetoed it while the UAR abstained from voting on the resolution. It later explained its stand saying that it was a friend of both India and Pakistan and hence its reluctance to side with either.⁵⁰

During the Sino-Indian war of 1962, Nasser offered to mediate between the two warring parties and put forward his own proposals⁵¹ for settling the dispute which were, however, rejected by China. Later, at the Colombo Conference, the UAR was instrumental in preventing the Conference from adopting an anti-Indian and pro-Chinese stance. Nevertheless, the Indians were disappointed with the Egyptian stand. They expected Nasser to come out more openly and emphatically on India's side just as Indians had supported Egypt in its hour of need. Moreover, many nonaligned Arab states maintained a discreet silence over the issue, possibly taking their cue from Nasser, India's closest friend who merely offered to mediate.⁵²

Again, during the Indo-Pak war of 1965 over Kashmir, Egypt maintained a neutral position which was considered helpful by India. At the Casablanca Conference of the Heads of Arab states in Sept. 1965, it was Nasser who played a key role in the Conference issuing a mild and balanced statement which appealed to India and Pakistan "to solve their differences by peaceful means in accordance with the principles and resolutions of the United Nations".⁵³

The Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh acknowledged this

in his statement in the Lok Sabha in Nov. 1965. "It is not secret that in Casablanca, it was mainly his (Nasser's) efforts that resulted in the Arab Conference taking an impartial attitude on this question. Even in the Security Council, UAR's position has always been that this is a matter essentially between Pakistan and India ... and any interference from outside will not lead to any settlement".⁵⁴

India too extended political and diplomatic support to Egypt during this period, though such support was never as complete and as unconditional as was made out in some quarters. Nehru himself, to start with, had some misgivings about the nature of Arab politics and the calibre of Nasser's leadership. After reading Nasser's book "The Philosophy of Revolution", Nehru wrote to the Indian Ambassador to Egypt Ali Yavar Jung : "Egyptian or indeed Arab politics appear to me to be extraordinarily immature and wrapped up in their petty problems with little understanding of what is going on in the world. When I met Nasser, I was attracted to him ; he is a likeable person. When I read a little book of his, I felt disappointed, that is, in regard to his intellectual calibre".⁵⁵

Nevertheless, Nehru saw in Nasser a modern, progressive and a nationalist leader who, if cultivated with care, could play a positive and independent role in the Middle East. While the conversion of the largest Arab state to nonalignment would keep the super power meddling in the region in

check, encouraging nationalism and secularism in the region would de-emphasise the role of religion in the region and neutralise the Pakistani attempts to forge solidarity with the region on the basis of Islam.

THE SUEZ CRISIS, 1956

The nationalization of the Suez Canal by Nasser in July 1956 following the decision of the US and the UK not to assist Egypt in the construction of the Aswan Dam precipitated a major crisis in the Middle East. The fact that Nasser's decision followed closely on the heels of his meetings with Nehru at Brioni and Cairo caused diplomatic embarrassment to India. Nehru made it clear to the Indian Parliament that his discussions with Nasser "did not relate to the Suez Canal or any aspect of Anglo-Egyptian relations".⁵⁶

Though Nehru supported Nasser in public, he tried to restrain him in private. After the nationalization of Suez Canal, Nehru sent a cable to the Indian Ambassador in Cairo asking him to tell Nasser that "he had acted hastily and that public opinion in India was likely to be unfriendly".⁵⁷ Addressing the Indian Parliament, Nehru conceded that "The suddenness of the nationalization decision and the manner in which it has been implemented may have contributed to the violent reactions. But the very terms of the nationalization under the laws of Egypt are within the province of that

Government".⁵⁸ He also referred to India's own vital interest in the issue. "India is not a disinterested party. She is a principal user of this waterway, and her economic life and development is not unaffected by the dispute, not to speak of worse developments, in regard to it".⁵⁹

On Oct. 24, India made its own proposals⁶⁰ to solve the Suez issue. The essence of the Indian approach was to negotiate a peaceful solution which would safeguard the legitimate interests of the users of the Canal without infringing in any way on the sovereign rights of Egypt. However, when the Israeli invasion of Sinai was followed by an Anglo-French military invasion of the Canal Zone, Nehru reacted quite sharply and described it bluntly as "a flagrant case of aggression" and "a reversion to past colonial methods".⁶¹ Later, India played an active role at the UN in securing the withdrawal of foreign troops from Egyptian soil and in vindicating Egypt's sovereign rights.

THE COOLING OF INDO-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS

Though the understanding and rapport that developed between Nehru and Nasser led to political coordination between the two countries' foreign policies in the 50s and early 60s, the Sino-Indian war and the death of Nehru soon after led to a certain chill in Indo-Egyptian relations. When Shastri visited Cairo in Oct. 1964, a reference to Peking's intran-

sigence in not accepting the Colombo proposals was deleted on Egypt's insistence.⁶² The Indians were disappointed by this lack of positive support from Nasser in regard to the vital issues affecting India - Kashmir and the Sino-Indian border dispute.⁶³

Indians were also piqued by the reports in the Egyptian press that India's nonalignment was "in danger of being eroded by American assistance" following the Sino-Indian war.⁶⁴

That the Indians were disenchanted with the attitude of the UAR was confirmed when Mrs.Gandhi deliberately chose to bypass Cairo on her way to Washington and spent instead two days in Paris in May 1966. G.H.Jansen commenting on the episode said: "It came as news to these friends of India that India was tired of being nagged by the Arabs in to a position of total hostility towards Israel while the Arabs maintained an equivocal neutrality towards India's antagonists, China and Pakistan".⁶⁵

Though Mrs.Gandhi did visit Cairo in July 1966, there was very little of the old spark in the relations between the two countries. The joint statement that was issued was confined to vague generalities and routine diplomatic niceties. "If the document reflected a measure of icy formality it was because in the type of relations which now exist between this country and the Arabs, any demonstration of excessive warmth is exceedingly difficult".⁶⁶

Though India extended total and vociferous support to Egypt during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the rout of the Arab armies left Nasser a weak and shattered man. The defeat also led to fresh thinking in Cairo which resulted in a new Arab strategy based on a broad Arab coalition which sought to rope in countries like Jordan and even Saudi Arabia which were hitherto ignored on ideological grounds. The withdrawal of the Egyptian forces from Yemen eliminated the main source of tension and friction between Cairo and Riyadh and paved the way for such a broad Arab coalition. However, the death of Nasser in 1970 and the advent of Anwar Sadat marked a new and more down-to-earth phase in Indo-Egyptian relations.

During the Bangladesh crisis in 1971, Egypt maintained a studied silence which again disappointed the Indians. When Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed met Sadat in Cairo in July 1971, Sadat assured him that he would impress upon Pakistan the need for a political solution to facilitate the return of refugees.

67However, Egypt continued to maintain a neutral and passive posture on the issue. The Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi was irked by the fact that there was little to choose between the so called progressive and conservative Arab states in their approach to an issue which was of critical importance to India.⁶⁸

However, M.H.Haikal, Editor-in-Chief of Egypt's leading daily Al Ahram and a close confidant of Sadat disclosed in New Delhi in February 1973 that Soviet arms and assistance

for Bangladesh passed through Egypt. "It is wrong to say that Egypt was completely silent. It did play an active and effective role" he said.⁶⁹ But it is quite possible that the help that Egypt rendered to India was more due to Soviet pressure than any desire on its part to help an old friend in her hour of peril.

Moreover, Sadat's political priorities and orientation were so different from that of Nasser that the political understanding and affinity that existed between India and Egypt all but ceased to exist in the 70s. Sadat was a pragmatist and his ambitions for Egypt were rather modest. His first priority was the withdrawal of Israel from the Egyptian territory. He also believed in free enterprise and was convinced of the necessity of gaining American support as the only way of breaking the Israeli intransigence. Having thrown out the Russians, he launched a major offensive against Israel in coordination with Syria in Oct. 1973. After "unfreezing" the situation, he plumped for the American connection which eventually led to Egypt signing a separate peace treaty with Israel and substantial American economic and military assistance.

Meanwhile, during the same period, India moved closer to the USSR and hence there was a hint of political divergence between the two countries though there was no bilateral dispute as such. Besides, India could not endorse the Egyptian strategy of separate peace with Israel without alienating

the rest of the Arab world which had ostracised Egypt from the Arab fold and with whom India was trying to cultivate a more meaningful and profitable relationship. Hence, India's cautious and qualified welcome to the Camp David Accord. Nevertheless, India firmly resisted pressures from various Arab countries to expel Egypt from the NAM at Havana in Sept. 1979.

The 70s and the 80s underlined the fact that apart from some political understanding, there was little else to Indo-Egyptian relations. Indo-Egyptian economic relations failed to take off despite repeated attempts of the two governments. Nasser, Tito and Mrs. Gandhi tried to provide a new direction to the developing countries by setting an example of promoting economic cooperation through mutual granting of tariff preferences and other concessions and incentives in selected areas. However, this laudable experiment proved to be a modest success.⁷⁰

Indo-Egyptian economic relations were also plagued by trade imbalance between the two countries. Initially, the imbalance was the result of Egypt buying more of Indian goods but failing to sell to India to the extent specified in the agreement. India's major import from Egypt was long-staple cotton. However, Egypt was not always able to fulfil its export commitment to India because of Egypt's preference to sell the same in hard currency areas.⁷¹ Later, the problem was compounded when India became a net Exporter of cotton.

In 1975, India and Egypt agreed to terminate the rupee trade from 1975 and switch over to trading in convertible currency. By and large, Indo-Egyptian economic relations remained modest and low-key with little likelihood of any significant breakthrough in future either.

Indo-Egyptian attempts at technological collaboration also ended in total failure. The two countries sought to produce a supersonic military aircraft with India building the HF 24 airframes while Egypt manufacturing the E 300 engines. The project fell through because of technical problems.⁷² In the words of one commentator "The whole project was a brain-child of Mr. Krishna Menon, who conjured up the idea of mating an Indian-built airframe with an Egyptian -designed jet engine, as a piece of political fantasy during the heydays of nonalignment".⁷³

There were a number of other irritants in Indo-Egyptian relations in the late 70s and 80s. In 1976, Egypt approached India for spare parts for its MIG 21s which were more or less grounded because Soviet Union had suspended all military supplies to Egypt. India could not possibly have obliged Egypt because of its contractual commitments to the USSR. India sent a negative reply almost six months after the initial Egyptian request.⁷⁴

Egypt was also sore that India voted in favour of a resolution condemning Egypt for signing a separate peace treaty with Israel at the Havana Nonaligned Summit in 1979 contrary

to the assurance that it received from the then Indian Foreign Minister Mr.S.N. Mishra. The two countries also failed to renew the agreement to train Egyptian nuclear scientists at Trombay and the acrimonious negotiations between Air-India and Egypt-Air over the flights from one country to another further vitiated the atmosphere between the two countries.⁷⁵

To sum up, India's relations with Egypt acquired a larger than life image initially because of euphoria over nonalignment, India's exaggerated fears over a hostile Islamic bloc and the colourful and charismatic personalities of Nehru and Nasser. However, the passage of time exposed the limitations of Indo-Egyptian relations both the in political and economic spheres. While India did gain something from this relationship, it must be emphasised that India's close identification with Nasser was a principal cause for the alienation of many Arab states which resented Nasser's leadership and policies but had no quarrel with India, thereby seriously circumscribing India's already limited options in the region.

INDIA AND IRAQ

India's relations with Iraq, potentially one of the more significant and powerful countries in the Middle East, has been rather chequered and took an unusually long time to mature and consolidate. In the following pages, an attempt would be made to analyse the initial impediments in the development of Indo-Iraqi relations, the Baathist coup in 1958 and its impact on subsequent Indo-Iraqi interaction and the factors that contributed to a breakthrough in their bilateral relations in the early 70s along with a brief discussion of future prospects.

Indo-Iraqi ties could be conveniently considered in two phases, the first phase lasting till 1958 when Iraq was under monarchy and the second phase beginning with the coup in Iraq in 1958 which overthrew the monarchy and established a radical Baathist regime in Baghdad.

INDO-IRAQI RELATIONS TILL 1958

Indo-Iraqi relations started on a fairly positive note soon after India's independence when the two countries "urged by the mutual desire to establish peace between the countries with a view to the common benefit of their people and the

development of their respective countries, (wished) to enter in to a Treaty of Friendship with each other..." in Nov. 1952.⁷⁶

However, as in the case of Iran, Nehru's penchant for non-alignment and Nasser again came in the way of India seriously cultivating Iraq on a bilateral basis. The monarchical regime in Iraq was, like other monarchies in the region, politically conservative. But its championing of Islam was again politically motivated and meant to ward off the threat posed to the regime by radical Arab nationalism. "The rivalry between Egyptian and Iraqi leaders was not new: but "Nasserism" heightened and gave a new edge to old rivalries".⁷⁷

Hence, Iraq's affinity with Pakistan even before the Baathist coup was primarily political rather than religious. More importantly, the Pakistani factor was of much less importance in the Indo-Iraqi equation than it was in the Indo-Iranian equation simply because unlike Iran, Iraq saw no direct stake , political or security, in the stability and viability of Pakistan.

Nevertheless, India failed to take a fairly detached view of Pak-Iraqi ties and develop its relations with Iraq independently of the Pakistan factor. This only goes to underline India's rather unwarranted obsession with Pakistan and Pan-Islam which led to unnecessary distortions and angularities in India's Middle Eastern policy in general.

It was the fear of radical Arab nationalism as represented by Nasser that prompted the regime of Nuri Pasha to gravitate, as a counter, towards Islam, Pakistan and eventually the Baghdad Pact.⁷⁸

THE BAGHDAD PACT, 1955

The Iraqi decision to join the Western military alliance in 1955 which came to be known as the Baghdad Pact was a blow to the development of Indo-Iraqi relations for various reasons. First. India, in general, was opposed to military alliances. Secondly, India was particularly worried about the Baghdad Pact because of Pakistan's membership of it. India feared that Pakistan could exploit its membership of the alliance to put pressure on India in relation to bilateral disputes between the two countries.

As Nehru pointed out to the Lok Sabha: "But, surely, nobody here imagines that the Pakistan Government entered into this Pact because it expected some imminent or distant invasion or aggression from the Soviet Union. The Pakistan newspapers and the statements of responsible people in Pakistan make it perfectly clear that they have joined this Pact because of India".⁷⁹ Thirdly, Iraq started extending overt political and diplomatic support to Pakistan over Kashmir only after the latter had joined the Baghdad Pact.

Looking back, one can not help wondering whether India should have allowed Iraq's membership of the Baghdad Pact to cloud Indo-Iraqi relations to the extent it did. Iraq was not unfriendly towards India nor was there any major bilateral dispute between the two countries. Iraq's motives for joining the Baghdad Pact had nothing to do with India. As Nehru himself pointed out, "other members of the Baghdad Pact have no hostility to India".⁸⁰ As we have already seen, the Baghdad Pact failed to evolve along the lines of the NATO regarding common defence against third parties which greatly reduced its efficacy and solidarity.

However, Iraq did support Pakistan on the Kashmir issue much more vocally after both of them joined the Baghdad Pact. Iraq's basic stand has been that the Kashmir issue must be solved on the basis of a plebiscite and that the passage of time made no difference to this commitment which both sides had accepted earlier.

Iraq sent a aide-memoire to the Government of India in June 1956, presumably at the behest of Pakistan, which referred to Iraq's concern over the Kashmir issue. It said: "The Government of Iraq desires to point out that the Kashmir question is a factor of restlessness and tension and it has its effect on the security of this area, and Iraq being a member of the United Nations and the Baghdad Pact, feels that it can not but be interested in anything that upsets the security of this area, which is on the whole linked with

the security of the world".81

At a Security Council meeting in Jan. 1957, the Iraqi representative Mr. Jawad argued that "The passage of time has neither changed the principles upon which the future of Kashmir was to be decided nor has made the method of a plebiscite less applicable now than it was eight years ago".82

In Oct. 1957, the Iraqi representative Mr. Khalaf asserted in a Security Council debate that in relation to Kashmir "a solution is already prescribed by the Council and the Commission through their resolutions, and all that is to be done is to implement the resolutions".83

As can be seen from the above, the Iraqi support to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue was largely political and diplomatic and primarily meant to express its solidarity with a fellow member of the Baghdad Pact. To India's dismay and disappointment this support continued even after the coup in Iraq in 1958 which installed a radical Baathist regime in Baghdad.

THE 1958 BAATHIST COUP AND AFTER

The Baathist coup in Baghdad in 1958 was a significant and welcome development from the Indian point of view for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, the coup in Baghdad sounded the death-knell of the Baghdad Pact which India greatly feared and firmly opposed. As Nehru told the Rajya

Sabha in Aug. 1958: "The whole conception and inception of the Baghdad Pact was based on unreality. It ignored the great forces and ferments in Asia today and merely thought in terms of coming to agreements with a certain stratum of rulers and a small group at the top. And suddenly we find that the very basis of the Baghdad Pact is gone. Baghdad and Iraq have dropped out of it".⁸⁴

Secondly, India expected that the advent of a Baathist regime in Baghdad would give "a boost to the forces of non-alignment and secularism in the Middle East".⁸⁵ The Baathist regime did adopt a nonaligned stance in foreign affairs and followed a genuinely secular policy both in the international and domestic spheres. This, in turn, no doubt, strengthened the forces of nonalignment and secularism in the region, a development which India could not but have welcomed with a sense of satisfaction and perhaps vindication.

Thirdly and lastly, India must also have hoped that the non-aligned and secular regime in Baghdad would, at least, dilute the strong political support that Iraq had been extending to Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. The fact that this did not happen for quite some time must have both disappointed and probably surprised New Delhi. This is primarily because India's earlier reservations about the monarchical regime and expectations in relation to the post-1958 Baathist regime were both based on misperceptions.

As has already been pointed out, even before the 1958 coup, Islam was hardly a consideration in Iraq's foreign policy pursuits nor was it a factor in Iraq's close ties with Pakistan. More importantly, India was never a factor in Iraq's aligned posture between 1955 and 1958. Hence, it was rather naive on the part of Indian policy makers to have expected a dramatic change in Indo-Iraqi relations in strictly bilateral terms even after 1958. Iraq's support to Pakistan's position on Kashmir continued beyond 1958 primarily because Iraq considered Pakistan's friendship as a useful factor in its rivalry with Egypt for Arab leadership. The change of regime in Baghdad did little to scuttle the traditional rivalry between the Egyptians and Iraqis and the Baathist regime in Baghdad, despite its ideological affinity with Nasser, was not inclined to play a second fiddle to Nasser. As one scholar pointed out, "The most striking, and to many the most surprising, development was the extraordinary rapidity with which antagonism between Iraq and Egypt reopened after a brief lull following the fall of the royal regime".

"Qassim perceived that Nasser aimed at a "leadership" of the Arab world which prejudiced independent action by Iraq in external affairs...". "Without explicitly stating it, Qassim unmistakably implied the equality of Iraq with Egypt within the framework of Arab nationalism".⁸⁶ Thus, in the post-1958 period, "India's relations with Iraq took a turn for

the better, although the major development in relations came between 1966 and 1976".⁸⁷

IRAQ AND THE SINO-INDIAN WAR, 1962

When the Sino-Indian border dispute erupted in to a full-scale war in Oct. 1962, Iraq extended strong support to India and criticised the Chinese actions quite explicitly. "Almowatin", a widely circulated Iraqi daily, editorially condemned the unprecedented and unreasonable Chinese aggression over a large territory of India and demanded that the Chinese withdrew to positions they held prior to 8 Sept. 1962. The Chinese action, the paper went on, compelled India to take necessary measures to face it on a war basis, and to entrust the country's defence to Nehru and request arms from the West, which she was never inclined to earlier.⁸⁸ Another paper "Al-Akhbar" said: "All endeavours to settle this not too very serious geographical dispute have failed because the Chinese wished them to fail".⁸⁹

There was also a message of support to Nehru from Iraqi thinkers, academicians and lawyers. The message said: "Irrespective of the arguments advanced by the two disputing sides, China's actions in imposing its military control over the territories she claims cannot be compatible with principles of the International Law. We proclaim ourselves on the side of the Indian peoples in this dispute...".⁹⁰ The

Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Karim Dassim implicitly criticised China when he said: "The cause behind the fighting was highhandedness in view and the insistence on imposing this highhandedness".⁹¹

Incidentally, India and Iraq signed an agreement in Dec. 1962 which accorded most favoured nation treatment to each other and as a result Iraq became an important market for Indian tea, jute. textiles and spices.⁹²

THE IRAQI PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO INDIA, 1964

The Iraqi President Mr. Mohammad Arif paid an official visit to India in March-April 1964 and had extensive talks with the Indian Prime Minister Nehru. The first ever India-Iraq Joint Communiqué⁹³ issued at the end of Iraqi President's visit reflected the growing political understanding between the two countries.

Both the leaders "acknowledged the identity of views between India and Iraq on world issues such as nuclear disarmament, colonialism, racial discrimination, arising from the policy of nonalignment followed by both countries and their common devotion to the objective of ensuring an early end of imperialism and colonialism in all their form and manifestations".

In an implicit reference to the Sino-Indian border dispute, they

"upheld the principle that all disputes between states, including boundary disputes, should be settled by peaceful means and not by resort to force, and that if aggression is committed in pursuit of territorial aims, its fruits must be denied to the aggressor".

The President of Iraq "expressed appreciation of the Colombo proposals and the hope that the People's Republic of China would also do everything necessary to facilitate direct negotiations between the two countries...".

Nehru "expressed his support for the just claims of the Arab countries to the waters of the river Jordan and for the rights of the Palestinian refugees wishing to return to their homes".

The Iraqi President "expressed the hope that the unfortunate differences between India and Pakistan would be resolved by reducing the current tensions between the two countries and creating the necessary atmosphere for direct discussions between India and Pakistan".

The Iraqi President also "expressed gratification at the fact that India was the homeland of 50 million Muslims ... who enjoyed the fullest freedom of religious faith and worship on a basis of complete equality under the law.

IRAQ AND THE INDO-PAK WAR, 1965

The Indo-Pak war over Kashmir in Sept. 1965 saw Iraq take a

position which was consistent with her earlier stand in relation to the dispute. The Iraqi representative at the U.N. argued that "a lasting solution of the Kashmir problem must be based upon the principles of the Charter and the decisions of the competent organs of this Organisation".⁹⁴ Iraq did not accept the Indian contention that the plebiscite issue had become irrelevant in view of the free elections held in the Indian held Kashmir which was tantamount to self-determination of the Kashmiris.

The then foreign minister of India, Mr. Swaran Singh, making a statement in the Rajya Sabha in Nov. 1965 mentioned Iraq among other the Middle Eastern countries and said: "The representatives of these countries made statements which cannot be construed as against our interests".⁹⁵ So, the Iraqi position during the 1965 Indo-Pak war was not construed as unfriendly even by the Indian government.

The year 1966 was a turning point in Indo-Iraqi relations. In February 1966, it was announced in Cairo that Iraq had given up its pro-Pakistan stand on the Kashmir issue. It was believed that it was Nasser who had weaned the then Iraqi President Arif away from the earlier pro-Pakistan posture. ⁹⁶This development went a long way in simplifying and expanding Indo-Iraqi relations.

THE IRAQI FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO INDIA, 1967

Dr. Adman Al-Pachachi, the first foreign minister of Iraq ever to visit India, came to New Delhi in March 1967. Addressing the Indian Council of World Affairs in New Delhi, he said that the close ties between India and the Arab world had led to the evolution of a common policy on international issues. On decolonization, nuclear disarmament, cold war and under developed countries, the approach of the two nations was identical.⁹⁷

The Iraqi foreign minister said that Iraq supported India's stand on nuclear non-proliferation and stood by the resolution moved on the issue by the eight nonaligned powers at the 21st Session of the U.N. General Assembly. He also found a large measure of agreement between India and Iraq on the international issues that he discussed with the Indian foreign minister Mr. Chagla. He asserted that Iraq adhered strictly to nonalignment and rejected any other form of grouping of states like that envisaged at the Islamic Conference.⁹⁸ The two countries also decided to set up an expert body to examine joint ventures that could be established between the two.⁹⁹

The Indo-Iraq Joint Communiqué¹⁰⁰ also reflected the warming up of Indo-Iraqi relations. It said that a treaty of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was essential to meet the

"serious danger inherent in the spread of nuclear weapons". Such a treaty should be based on "the principle of an acceptable balance of obligations and responsibilities between the nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear states".

The Communique expressed full support for the struggle of the people of Aden and the Protectorates to attain freedom and independence. It also supported the struggle of the Arabs of Palestine for the realisation of their aspirations. The year 1968 saw Indo-Iraqi cooperation extending to the field of defence as well. India's then defence minister Mr. Swaran Singh paid an official visit to Baghdad in Feb. 1968. As symbol of India's growing ties with Iraq, a fighter aircraft was presented to Iraq during Swaran Singh's visit. 101 On his return from Baghdad, Mr. Singh disclosed that India would provide more military instructors to train the Iraqis and would increase the training facilities, particularly for Iraq's Airforce.¹⁰²

In Feb. 1970, India and Iraq signed an agreement on Technical and Scientific Cooperation which envisaged "exchange of technical personnel, grant of scholarships, exchange of visits of experts, exchange and supply of technical documentation and the equipment of indigenous manufacture, cooperation and scientific work between the scientific and technical organizations and institutions of the two countries and provisions of consultancy services and carrying out feasibility of studies on subjects of mutual benefit".¹⁰³

From the Indian point of view, during the Bangladesh crisis "Iraq was not hostile although it did not adopt a vocally sympathetic standpoint".¹⁰⁴ After the crisis was over, Iraq became the first Arab country to recognise Bangladesh in Aug. 1972.

In June 1972, India threw its weight behind Iraq's decision to nationalise the Iraqi Petroleum Company. India's Foreign Minister Mr. Swaran Singh, in a statement, said that "India appreciates and supports the Iraqi Government's desire to exercise control over their natural resources, among which oil plays a vital part in the economy of the country".¹⁰⁵

The statement was significant because the nationalization decision had led to a bitter war of words between Iraq on the one hand and the US and the UK on the other and threats of economic sanctions against Iraq. Iraq believed to have agreed in principle to supply one million tons of crude to India annually for the Haldia refinery. It was also stated that there were prospects for joint exploration of oil.¹⁰⁶

The Iraqi Foreign Minister Mr. Murtadha Saeed Abdul Baqi paid an official visit to India in Aug. 1972. In the Joint Communiqué¹⁰⁷ issued at the end of his visit, the two Foreign Ministers expressed their common desire to share the experience gained in their respective national development processes. The two sides also reaffirmed their adherence to the principal of nonalignment. They considered Iraq's recognition of Bangladesh a positive step. Mr. Baqi referred to

the tense situation in the Gulf and along Iraq's borders which threatened peace and cooperation in the region. Mr. Swaran Singh said India was fully aware of the dimensions of these problems.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GROWING INDO-IRAQI TIES

The upswing in Indo-Iraqi relations in the early 70s was significant not only in itself but also for the openings it provided for Indian diplomacy in the region. As one newspaper put it "Gone are the days when New Delhi's approach to the Arabs revolved round one or two countries in the region. India has acquired new friends in countries like Iraq and Yemen".¹⁰⁸ Consequently, India's approach to the region became more balanced and broad-based.

The opening up of Indo-Iraqi relations was a major contributory factor to the subsequent breakthrough that was achieved in Indo-Iranian relations. The Shah of Iran would in no way allow his principal Arab rival in the Gulf to cultivate India, an emerging regional power, on exclusive terms.

More importantly, it was also a lesson for Indian policy makers that it was not necessary to make a 'either/or' choice between two contending countries and it was quite feasible to have good relations with both on the basis of mutuality of interests. India's success in cultivating Iraq

without alienating Iran was ample proof of this.

India's deepening relations with Iraq also facilitated the subsequent process of political understanding and fruitful economic cooperation between India and various Gulf states. The broad understanding that India and Iraq were able to foster between themselves led to the signing of numerous agreements between the two countries.

The Indian Minister of Planning Mr. D.P. Dhar visited Iraq in Sept.-Oct. 1972 and the Joint Communiqué¹⁰⁹ issued on the occasion reflected the widening and deepening of Indo-Iraqi economic ties.

In Oct. 1972, Iraq agreed in principle to give India a loan to cover the bulk of the foreign exchange requirements of the giant Mathura refinery, estimated at \$75 million.¹¹⁰

In Dec. 1972, the Planning Minister of Iraq Dr. Jewad Hashim visited India and met his Indian counterpart Mr. D.P. Dhar and they agreed that "a Joint Planning Committee would be set up with the objective of studying and utilising the planning activities of the two countries for mutual benefit".¹¹¹

In April 1973, Iraq agreed to supply India 30 million tons of crude over a 10-year period for the refinery to be set up at Mathura during 1977-78. Iraq also agreed to extend a credit of \$50 million in the shape of supplies of crude oil.

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In Aug. 1973, India and Iraq reached an agreement which per-

mitted India's Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) to search for oil in some specified regions in Iraq.¹¹³ In Sept. 1973, India and Iraq agreed to establish a sponge iron plant in Iraq.¹¹⁴

SADDAM HUSSEIN'S VISIT TO INDIA, MARCH 1974

The Iraqi Vice-President Mr. Saddam Hussein visited India in March 1974 and had extensive discussions with Mrs. Gandhi and the Joint Communique¹¹⁵ issued on the occasion reflected the further deepening of political and economic ties between the two countries. The establishment of a permanent Joint Commission and the agreements for securing a loan on soft terms to import 2.8 million tons of crude oil during 1974 and the supply of 112 million tons of crude over ten years after Mathura refinery became operational were the major outcome of the visit.¹¹⁶ Mr. Hussein also expressed Iraq's opposition to foreign military bases in the Gulf region and the Indian Ocean.¹¹⁷

The visit reflected the close political affinity that existed between the two countries which, in turn, led to extensive economic cooperation. As one newspaper put it, "Iraq, committed to socialism and total independence in the field of foreign policy, is closest to India. Vice-President Saddam Hussein ... represents these attitudes more emphati-

cally than any Arab leader today".¹¹⁸

MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT TO IRAQ, JAN. 1975

Mrs. Gandhi's three day visit to Baghdad in Jan. 1975 was a definite success in both political and economic terms. The veiled warnings against any future Arab oil embargo and the big power naval activities in the Indian Ocean reportedly figured in the talks between Mrs. Gandhi and Mr. Saddam Hussein. Both leaders agreed that not all world powers were reconciled to the new realities in the region.¹¹⁹

The Joint Communiqué¹²⁰ issued on the occasion reflected the close coordination that the two countries managed to establish in their general views on international affairs and specific issues of mutual interest and benefit.

Mrs. Gandhi "appreciated the successes achieved in consolidating the country's economic independence and gaining control over its national resources for the well-being of the people of Iraq".

The two leaders "stressed the continuing validity of the policy of nonalignment which had served the international community well".

They also emphasised the importance of "the Indian Ocean being a Zone of Peace free from foreign military bases and great power rivalry and tension".

Regarding Iraq's border dispute with Iran, Mrs. Gandhi

"expressed the Government of India's full awareness of the dimensions of these problems".

INDO-IRAQI POLITICAL HONEYMOON

The latter part of the 70s saw the establishment of the closest political and economic links between India and Iraq. This was largely due to the similarities in the problems that the two countries encountered during this period and their respective national ambitions and aspirations. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that one Indian observer chose to comment in 1976 that "Among Arab states, Iraq is closest to India today in political terms".¹²¹

Both India and Iraq faced grave challenges to their national security and sovereignty in the early 70s, India in relation to Bangladesh crisis in view of the unsympathetic attitude of the West and Iraq in relation to gaining control over its oil resources from foreign companies in the face of threats of economic sanctions again from the West. Consequently, both India and Iraq were left with little choice but to move not only closer to the USSR but also to formalise their close ties with it in the form of Friendship treaties in 1971 and 1972 respectively. As the challenges, which precipitated the friendship treaties were overcome, both India and Iraq "reverted to their normal foreign policy stance".¹²²

Nevertheless, this period was also characterized by an orchestrated campaign, mainly western inspired, that the USSR was trying to create a hostile ring round Iran and Pakistan by building an axis running from New Delhi through Kabul to Baghdad. It was also alleged that India and Iraq were secretly providing base facilities to the Soviet Indian Ocean fleet at Visakapatnam in the Bay of Bengal and Umm Qasr in the Shatt-al-Arab estuary in the Persian Gulf respectively which had no basis in fact whatsoever.¹²³

This is the reason behind both countries reaffirming, time and again, their commitment to nonalignment, their opposition to major power meddling in the Indian Ocean, their determination to pursue independent foreign policies and their emphasis on national self-reliance which they sought to attain by mutual cooperation in economic as well as technological spheres during this period.

IRAQ AND THE JANATA INTERREGNUM, 1977-79

The change of government in India made little difference to the buoyancy in Indo-Iraqi relations despite the fact that Iraq extended its full support and solidarity with the domestic policies of Mrs. Gandhi during the emergency period in India.¹²⁴

A high level Iraqi delegation led by its Vice-President Mr. Taha M. Marouf visited India in July 1978 and had extensive

talks with the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Desai and his senior colleagues. They covered a wide range of subjects and a "broad measure" of agreement on the issues discussed emerged.¹²⁵

The Joint Communiqué¹²⁶ issued on the occasion was a reiteration and reaffirmation of the commonalty of perceptions and policies of the two countries in relation to major global and regional issues and problems and their determination to develop a common approach in tackling them.

INDO-IRAQI RELATIONS IN THE 80S

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 brought India and Iraq much more closer to each other politically. Both were opposed to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and there was considerable similarity of views between the two on the developments in Afghanistan and the situation created by them in the region. Both agreed on the need to defuse the tension in the area and prevent the escalation of super power rivalry in the region including the Indian Ocean. Both were of the opinion that injection of arms in to the region would create further instability and heighten tension in the region.¹²⁷

Commenting on the importance of the Indo-Iraqi ties, one newspaper said: "... the regime there (in Baghdad) is

genuinely secular and nonaligned. Both these points are important for New Delhi: the first because the tide of Islamic fundamentalism is sweeping West Asia and a number of governments are finding it expedient to speak in the name of religion and second because the Soviet take-over in Afghanistan and the US response to it have exposed the whole region to super power rivalry on a much bigger scale than it has been exposed ever before".

It went on to add: "For years, both India and Iraq have been trying to pursue policies which could strengthen their political and economic independence and keep the region free from the control of the super powers".¹²⁸

However, the fact remained that neither India nor Iraq was in a position to displease the Soviet Union over Afghanistan. Though it was primarily the Soviet action which escalated tensions in the region, both the countries reserved their strongest criticism for the Western response to it. It was also ironical that despite being two of the largest importers of arms in the region (mostly Soviet), India and Iraq chose to be critical of Western countries for large scale transfer of arms to the region as a response to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

IRAN-IRAQ WAR, SEPT. 1980

The Iran-Iraq war which started in Sept. 1980 caused con-

siderable strain in Indo-Iraqi relations. When the war broke out, the Indian Foreign Ministry described it as an "unfortunate development" because both countries were non-aligned and had friendly relations with India.¹²⁹

However, there were reports in the foreign press that India had agreed to supply planes and tanks' parts to Iran in its war with Iraq. The Indian Foreign Ministry in a Press Release said that there was "no truth whatsoever in these reports". It described these reports as "mischievous and motivated, aimed at distorting India's objective and correct stand in Iraq-Iran conflict, the countries with whom India has equally friendly relations".¹³⁰

When the Israeli Airforce bombed and destroyed Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor near Baghdad on 7 June, 1981, India reacted sharply and condemned Israeli action as "stark adventurism and a blatant act of intervention and aggression".¹³¹

As the Iran-Iraq conflict continued unabated, for the first time since the Iraqi revolution in 1958, Indo-Iraqi relations started showing strains. Iraq did not like the shifting of the venue of the 7th Nonaligned Summit from Baghdad to New Delhi in 1983. According to the Gulf News Agency (GNA), Iraq had informed India many times of its "dissatisfaction" with the NAM's role in ending the Iran-Iraq war. Iraq reportedly sent a low-level representation to Mrs. Gandhi's funeral to register its unhappiness.¹³²

To sum up, Indo-Iraqi relations, like Indo-Iranian rela-

tions, took a much longer time to develop and consolidate than they should have primarily because of Nehru's passion for nonalignment and Nasser. This was so despite the fact that the Pakistan factor was of much less significance in relation to Indo-Iraqi ties than it was in the case of Indo-Iranian ties.

The fact that there was no dramatic upswing in Indo-Iraqi ties even after the coup in Baghdad in 1958 and Iraq's subsequent withdrawal from the CENTO and its nonaligned orientation only served to expose the basic untenability and far-fetchedness of some of the assumptions that underlay India's policy towards the region. It is of significance to note that Indo-Iraqi ties really flourished only after India had started cultivating Iraq in bilateral terms on the basis of mutuality of interests in the political sphere and complementarity of interests in the economic sphere subsequently.

Iraq will always be an important country for India in the Middle East because Iraq would continue to be a major factor in Middle Eastern regional politics and there has been no bilateral dispute whatsoever between the two countries over the years. Given the complementarity of political outlook and economic interests between the two countries, Indo-Iraqi ties would continue to grow occasional irritants notwithstanding.

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CHAPTER 3

INDIA AND IRAN

Iran, apart from being a major and potentially one of the most powerful countries in the Middle East, is, perhaps, the most important country India has had to deal with in the region. This is primarily because Iran, from the beginning, considered that it had a direct and vital stake in the Indian subcontinent both from political and security point of view.

Consequently, Pakistan became an important factor in the Indo-Iranian equation for almost two decades and placed artificial restrictions on the development and maturity of Indo-Iranian relations which remained in "a state of somnambulance". While Iran was partly responsible for this, it appears, at least in retrospect, that India must accept the larger part of the blame for this sorry state of affairs.

India signed a treaty of friendship with Iran as early as March 1950 wherein both the countries "recognising the ancient ties which have existed between the two countries for centuries and their mutual need for cooperation in strengthening and developing these ties and urged by their mutual desire to establish peace between the two countries with a view to the common benefit of their people and the

development of their respective countries (wished) to enter in to a treaty of friendship with each other".¹

However, the following two decades of Indo-Iranian relations hardly bore any resemblance to the sentiments expressed in the friendship treaty and remained cool and low-key punctuated with moments of mutual suspicion and even hostility. The following pages would be devoted to a critical discussion of the reasons that came in the way of Indo-Iranian relations developing to their full potential in the two decades or so following India's independence and the factors that contributed to a breakthrough in their relations in the mid 70s and a brief look at the future prospects.

THE INITIAL AFFINITY

When India and Pakistan became independent in 1947, in spite of Pakistan's anti-Indian propaganda and considerable sympathy that existed in the Iranian press and the people in general for Pakistan, the Government of Iran remained unaffected and was basically well disposed towards India, a fact acknowledged by Nehru himself.² Even before India's independence, Iran participated in the First Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in March 1947 and extended its friendship and goodwill to India.

Nehru too extended sympathy and support to Iran in 1946 in

its dispute with the USSR in regard to Azerbaijan and the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Iranian soil, though he avoided any direct criticism of the Soviet Union. He made it clear that Indian opinion would strongly resent any aggression on Iran or Turkey by any power.³ Again, when Iran nationalised the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951, India extended her support to Iran to help her get rid of the remnants of Western imperialism in that country though India appealed to both Iran and Britain to settle the issue through negotiations.

More importantly, during this period, Iran also tried to steer clear of great power influence and pursue an independent foreign policy akin to India's nonalignment under the Premiership of Mossadegh. As one observer put it, "Under Mossadegh, Iran refused like India to be drawn into one or other of the two great power blocs and clung tenaciously, if a little hopelessly, to her neutrality".⁴

However, unlike in India where there was a broad national consensus on India's nonaligned posture, Mossadegh's National Front had to contend with two other contestants for power in Iran who were opposed to Iran's policy of neutrality namely the Shah, who favoured an alliance with the West in order to contain the Soviet threat and the Tudeh (Communist Party of Iran) which desired an alliance with the USSR on ideological grounds.⁵

ALIGNMENT AND ALIENATION

However, the ouster of Mossadegh and the reinstatement of Shah in Aug. 1953 with the help of the Central Intelligence Agency put an end to Iran's experiment with neutrality and put her firmly in the Western alliance. The Shah never believed that neutrality would be in the interests of Iran. During the World war II, in spite of Iran's declared neutrality, Iran was occupied by the allied powers and Shah's father Reza Shah was deposed and exiled.

In Shah's own words "While studying the history of past fifty years, we have discerned and deduced that Iran has consistently been menaced and subjected to encroachments. Previous experiences of history have prompted us to conclude agreements and treaties with countries who are capable of combating these dangers and preventing them from recurring".

6

However, Iran joining the Western alliance proved to be a turning point in Indo-Iranian relations in the sense that it created a political rift between the two major Asian nations which they failed to mend, despite a few feeble attempts, in the next two decades or so. The reasons for this are not far to seek.

THE NEHRU FACTOR

Firstly, India displayed little understanding of the circumstances which almost compelled the Shah to align himself with the West. He had genuine fears of a Russian threat to Iran particularly after Stalin delayed the withdrawal of Russian troops from Iran beyond the stipulated date of 2 March 1946 at the end of the world war II. The Shah was also fearful that the Russians could destabilise his regime through the Tudeh Party which had close links with the USSR. The Shah's domestic position too was anything but secure having been installed in power by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Moreover, he considered alignment with the West as the only way of obtaining economic assistance and arms to which he attached the highest priority.⁷

Nehru, on the other hand, had little time for aligned nations in those early days of pristine nonalignment. His attitude to aligned nations, as has already been pointed out, was "self-righteous". Hence, Nehru showed little appreciation of the genuine fears and misgivings that haunted the Shah in relation to his country's security and integrity. Consequently, for years, a barrier has been created between Iran and India by Nehru's antipathy towards those in military alliance with the West.⁸

The Shah of Iran did make his first visit to India in Feb.

1956 on India's invitation just four months after Iran had joined the Baghdad Pact. Despite the fact that the Shah spent 23 days in India, one of the longest visits ever made by any Head of State to India, it was obvious that the visit was anything but a success in political terms. The Shah tried to impress upon the Indian leaders that his country's close ties with Pakistan were not directed against India and would not be at the cost of India's friendship. He did refer to "differences" between the two countries but also emphasised their traditional bonds.⁹

President Rajendra Prasad, in his welcome address, was anything but effusive. He said that "there may arise differences of opinion among us, but the firm basis of understanding and mutual regard on which our bonds of friendship rest can always be depended upon to take such a strain well ...".¹⁰

That no communique was issued at the conclusion of talks between Nehru and the Shah was an ample indication of the fact that the two leaders were on different political wavelengths and merely agreed to disagree.

Nehru made a return visit to Tehran in Sept. 1959. The visit only served to underline the political gulf that separated the two countries. According to Girilal Jain, Nehru's meeting with the Shah was a "near disaster" because the two leaders thought in "very different terms".¹¹ The Iranian Prime Minister Mr. M. Eghbal while welcoming Nehru merely

stated that "there is no grave problem between India and Iran".¹²

The Joint Statement issued on the occasion was deliberately confined to vague generalities and pious sentiments in order to conceal or at least gloss over disagreements on specific issues.¹³ In a television interview, Nehru more or less confirmed the lack of political understanding between the two countries by stating that "Indo-Iranian friendship could be expanded especially in the field of culture, commerce and trade".¹⁴

THE NASSER FACTOR

The second factor that adversely affected Indo-Iranian relations was Nehru's close personal friendship with Nasser. Nehru's endorsement of Nasser as the leader of the Arab world and his policies as progressive and dynamic naturally did not go down well with the Shah who felt threatened by such policies.¹⁵

Shah was already apprehensive about the Soviet threat and the vulnerability of his own domestic position which was far from stable. Under the circumstances, Nasser's crusade against monarchies only tended to increase the Shah's sense of insecurity. The traditional Persian-Arab rivalries and suspicions and the sectarian divide between the Shi'ite Iran and the predominantly Sunni Arabs only accentuated the

Shah's fears of isolation and encirclement.

Nasser's attempts at the unification of the Arab states like the formation of the UAR by the merger of Egypt and Syria made the Shah conjure up visions of a coalition of radical Arab states leaning heavily against Persian Iran.

The coup in Iraq in 1958 and the coming to the power of a radical Baathist regime in Baghdad only confirmed the Shah's worst fears. After the coup, the new regime not only started moving closer to the USSR but also reopened the Kurdish question.¹⁶ The Iraqi claims to Kuwait in the early 60s and the Civil War in Yemen and Egypt's active participation in it were perceived by the Shah as a direct threat to Iran's interests, particularly in the Persian Gulf.

Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Shah of Iran did not take kindly to India's "special relationship" with Egypt and Nehru's political preference in favour of Nasser and nonalignment.¹⁷

ISLAM AND PAKISTAN AS FACTORS

The Shah tried to counter this threat from Arab radicalism as espoused by Nasser in two ways. First, he sought to make use of Islam as a counter ideology to Nasser's radical Arab nationalism. It is in this context that one should understand the Shah's attempts to organise Islamic conferences,

particularly in the 60s.

Secondly, he tried to counter Iran's sense of isolation by cultivating non-Arab Muslim countries like Pakistan with whom Iran had close ethnic and cultural ties. Ironically, Nehru's penchant for Nasser and nonalignment prompted the Shah to move closer politically to Islam and Pakistan, a development which the Indian policy towards the Middle East was purported to counter and neutralise.

Though Shi'ite Islam was declared the State religion in Iran, the Shah of Iran was not a religious man in any sense of the term. Despite his political conservatism, Shah was a modern and forward looking monarch. In fact, under the Shah, the emphasis in Iran was on pre-Islamic Aryan Civilization. His title "Aryamehr" meant the "Light of the Aryans". In 1971, the Shah celebrated in a grand and pompous fashion the 25th Centenary of the founding of the Persian Empire by the Cyrus the Great emphasising Iran's Aryan ethos and heritage.

Hence, Islam was hardly a factor in the Shah's support for an Islamic alliance in the 60s or his intimate relationship with Pakistan over the years. The Shah cultivated both Islam and Pakistan as a counterpoise to Nasserism and a possible Arab domination of the region.

Iran also firmly opposed the Pakistani attempts to give a religious colour to "Regional Cooperation for Development" (RCD) which came in to existence in 1964 to promote economic

cooperation between Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. The Iranian foreign minister told the Majlis that "... incidentally, Turkey, Pakistan and Iran are all Muslim countries but ... this unity, alliance and concord has no direct connection with Islam, nor does it have any specific religious aspects. Other nations of Asia ... may share in this regional alliance".¹⁸ In fact, Iran even sounded India on joining the RCD as early as 1964 despite Pakistan's total opposition to such a move.¹⁹

It goes without saying that joining the Baghdad Pact had brought Iran and Pakistan closer both politically and militarily, a development which India could not but look upon with considerable disquiet and trepidation. As Nehru told the Lok Sabha "... Baghdad Pact and SEATO ... have a direct effect upon us and naturally we have viewed them with suspicion and dislike".²⁰

It must be stated that it was only after Pakistan joined the Baghdad Pact that it could count on the support of Iran and other Pact members on the Kashmir issue both at the U.N. and outside.²¹ This support, in essence, was based on the U.N. resolutions which sought to settle the issue on the basis of a plebiscite in Kashmir. Both Iran and Turkey supported Pakistan on Kashmir because they considered Pakistan's membership of the Pact as essential for its viability and success. Besides, Iran solicited Pakistan's support in its dispute with Iraq over the Shatt-al-Arab waterway and Turkey

in its dispute with Greece over Cyprus.

Nevertheless, Iran joined the Baghdad Pact for motives other than those that prompted Pakistan to join the same and India-baiting was certainly not one of them. Nehru himself acknowledged this when he told the Lok Sabha in 1956 that "Other members of the Baghdad Pact have no hostility to India and they have not entered in to pact because of their anti-Indian feelings".²² Consequently, the partial cooling of Indo-Iranian relations following Iran's adherence to the Baghdad Pact was anything but irretrievable.

Moreover, the Baghdad Pact, in its actual terms, failed to acquire the sort of teeth and efficacy that the NATO managed to muster. The Pakistani attempt to convince Pact members that the threat to them could come from "any source other than the Communist nations" came to nought because of the opposition from the the US and Britain.²³ Nor could Baghdad Pact countries agree that aggression against one being aggression against all on the lines of the NATO. It also failed to raise a force of its own with a unified command. As a result, the Pak-Iranian cooperation was confined to joint military exercises and political support to each other. And the Pact more or less collapsed when the coup in Iraq in 1958 installed a radical Baa'thist regime in Baghdad.

Though the Baghdad Pact was renamed CENTO and its Headquarters transferred to Tehran following Iraq's formal

withdrawal from the Pact in 1959, the fast changing regional and international scenario in the 60s gradually made the Pact redundant.

THE CHANGING SCENARIO OF THE 60S

The onset of the 60s saw the evolution of the new weapon systems based on ICBMs and IRBMs which brought about a definite reorientation in American security perceptions towards the region. "By 1964-65 the US strategic interests in the area had shifted from the land-mass of the northern-tier to the Indian Ocean".²⁴ Consequently, US policy towards Iran tended to be a little more relaxed in this period than it was earlier.

These changing American perceptions had serious implications for Iran which left her with no choice but to adjust her foreign policy posture to the emerging new realities²⁵ like a) American reluctance to aid Iran in case of threat from sources other than the USSR b) the gradual decline in the economic and military aid from the US and c) the resentment over being discriminated against by the US in comparison to Pakistan and Turkey in the supply of sophisticated arms. Iran responded to the changing strategic scenario by trying to open up to the USSR, a process facilitated by the Iranian refusal to permit the US to install anti-Soviet missile bases in Iran.²⁶ This was the beginning of the independent

foreign policy that the Shah was to pursue with increasing vigour towards the end of the 60s.

THE SINO-INDIAN WAR, 1962

The Sino-Indian war over their disputed border in Oct. 1962 saw Iran come out openly and strongly on the Indian side. The Prime Minister of Iran, in reply to Nehru's message concerning the Chinese invasion, stated on 3 Nov. 1962 that the "Government of Iran strongly condemns aggression in any form and supports India at a time when she has fallen victim of an aggression".²⁷

In fact, it was reported that the Shah had advised Ayub Khan to send his troops in support of India following the Indian military debacle in the NEFA. Obviously, the Shah was not aware of the close links that Pakistan had already established with China.²⁸

Moreover, it was the so called Conservative states like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Jordan which extended support and sympathy to India during the Sino-Indian conflict whereas India's traditional friends including Egypt maintained somewhat a neutral stand over the dispute.²⁹

THE INDO-PAK WAR, 1965

The Indo-Pak war of 1965 over Kashmir saw Iran extend moral

as well as material support to Pakistan. Reacting to the crossing of international boundary by the Indian forces in to Pakistan near Lahore on Sept. 6, the Iranian Foreign Ministry declared that the "Indo-Pakistan war as an act of aggression committed by Indian forces against Pakistan".³⁰

At the U.N., the Iranian representative Mr. Vakil argued in favour of a settlement "in accordance with the Security Council Resolutions". He asserted that "A settlement, to be durable, must be achieved not on the basis of political expediency but mainly on the basis of law and justice; that is, on the basis of the principle of self-determination, to which both parties had previously subscribed".³¹

On the Material side, the Iranian help to Pakistan was rather modest. It provided Pakistan with "whatever non-military assistance it could".³² However, it was reported that Iran did supply jet-fuel, gasoline and some small arms and ammunition to Pakistan.³³ Iran also sent medical supplies and medical teams to Pakistan.

On the face of it, these Iranian actions could be construed as unfriendly to India. However, the Shah, in private, strongly urged Ayub Khan to bring the hostilities to an end. During the conflict, when the air-route to Moscow became impossible, Iran immediately offered Air-India an alternative route through Tehran. When the war was still waging, the Shah sent one of his ministers on a friendly visit to India. Nor did Iran interrupt its oil supplies to India. Generally

speaking, Iran acted as a restraining influence on Pakistan in the latter's disputes with India.³⁴

More importantly, from the Indian point of view, the Indo-Pak conflict gave further fillip to Iran's quest for an independent foreign policy. The Shah was badly shaken by the American attitude to the Indo-Pak war. Despite its commitment to Pakistan under CENTO, SEATO and the bilateral defence agreement of 1959, the US remained neutral in relation to the conflict. Moreover, the US arms embargo to both India and Pakistan worked out to India's advantage because India was almost self-sufficient in small arms and ammunition production whereas Pakistan was excessively dependent on the West for the same. As one Indian scholar pointed out, the Shah "was reacting more violently to the inability of the CENTO and to the USA to support their ally than to India's fighting with Pakistan".³⁵

The Shah realised the limitations and the conditional nature of external assistance in safeguarding Iran's security and integrity and its basic unreliability. As a result, he "launched an accelerated weapons acquisition programme in 1966-67 which was independent of the CENTO".³⁶

Besides, the Shah also tried to reduce his exclusive dependence on the West by striking an arms deal with the USSR in 1967 which included APCs and anti-aircraft guns. The deal was also meant to be a "lever" to persuade the West to sell sophisticated arms to Iran which worked "rather well".³⁷

THE CHANGING PAK-IRAN EQUATION

The 60s also saw a gradual change in the Pak-Iran equation, particularly after the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. First, the Shah did not approve of Pakistan getting too close to China. There were people in Tehran who believed that Chinese Communist influence had percolated in to the officer cadre of the Pakistani army. The Shah reportedly once remarked that his friendship with Pakistan was intended to prevent it from getting itself more deeply involved with China.³⁸ Nor did Iran approve of China's ultimatum to India during the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and made it clear that China should not interfere in Indo-Pak issues.³⁹ Iran also supported the Indian position at the preparatory meeting of the proposed Afro-Asian summit at Jakarta in April 1964 that Nonaligned summit should precede the Afro-Asian Conference and that the USSR should be invited to the latter. The Indian move was primarily meant to sabotage China's attempt to project itself as the leader of the Afro-Asian world following the Chinese military defeat of India in 1962.⁴⁰

Secondly, the 60s also exposed the limits of Iran's economic relationship with Pakistan, RCD notwithstanding. Economically, India was a bigger market. With a population of 25 million, Iran's development strategy had to be export oriented.⁴¹ In 1958, India's trade with Iran was five times

more than Pak-Iran trade. One reason for this was that India's oil needs and its oil imports from Iran were greater than that of Pakistan. But it must be noted that Iran's non-oil trade with India was also far more significant than that of Pakistan.⁴²

Thirdly, following the Sino-Indian war in 1962 and the subsequent supply of American arms to India, Pakistan sought to upgrade its relations with China and normalise its ties with the USSR. "In 1963, bilateralism became the key concept in the new foreign policy of Pakistan, a policy in which links between two countries would exist quite apart from either's relations with any third country".⁴³ In other words, it meant that Pakistan's ties with China or the USSR had little to do with US-Pak relations. By the same token, "This policy could also mean that Iran's relationship with Pakistan had little bearing on Iranian relations with India".⁴⁴

Fourthly, the 60s saw the development of certain discordant notes in the Pak-Iranian relations. Pakistan, in this period, tried to patch up with the Arab countries especially Egypt. Hence, Pakistan could not share Iran's hostility to Nasser and consequently Pakistan's support to Iran on regional issues slackened considerably. When a shooting incident took place on the Iran-Iraq border in Dec. 1965, the Iranians were disappointed with the lack of response from Pakistan.⁴⁵ Iran was also upset when Pakistan voted in favour of Bahrain's membership of UNESCO in Sept. 1966 im-

plicitly acknowledging Bahrain's sovereign status which was not acceptable to Iran then.

Lastly and more importantly, the late 60s saw the emergence of a strategic environment which enabled the Shah to redefine and enlarge Iran's role as a regional power. As a consequence, it became imperative for the Shah to look beyond the Persian Gulf and Pakistan for understanding and support in favour of Iran's new regional policy.

There were a number of factors which facilitated Iran's quest for a more assertive role in the Persian Gulf region. The limited super power detente and Iran's own improved relations with the USSR enabled the Shah to shift his focus from his northern borders and concentrate on the Persian Gulf. The British decision in 1968 to withdraw its forces from the east of Suez by the end of 1971 dovetailed with Iran's new regional ambitions. The debacle that the Arabs suffered in 1967 at Israeli hands more or less destroyed the mythical appeal of Nasserism and left Nasser a weak and shattered man. This freed the Shah from his preoccupation with radical Arabism which he had considered a serious threat to his regime and devote his attention to Iran's expanding role as a regional power.

Most importantly, by the mid 60s, the Shah had consolidated his domestic position considerably. The success of his domestic reforms known as the White Revolution, suppression of domestic opposition, Iran's rapid economic growth and the

acquisition of sophisticated arms increased the Shah's self-confidence and enabled him to give real substance to what he termed as "independent foreign policy".⁴⁶

THE CHANGING TENOR OF INDO-ARAB RELATIONS

The 60s also saw the emergence of stresses and strains in Indo-Arab relations which necessitated the Indians to take a critical look at India's policy towards the Middle East. The disappointing response of the Arab countries to the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and the Indo-Pak war of 1965 brought about a widespread disillusionment in India and questions were raised about India's unqualified support to the Arabs. The humiliation that Egypt and Nasser suffered after the 1967 military debacle awakened Indian policy makers of the risk of too much dependence on Nasser. The 1967 war also led to the emergence of Iran and Saudi Arabia as important actors in the region which India could not possibly ignore for long.

All these factors converged towards the end of 60s to create an environment which necessitated and facilitated both Iran and India to overcome their old inhibitions and misgivings and embark on a new course of mutual understanding and accommodation on the basis of a growing consensus on a number of regional issues which were of concern and importance to both the countries.

THE SHAH'S VISIT TO INDIA, 1969

It was in such a positive and relaxed atmosphere that the Shah's visit to India took place in Jan. 1969. During the visit, the Shah asserted that Iran wanted to pursue an independent policy and stand on her own feet.⁴⁷ He did not mince words regarding Iran's role as a regional power. "We owe a responsibility not only to ourselves but also to the region" he said.⁴⁸ He also made it clear that the CENTO had long ceased to have any military significance and would remain so despite the Soviet action in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁹ He pointed out that India was a big country in the region and "a historical responsibility towards smaller nations of the region rests on her".⁵⁰ The Shah also saw "unlimited possibilities and wide scope for very great and significant cooperation between India and Iran".⁵¹

The Joint Communique⁵² which was issued at the end of the Shah's visit reflected, for the first time, anything approaching political understanding between the Shah and an Indian Prime Minister. Both sides agreed that "the preservation of peace and stability in the Persian Gulf is the exclusive responsibility of the littoral states and there should be no interference by outside powers".

In relation to the Middle East, they expressed "anxiety and concern over the delay in the implementation of the Security

Council resolution of Nov. 22, 1967 and the resultant growth of dangerous tensions in the region".

The Shah "noted with satisfaction the Indian efforts to resolve all differences with Pakistan in a peaceful manner". Thus, when India and Iran were poised for a breakthrough in their relations, a couple of incidents caused consternation to both sides resulting in a temporary cooling off of relations between the two countries. India was annoyed by the support that the Shah extended to Yahya Khan in keeping India out of the Islamic Conference in Rabat in Sept. 1969 and Iran was piqued by the alleged cold-shouldering by India of a visit by the Shah's sister Princess Ashraf. As both sides were trying to set aside these minor differences in their larger interests, the developing crisis in East Pakistan vitiated the atmosphere between them so badly that Indo-Iranian relations went into cold storage for the next three years.

THE BANGLADESH CRISIS, 1971

Iran's attitude to the Bangladesh crisis was fairly consistent with its earlier policy towards the Indian subcontinent. Unfortunately, the crisis revived many of the old fears and suspicions that Iran and India traditionally entertained about each other over the decades and proved to be a stumbling block when Indo-Iranian relations seemed to be

poised for a breakthrough.

From the very beginning of the crisis following the brutal Pakistani crackdown in East Pakistan and the exodus of millions of refugees to India, Iran maintained that it was an internal matter for Pakistan and strongly advised all powers against interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs.⁵³

Iran was quite perturbed over the situation in the subcontinent primarily because it could have an unsettling and spill-over effect on Iran. The Shah made this clear in an interview with an Indian newspaper in June 1971. "An Indo-Pak settlement is the first imperative not only for the security, development and prosperity of the Indian subcontinent but also of the neighbouring region and particularly Iran".⁵⁴

When war broke out between India and Pakistan on 3 Dec. 1971, Iran's response at the U.N. was much more muted than it was in 1965 when Iran condemned India as an aggressor. The Iranian representative at the U.N.⁵⁵ Mr. Hoveyda expressed himself against "armed intervention on the part of India against the national territory of a member state" and interference in "affairs which were essentially within the national jurisdiction of Pakistan".

"No matter how grave has been the situation of Pakistan with regard to the humanitarian question of the refugees, nothing can justify armed action against the territorial integrity of a Member State".

He advocated a solution based on "an unconditional cease-fire" and "withdrawal of troops from the territories occupied by both sides".

However, what really caused resentment and disquiet in India was Iran's assistance to Pakistan in the military sphere. The Shah himself made no bones about the increased flow of military supplies to Pakistan through Iran. From the Indian point of view, the Indo-Soviet treaty was expected to serve as a deterrent as much against the overt dangers of Chinese intervention as against covert threat of large scale flow of arms to Pakistan from Iran by the overland routes.⁵⁶ In fact, it was reported that the USSR deployed troops along the Iranian border to deter the Shah from aiding Pakistan in its war with India over Bangladesh in late 1971.⁵⁷

Pakistan itself acknowledged the help rendered by Iran during the Indo-Pak war of 1971 in a Communique issued by Islamabad on 8 May 1973. During the war, Pakistan's entire Civilian aircraft fleet was sheltered in Iran and from there they were allowed to fly essential supplies to Pakistan from friendly countries. When the oil tanks in Karachi were set ablaze, Iran sent equipment and experts to put it out. Iran allowed the passage of strategic supplies to Pakistan via the land routes through its territory. Iran also met critical shortage of certain items including ammunition and aircraft, helped in maritime air- reconnaissance and offered a fully equipped military hospital.⁵⁸

Given Iran's close relations with the U.S. and President Nixon's strong opposition to the emergence of Bangladesh, one can not help wondering as to what extent the Iranian assistance to Pakistan was at the American instance.

Nevertheless, while what Iran did to help Pakistan was significant, what it chose not to do was equally significant, if not more. Despite the threats that Iran would stop supplying oil to India in case of war with Pakistan⁵⁹, Iran never carried out the threat. During the war, the palace sent word to the small Indian business community in Tehran to assure that it had nothing to fear from Tehran's support for Pakistan.⁶⁰

Iran also resisted the Pakistani pressure to activate the CENTO and provide legal basis for its clandestine assistance nor did it indulge in any direct provocation nor interfere with the overflight of Indian aircraft.⁶¹ According to one Iranian scholar, "Iran's support in the 1971 war, remained verbal, moral and diplomatic and underscored the fact that this was the most that RCD states could do for each other".

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THE POST-BANGLADESH PHASE

Iran extended total political and diplomatic support to Pakistan after the Indo-Pak war of 1971 in order to bolster Pakistan's weak bargaining position vis-a-vis India which

held all the aces after its military victory. Iran openly committed itself to the integrity of what remained of Pakistan and firmly supported the Pakistani position on the issues of 93,000 Pak POWs detained in India, withdrawal of forces from occupied territories, the proposed trial of 195 POWs by Dacca on charges of genocide and the recognition of the state of Bangladesh.

The dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 was seen by the Shah as part of a larger plan to encircle Iran. "At the core of the Shah's interpretation of the security threat ... was the perception of a pincer movement from Iraq to the west, India and Afghanistan to the east and the Soviet Union behind both".⁶³ The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Aug. 1971, the Iraq-Soviet Treaty of April 1972, the July 1973 coup in Afghanistan and the secessionist movements in Baluchistan, Pakhtoonistan and Sind gave credence to such fears. The increasing Soviet naval presence in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean made Iran wonder if it had to counter the Russian threat not only from the north but from the south as well.

Under the circumstances, the Shah considered that Iran had a vital stake in the survival of the remainder of Pakistan for two reasons. First, Iran wanted a stable eastern flank and the Pakistani support in its rivalry with the Arab states. Secondly, any separatist movement in Baluchistan would give ideas to the large number of Baluchis living in Iran.

The Shah told C.L. Sulzberger of the New York Times: "We must see to it that Pakistan doesn't fall in to pieces. This would produce a terrible mess. An Indo-China situation of new and larger dimension. I dread to think of it". He went on to add ominously "But if Pakistan fell apart, the least we could do in our interest would be some kind of protective reaction in Baluchistan".⁶⁴ The interviewer interpreted this to mean that Iran would annex Baluchistan before anyone else did.

Thus, "During 1971-73, an attempt was also made to project the possibility of an Indo-Iranian confrontation as a source of threat perception for India as well Iran".⁶⁵ Hence, the relations between India and Iran in this period "could be distinctly characterized as chilly".⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the post-Bangladesh phase saw the transformation of the regional environment both in South Asia as well as the Middle East in such a decisive way that it made it imperative for India and Iran to come to terms with each other in the light of new regional realities in both the regions.

The post-1971 period saw a decisive change in the power balance in the subcontinent in India's favour and it emerged as the pre-eminent power in South Asia. As a result, "New Delhi could afford to see and formulate its policy towards other countries, relatively independently of the Pakistan factor".⁶⁷ Consequently, India, more sure of herself than before, was in a position to take the close Pak-Iranian

relations in her stride and strive for better relations with iran for their own worth.

More importantly, as a result of the events of 1971, "India's security environment has greatly improved and the self-confidence of its foreign policy making elite has vastly increased".⁶⁸ Hence, India, for the first time since independence, was able to "rid itself of its rather unhealthy preoccupation with Pakistan and the Indo-Pak power balance"⁶⁹ and concentrate on playing a wider role in the international arena in consonance with her size, location and resources.

It was also about this time that certain changes were occurring in the the Middle Eastern region which prompted Iran to formally don the role of a regional power. The British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf was completed on 30 Nov. 1971 as part of its east-of-Suez policy. On the very same day, Iran occupied the three disputed Gulf islands of the Greater and Lesser Tumbs and Abu Musa, near the Straits of Hormoz. This act symbolically and dramatically heralded the emergence of Iran as a regional power, a role which had the tacit support of the US.⁷⁰

However, "The core relationships in their foreign policy arenas that New Delhi and Tehran had now evolved, linked one with the Soviet Union, and the other with the United States. This was bound to create complications in their bilateral relationship, since such a relationship could not be

divorced from the total environment in which Indian and Iranian foreign policies were shaped".⁷¹ Nevertheless, the Arab-Israel war of 1973 introduced certain new elements in to the regional politics of the Middle East as well as South Asia which further pushed India and Iran to explore the possibility of a rapprochement between the two countries in a much more persistent and determined way.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, 1973

The Arab-Israeli war of 1973 and the subsequent oil embargo which led to a steep increase in the price of oil resulted in Iran's income from oil jump from \$ 4.9 billion in 1973 to \$ 25 billion in 1975.⁷² The Shah sought to use his increased oil revenues to a) build up a powerful military machine in line with his regional ambitions b) use Iran's phenomenal oil wealth "in influencing policies and winning friends" and c) ensure the rapid industrialization of Iran before its oil reserves ran out.⁷³ The Shah realised that a friendly India could play a complementary role in the realisation of Iran's major political and economic goals in the changed regional context in South as well as the Middle East.

The good showing of the Arab forces in the 1973 war and the remarkable unity displayed by them during the war must have caused some concern to the Shah whose earlier security

strategy for Iran was based on the Arab disunity.⁷⁴ Hence, opening up to India was an opportune move on the part of the Shah.

The Shah was also upset with Pakistan's attempt to forge close links with the Arab states like Saudi Arabia, UAE and Libya which could have security implications for Iran in the longrun. He was particularly annoyed with Bhutto for hobnobbing with Gaddafi whom he referred to as "crazy fellow"⁷⁵ and refused to attend the Islamic Summit in Lahore in Feb. 1974 because of his presence.

The Shah was also aware of India's growing relationship with Iraq in the early 70s, his principal rival in the Gulf and the need to balance it by cultivating a fruitful relationship with India in the economic as well as political spheres. He further realised that only by providing alternative sources of economic assistance and political support could he wean India away from the USSR.

The tripartite agreement among India, Bangladesh and Pakistan in April 1974, finally cleared "the human and political debris left by the 1971 war"⁷⁶ further paved the way for Indo-Iranian detente. India was able to convince the Shah that she too had a stake in Pakistan's integrity and survival.⁷⁷ As a result, the Shah gave up his earlier policy of shoring up Pakistan militarily vis-a-vis India and instead accepted that "an Indo-Pak rapprochement as the surest way of stabilising Iran's eastern flank".⁷⁸

India too, on her part, had her reasons for making up with Iran. India did entertain serious misgivings about Pak-Iranian military links over the years.⁷⁹ Indian policy makers realised rather belatedly that the only way India could dilute the close Pak-Iranian relations was by cultivating Iran on a bilateral basis relatively independent of the Pak factor and creating a stake for Iran in the improvement and consolidation of Indo-Iranian relations.

More importantly and in a much more broader context, Indian policy makers were also able to shed some of their past inhibitions and diffidence in their attitude to the Middle East as a whole which had earlier hampered India's manoeuvrability in the region. As one indian scholar put it: "The long period of Indo-Arab relations has created a certain thinking in a section of the Indian elite that an improvement in India's relations with any other regional power, whether that power be Israel or even Iran can be only at the cost of India's close ties with the Arab world".

"India has already lost some initiative in West Asia by taking a negative stand vis-a-vis the Palestine question. That should serve as a warning and should prevent India from taking a similar negative stand on the Arab-Iranian relations also".⁸⁰ It is against this backdrop that Mrs. Gandhi made her momentous trip to Tehran in April 1974.

MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT TO TEHRAN, APRIL 1974

Mrs. Gandhi paid a four day visit Iran in April-May 1974. This was "the first time that there has taken place what can be called a meeting of minds between the Shah and the Indian Prime Minister".⁸¹

The Joint Communiqué⁸² issued at the end of Mrs. Gandhi's visit reflected the understanding and accommodation that the two sides were able to achieve on most major political issues and a substantial increase in the economic cooperation between the two countries.

The Prime Minister of Iran "appreciated the initiatives taken by India" and "supported all efforts to settle outstanding disputes between India and Pakistan through bilateral negotiations and through peaceful means".

Both sides "emphasised the vital importance safeguarding stability and peace in the Persian Gulf and settlement of issues by the littoral states themselves ... without outside interference".

Both sides called for the full implementation of the U.N. Security Council resolution 242 which "calls for complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab territories, and a just solution of the Palestinian problem".

The two sides "reaffirmed their support for declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace...".

The Iranian side explained the situation "on their western borders" and the Indian side expressed "full understanding of the dimensions of the problem".

As one newspaper put it: "The economic gains to India and Iran from the latest accords are obvious, but it is the political assumptions behind them which are far more significant".⁸³

THE SHAH'S VISIT TO INDIA, OCT. 1974

The Shah of Iran paid a return visit to India in Oct. 1974 whose real significance lay in the fact that India was the last lap of his tour of a number of littoral states of the Indian Ocean namely Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia. His tour was primarily meant to gain support for his proposal to establish an "Indian Ocean Economic Community".⁸⁴ The Joint Communiqué⁸⁵ issued at the end of the Shah's visit more or less a repetition of the Joint Communiqué issued during Mrs. Gandhi's earlier visit to Tehran in April 1974.

Even before he arrived in India, the Shah made certain statements which reflected the growing understanding between the two countries. In an interview to a Bombay Weekly, the Shah envisaged the possibility of collaboration of the Indian and Iranian navies in keeping the Indian Ocean free of

big power rivalries.⁸⁶ In Canberra, he accepted India's stand on its Peaceful Nuclear Test (PNT) at Pokhran in May 1974 on two counts. "Firstly, I must accept the word of a friend and secondly, a policy of peaceful uses of nuclear technology was in the Indian interest".⁸⁷

The political understanding and economic cooperation that India and Iran achieved in 1974 was sustained and consolidated till the Shah of Iran visited India again in Feb. 1978 when the Janata Party was in power.⁸⁸

THE SHAH'S VISIT TO INDIA, FEB. 1978

The fact that the change of government made little difference to the deepening of Indo-Iranian relations was amply demonstrated by the Joint Communiqué⁸⁹ issued at the end of the Shah's visit.

It, inter alia, referred to "the close similarity of views of the two countries on international issues, regional problems and bilateral relations of India and Iran". It "stressed the full sovereign rights of all states with regard to their natural wealth and resources". It also said that both sides "have agreed to cooperate with each other for the development of nuclear science for peaceful purposes".

In an interview to a Bombay Weekly, the Shah described

India's positive response to his proposal to forge an Indian Ocean Community as the "most encouraging development". Referring to Pak reservations about the idea, the Shah said that Pakistan should realise that the common market was not designed to "crush the small in the interest of the big" but to provide their economies opportunities to flourish within the organization.⁹⁰ The Shah described "Asian Highway" as being central to his concept of "Asian Common Market" which would mean that eventually "this mass of land and populations and goods could be linked to the European mass".⁹¹

As one newspaper pointed out, "Although the impression left by the Shah of Iran's four-day visit to India is mainly of a marked advance in economic cooperation between the two countries, the political understanding behind this important development should not be ignored". It went on to add "That the Shah spent four days in India and only four hours in Pakistan also indicates a certain change in his assessment of priorities".⁹²

The Shah's change of priorities was due to a number of factors. Throughout the 50s and 60s, Pakistan was the stronger of the two countries. However, "An increase in Iranian power and prestige coincided with Pakistan's decline, which resulted from the 1971 defeat at Indian hands and the dismemberment of the country into Pakistan and Bangladesh".⁹³ Hence, there was a definite change in the Pak-Iranian equation in favour of the latter in the 70s, a fact acknowledged

by Bhutto himself when he bemoaned "Before, when I talked with him (the Shah), I used to talk to him as a brother. Now, I have an audience".⁹⁴

The growing disparity between Iran and Pakistan in the 70s also caused disquiet and suspicion in some quarters in Pakistan regarding the Shah's intentions in relation to Pakistan. His comments about "protective reaction" in Baluchistan caused a flutter in Pakistan and fears were expressed that Iran was trying to interfere in the internal affairs of Pakistan.⁹⁵ Growing Indo-Iranian amity only added to the Pakistani fears. The Chief of the Pakistani Air Force, Nur Khan quite bluntly remarked that "Iran and India could come closer to each other. India could claim half of Pakistan up to river Indus, leaving rest of Pakistan to Iran. A weak Pakistan could also go under the hegemony of Iran as well".⁹⁶

The Shah was also piqued by Pakistan's firm and open opposition to his grandiose scheme in relation to the Indian Ocean Community. Pakistan, quite deliberately, chose the eve of the Shah's visit to India to let its opposition to the idea be more widely known to the world.⁹⁷

The Marxist coup in Afghanistan in April 1978 which brought the pro-Moscow government of Taraki to power revived the Shah's old fears of encirclement as the new government lost no time in supporting the Baluchistan and Pakhtoonistan demands. The Shah also reported to have said that Iran would

intervene if Pakistan showed signs of cracking up.⁹⁸

Further, the Shah seemed to be in broad agreement with the Indian view that despite the Marxist leanings of its leadership, the Afghans' fierce sense of freedom would make them rather unlikely stooges. He was not too impressed by the Pakistani attempt to project the happenings in Afghanistan as posing an immediate Soviet threat to the region which could be countered only by making Pakistan strong through arms aid.⁹⁹

KHOMEINI'S IRAN AND INDIA

The fall of the Shah in Feb. 1979 and the appearance of Ayatollah Khomeini on the scene "did affect the momentum" of Indo-Iranian relations.¹⁰⁰ The Indian foreign minister Mr. Vajpayee disclosed in Feb. that Khomeini had sent a representative to India and that "we had established contacts".^{101A} A few weeks later, he told the Lok Sabha that the developments in Iran were "positive" and described Khomeini as the "father figure of Iranian revolution". "We are waiting for the day when we can welcome Iran in the nonaligned movement" he added.¹⁰² In fact, "India viewed the revolution in Iran as a reflection of Iran's quest for identity and national self-assertion and a desire to charter an independent course without outside Big Power influence".¹⁰³ India was also among the countries to have been told by Iran

that investments made during the Shah's time were safe and that further Iranian investments could be expected.¹⁰⁴

However, the Khomeini's regime soon became totally preoccupied with domestic problems like American hostages issue and a breakdown in law and order following the purges of suspected Shah's supporters. The Iraqi invasion of Iran in Sept. 1980 left little time for the new regime to follow a vigorous foreign policy.

India reacted very cautiously to the abortive US attempt to rescue its diplomats held hostage by Iran. The official statement said that whatever the extenuating circumstances, India could not condone such "military adventurism". While India was opposed to the violation of diplomatic immunities and sympathised with the fate of the American hostages, it felt that the US action "tended to complicate the situation further and to heighten the tension".¹⁰⁵ Later, at a press conference, Mrs. Gandhi said that the US attempt to free its hostages in Iran could not be described as an attempt to invade that country nor could it be called an interference in the affairs of another country.¹⁰⁶ While India heartily welcomed Iran to the nonaligned fold,¹⁰⁷ it also had its misgivings about the new regime in relation to its Islamic fervour and its attempts to export it.

Generally speaking, while the two countries have a great potential to coordinate their foreign policies in relation to major regional issues and exploit the complementarity of

their economies to the full, there could develop, in future, certain areas of friction and competition in their relations.¹⁰⁸ How effectively and how smoothly potentially contentious areas such as the roles of their respective navies in the Indian Ocean and their attitudes to the Gulf states and their security concerns are going to be tackled by the policy makers on both sides would determine the nature of future Indo-Iranian interaction.

To sum up, Indo-Iranian relations failed to take off despite the absence of bilateral disputes between the two countries and even a certain harmony in their politico-economic interests. Nehru's preference for nonalignment and particularly Nasser put off the Shah of Iran considerably. India's exaggerated fears about Pakistan's ability to forge Islamic solidarity in the region against India led its policy makers to give more importance to the Pakistani factor in the Indo-Iranian equation than they should have. As a consequence, India failed to pursue, with required vigour and persistence, the policy of bilaterally cultivating Iran on the basis of mutuality of interests despite the existence of a number of factors which would have facilitated such a course. That, perhaps, would also have been the surest way of weaning Iran away from Pakistan, a major objective of India's policy towards the Middle East.

INDIA AND SAUDI ARABIA

One of the more amazing and puzzling aspects of India's policy towards the Middle East has been India's relationship or lack of it with Saudi Arabia over the decades. As one newspaper put it "Relations between India and Saudi Arabia in the 26 years since the first Indian Prime Minister visited that country were hardly the kind that should have governed two major Asian nations".¹⁰⁹

THE INDIAN MISGIVINGS

The Indian political leadership, from the beginning entertained misgivings about Saudi Arabia considering it as a feudal and theocratic state and was wary of cultivating it even on bilateral terms. Saudi Arabia was one of the major countries in the region in terms of its geographical and demographic size and economic potential even in the 50s. The fact that it was the guardian of the Holy shrines of Islam gave it an added aura in the Islamic world.

Given India's fears about the possible creation of an Islamic bloc under the inspiration and the goading of Pakistan, it was all the more important and necessary for India to have established an amicable and balanced relationship

with Saudi Arabia which would have pulled the diplomatic carpet from under the feet of Pakistan and would have been a more effective impediment to the rise of any Islamic grouping than any other strategy that India could possibly have adopted. The reason why it was not done would remain as one of many mysteries that characterized India's rather unimaginative and timid policy towards the Middle East.

THE INITIAL HARMONY

It was not as if there were irreconcilable differences in the political outlook of the two countries, in spite of the admittedly conservative and traditional nature of the political leadership in Saudi Arabia. There were many incipient tendencies in the policies of the Saudis even in the early years which could have been encouraged and promoted by India to its political advantage. The fact that India failed to do so was essentially because of India's own rather rigid and self-righteous posture in the 50s and 60s which thwarted India broadening and diversifying its political base in the region, as we shall see in the following pages.

It should be noted here that Saudi Arabia was one of the participants in the first Afro-Asian Conference ever held in Bandung in Indonesia in April 1955 and a signatory to the final communique issued after the Conference.

When Pakistan joined the Baghdad Pact, the Saudi Embassy in

Pakistan took the "unusual" step of issuing a press handout containing the text of the Radio Mecca broadcast which exhorted Pakistan to withdraw from the Pact and "return to the right path". It referred to Pakistan's action as "a stab in the heart of the Arab and Muslim states".¹¹⁰ The strong Saudi reaction to the Baghdad Pact could not but have pleased India which herself vehemently opposed it for her own reasons.

KING SAUD'S VISIT TO INDIA, 1955

The first top level political contact between the two countries took place in Dec. 1955 when King Saud came to New Delhi for a brief visit. The joint-statement issued at the end of the visit reflected a certain harmony in the political outlook of King Saud and Prime Minister Nehru. Both the leaders emphasised that "a peaceful and non-militant approach to the issues which divide the world is an urgent necessity". The two countries also fully subscribed to "the five principles, namely respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, mutual respect and equality and peaceful co-existence which alone in their view can provide a stable basis for peaceful and cooperative existence among the nations of the world".¹¹¹

More importantly, King Saud, speaking as the guardian of the

Muslim Holy places, publicly thanked Nehru and his Government for their policy towards the Muslim minority in India. He declared: "I desire to say to my Muslim brethren all over the world with satisfaction that the fate of Indian Muslims is in safe hands".¹¹² This was a very significant statement, from the Indian point of view, in view of the persistent Pakistani criticism of the alleged discriminatory policy of the Indian Government towards its Muslim minority.

NEHRU'S VISIT TO RIYADH, 1956

Nehru paid a return visit to Riyadh in Sept. 1956. In the joint-statement that was issued on the occasion, both the sides reiterated "their adherence to the declaration made by the Bandung Conference which laid down the principles which should govern international relations". Referring to the Suez crisis, the King and the Prime Minister emphasised that "in spite of the difficulties and tensions that have arisen over this question, it is possible to reach a settlement negotiated between the parties concerned without any derogation from Egyptian sovereignty and authority and maintaining the interests of other countries in the unrestricted use of the Canal as an open waterway".¹¹³

When Nehru arrived in Riyadh, he was greeted with the slogan "marhaba rasool al salam" which led to a lot of controversy and resentment in Pakistan. The Saudi Embassy in Pakistan

issued a statement explaining that the phrase meant "Welcome Messenger of Peace" and not "Welcome Prophet of Peace" as interpreted by the Pakistanis. But Pakistani feelings were not mollified. The Pakistani newspaper Dawn, in view of King Saud's and President Nasser's less than friendly attitude towards Pakistan, advised Pakistanis to "calmly and dispassionately take all these bitter truths in to consideration and restrain to some extent their vain expectations from the so-called Muslim world".¹¹⁴

In view of all this, it is nothing less than astonishing that for the next 26 years, no Indian Prime Minister visited Saudi Arabia till Mrs. Gandhi only made a trip to Riyadh in 1982. Neither the religious orthodoxy of Saudi Arabia nor Pakistan's perceived closeness to the Saudis over the years would fully explain the lack of verve in Indo-Saudi relations. Nor was there any serious bilateral issue that vitiated the political atmosphere between the two countries.

THE NASSER FACTOR

Looking back, the most plausible reason for this Indo-Saudi estrangement seemed to be political and ideological rather than religious. There is no gainsaying the fact that it was Nehru's endorsement of Nasser as the sole and undisputed leader of resurgent Arab nationalism that complicated India's relations with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, probably

more than any other country in the region, felt threatened by the radical Arabism espoused by Nasser.

Nor the threat from Egypt remained purely ideological. In the 60s, Egypt actively got involved in the civil war in Yemen. Egyptian troops trained the Republican forces and also actively fought the Royalist tribesmen in North Yemen in support of the Republic of South Yemen which was governed by a radical leftist regime. At the height of the civil war in North Yemen, as many as 70.000 Egyptian troops were involved in it.¹¹⁵ This was often cited as one of the reasons for the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war. Moreover, during the Yemen civil war, Egyptian planes often bombed Saudi border towns like Najran with impunity without being challenged.¹¹⁶ Saudi Arabia, being a large country with a long coastline but with a relatively small population and a poorly trained and equipped army felt quite vulnerable and almost defenceless.

Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Saudis were annoyed with India for backing Nasser so consistently and so unequivocally even when he had acted rashly and overambitiously on occasions. Ironically, it was King Faisal's fears of Arab radicalism as represented by Nasser that prompted him to resort to Pan-Islamism as a counter strategy, a development India sought to resist and undermine by supporting Nasser.

ISLAM AND PAKISTAN AS A COUNTER

In fact, "King Faisal's dedication to Pan-Islamism had its genesis in the struggle for Arab unity and the Saudi-Egyptian rivalry for the leadership of the Arab world".¹¹⁷ The Saudi attempts to organise various Islamic Conferences in the 60s should be seen in this context. Moreover, the opponents of Nasser were branded by Cairo as "reactionaries" and "agents of imperialism" and a number of unsuccessful plots were organised by the UAR to overthrow various monarchies and conservative regimes in the region.¹¹⁸

Against this background, it is anything but surprising that the Saudis looked upon Nehru's endorsement of Nasser's leadership of the Arab world with suspicion and resentment. Thus, it was India's own ideological reservations and misgivings about the so called conservative Arab states and a lack of balance and sensitivity in its policy towards them that was primarily responsible for India's lack-lustre relationship with Saudi Arabia in the 60s and even 70s. Hence, no consistent and determined effort was made to cultivate Saudi Arabia which left India with no leverage worth the name with one of the most important states in the region and, at least since the mid-70s, one of the richest in the world.

It was in this context that Saudis sought the assistance of

Pakistan in bolstering their defences in the late 60s. In Aug. 1967, the Saudi Minister of Defence and Civil Aviation visited Pakistan which resulted in a defence agreement between the two countries. As a result, Pakistani advisers were sent to Saudi Arabia to "help expand and modernize the Saudi Armed Force". The number of Saudi personnel in Pakistani military training institutions also went up "considerably".¹¹⁹

India was quite quick to react to this development. The Indian Foreign Minister Mr. M.C.Chagla reportedly conveyed India's concern to the Saudi Ambassador regarding the "disquieting" newspaper reports both in India and abroad about the transfer of Saudi arms to Pakistan. Mr.Chagla said to have emphasised that any supply of military equipment to Pakistan would only increase tension in the region and make Indo-Pak rapprochement difficult.¹²⁰

Indian policy seemed to have attributed the close Saudi-Pak ties more to Islamic solidarity than to mutuality of interests between the two countries. The only way India could have diluted Saudi-Pak amity was to try and cultivate the Saudis on the basis of mutuality of interests. However, Nehru's close identification with Nasser and his political distaste for the so called conservative Arab states came in the way of such a possibility.

If India supported Egypt because it promoted India's security by its progressive policies in the region, the

Saudis felt threatened by such policies and sought to enhance their own security by opposing Nasser. In the process, the Saudis cultivated Pakistan in order to counter the forces Nasser represented and the lack of amity between Egypt and Pakistan facilitated this process. This also acted as a snub to India, intended or not, for throwing in its lot with Nasser.

Nevertheless, the Saudi support to Pakistan vis-a-vis India even against this background was cautious and calculated and was never so substantial as to totally alienate India.

KASHMIR

Regarding Kashmir, the Saudi position in general was that the issue should be solved in accordance with the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir. It was at variance with the Indian position in so far as it refused to subscribe to the subsequent Indian position that the issue of plebiscite had become irrelevant in the changed circumstances of Kashmiris having elected their own government in free and fair elections.

At this juncture, it must be noted that even Nasser, the reason for Saudi distance from India, never supported India's position on Kashmir. His consistent stand on the issue was that that India and Pakistan should settle their

dispute through negotiations without outside interference. In view of India's own unwavering support to Nasser in relation to most Arab issues which was, no doubt, irksome to the Saudis, it would be difficult to describe the Saudi position on Kashmir as anti-Indian.

THE INDO-PAK WAR, 1965

During the 1965 Indo-Pak war over Kashmir, the Saudi representative at the UN Mr. Sakkaif emphasised that Saudi Arabia "has had the best of cordial and brotherly relations"¹²¹ with both India and Pakistan. He recalled that the Security Council had "passed resolutions reaffirming the right of the Kashmir people to self-determination"¹²² which, of course, was a fact. In view of India's almost non-existent relationship with Saudi Arabia in those years, it would be rather rash to characterize the Saudi attitude to India as unfriendly and hostile.

THE INDO-PAK WAR, 1971

During the 1971 Bangladesh crisis, the Saudi position was similar to that of many other countries which generally held the view that what was going on in East Pakistan was Pakistan's internal affair and that no other country had any right to interfere in the same. The Saudi representatives

argued along the same lines at the UN throughout the crisis. Speaking in the General Assembly on 11 Oct. 1971, the Saudi representative Mr.Sakkaf said:" We believe what is happening in Pakistan is strictly and without any doubt the affair of the Pakistanis themselves, and therefore any outside interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan will surely constitute a violation of our Charter".¹²³ On the 7th Dec. 1971, the Saudi representative Mr.Baroody, addressing the General Assembly, appealed to India "not to forget the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi" and warned that the Indo-Pak conflict might "fan the flames of religious intolerance".¹²⁴Mr.Baroody, speaking at the Security Council on Dec. 16 1971, admitted that the conflict between the East and West Pakistan was "most probably for economic as well as for political reasons ... ". He also asserted that "only India and Pakistan can solve the problem, without interference from outside".¹²⁵

By and large, the Saudi attitude to the Bangladesh issue at the UN was fairly balanced and conciliatory. Its position was akin to that of many other states, Muslim or non-Muslim, and it would be rather petulant to suggest that it adopted a hostile or unfriendly attitude towards India.

THE AFTERMATH OF BANGLADESH

However, the Bangladesh episode did have a serious bearing

on Indo-Saudi relations in the sense that it proved to be an obstacle in improving the political understanding between the two countries at a time when the situation in both the regions was conducive to such an exercise. Even in the 60s, despite Saudi Arabia's image as a politically conservative and socially backward country, there were a number of elements in Saudi's regional policy which would have been consonant with India's own thinking and preferences in the region.

The most striking thing about the Saudis' regional policy was its moderation. The financial support to Egypt and Jordan in their confrontation with Israel, the occasional appeal for Islamic solidarity and the calls for Islamic summit and Jihad against Israel after the burning of the Al Aqsa mosque might give an impression of religious orthodoxy and hawkishness.¹²⁶ However, King Feisal always favoured a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute and merely insisted on the implementation of the Nov. 1967 Security Council resolution which only called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces to the pre-war positions.¹²⁷

King Feisal was also more fearful of Communism than Zionism and was opposed to the increasing influence of the USSR in the region under the pretext of helping the Arabs against Israel. For him, the existence of the Jewish state would be more palatable than allowing the USSR to entrench itself in the region provided Israel could be persuaded to withdraw

from occupied Arab territories.¹²⁸

King Feisal was also firmly opposed to any foreign power filling in the so called vacuum created by the withdrawal of the British from the Persian Gulf in 1970. He was in favour of security being maintained by the states of the region themselves.¹²⁹

The Saudis also realised the limitations of their relationship with Pakistan about this time. Despite the mutual desire to increase "Islamic cooperation in industrial fields", there was very little progress in that direction because Pakistan's petroleum needs were quite low.¹³⁰ This, in turn, made the Saudis realise the importance and usefulness of cultivating India for both economic and political reasons.

After the burning of the Al Aqsa mosque in 1969, King Feisal called for an Islamic summit to discuss the issue. However, King Hassan of Morocco thwarted Feisal's efforts to have the summit at Mecca and managed to stage it in his own capital Rabat. Feisal was not satisfied with his status as the "Joint Convenor" of the summit. Since the agenda at Rabat was confined to the burning of the Al Aqsa mosque and any new proposal on Palestine would not find favour with Iran and Turkey, Feisal came up with the idea of inviting India as a means of asserting his own authority and pre-eminence at the summit. India's anxiety to attend the summit in order to thwart any Pakistani attempts to rake up its bilateral

issues with India suited Feisal admirably. However, Pakistan's President Yahya Khan's threat to boycott the summit in the event of India's participation carried the day and King Feisal's ploy backfired badly.¹³¹

Most importantly, the Arab debacle in the 1967 war reduced the prestige of Egypt in the Arab eyes and more or less destroyed the mythical appeal of Nasser. Nasser himself realised the need to adopt a new strategy in the changed circumstances. His crusade against monarchies and feudal elements only drove the conservative Arab states more and more in to Western arms. Nasser now decided to build a broad Arab national front by roping in even these states which were earlier detested on ideological grounds. Egypt's withdrawal of troops from North Yemen removed the most important irritant between Egypt and Saudi Arabia and symbolized Nasser's new strategy of broad Arab unity. Nasser's death in 1970 marked the end of an era in Arab politics and the beginning of the end of India's "special relationship" with Egypt which certainly removed a cloud hanging over Indo-Saudi relations.

When everything pointed towards a new beginning in Indo-Saudi relations by 1970, the crisis in East Pakistan in 1971 and the subsequent dismemberment of Pakistan put an end to any such hopes. After the fall of Dacca, Saudi Arabia extended total and continuous support to Pakistan in its dealings with India. It also withheld its recognition to

Bangladesh until it got the green signal from Pakistan in order to strengthen Pakistan's bargaining position vis-a-vis India and Bangladesh.¹³² The Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mr. Omar Saqqaf asserted that India's refusal to hand over the POWs to Pakistan and its decision to refer some of them to Dacca for trial as war criminals constituted "a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention". India's attitude could result in "further deterioration" in the situation he warned.¹³³

THE POST-1973 PERIOD

However, in May 1973, India struck an oil deal with Saudi Arabia "hitherto considered most unlikely of Arab countries".¹³⁴ The Saudis agreed to supply 3.3 million tons of crude in three years from June 1973, at the rate of 1.1 million tons per year.

But during the oil embargo that followed the Yom Kippur war of 1973, Saudi Arabia exempted 9 countries including Pakistan, Malaysia and Britain from the cut in oil supplies. India's name, however, did not figure in the list.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, a few days later, the Saudi Charge d' Affairs, Suleman- el- Nasser assured New Delhi that there would be no cut in oil supplies to India. "Whatever is scheduled to come to India will come" he added.¹³⁶

The Simla agreement of April 1974 signed by India, Pakistan

and Bangladesh, the subsequent return of all POWs to Pakistan and the normalisation of relations in the subcontinent paved the way for an Indian initiative to open a meaningful dialogue with the Saudis. The visit of D.P.Dhar, the then Minister of Planning, to Jeddah in May 1974 was designed to facilitate such a process.

THE SAUDI OIL MINISTER YAMANI'S VISIT TO INDIA, 1975

Consequently, the Saudi oil Minister Mr.Ahmed Zaki Yamani paid a three day visit to India in Feb. 1975. In fact, Mr.Yamani was first invited to India in 1968 and the invitation was renewed in 1973 when India made its first direct contact for oil with the Saudi National oil company. However, political misgivings about each other came in the way of Mr.Yamani accepting the invitation earlier.¹³⁷ Significantly enough, Mr. Yamani was the first Saudi dignitary to visit India since King Feisal's visit to India in 1955. At a meeting with Mrs.Gandhi, Mr.Yamani reportedly expressed himself in favour of developing "closer and more extensive" bilateral ties with India, especially in the economic sphere.¹³⁸ Later, at a press conference,¹³⁹ he expressed confidence that a "new era" in Indo-Saudi relations could begin. He revealed that an agreement to set up an India-Saudi Arabia joint commission for economic, scientific and technical cooperation would be signed in New Delhi at the

end of the month.

Mr.Yamani ruled out Saudi oil at concessional rates for India and also any Saudi credit for supply of crude to India. He said Saudi policy was to have one price for everybody and to sell oil only on cash basis. However, Saudi Arabia was prepared to extend long-term credit to India on soft terms for starting joint industrial ventures in either country.

Regarding Pakistan, Mr.Yamani said: "Definitely, we are concerned with the integrity of Pakistani territory. We are a Muslim country and in Saudi Arabia we are concerned with our brothers all over the world, in Pakistan and in India".¹⁴⁰ It was in the interest of Saudi Arabia to see that the dispute between India and Pakistan came to an end.

The real significance of Mr.Yamani's visit lay in the fact that "... the Saudi oil Minister's visit revives a long neglected relationship".¹⁴¹ The new political climate in the subcontinent following the Simla agreement facilitated a new understanding between Saudi Arabia and India and led to a remarkable leap in Indo-Saudi economic relations in the next few years.

However, in the political sphere, the understanding between the two countries did not reach the sort of level it should have given the extent of commonalty of interests and perceptions on the major issues confronting both South Asia and the Middle Eastern regions. India's suspicions about Saudi's close military links with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's mis-

givings about the Indo-Soviet connection persisted despite the limited political understanding that the two countries managed to reach in the post Simla phase.

INDO-SAUDI TIES IN THE 80S

The fall of the Shah of Iran in early 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in Dec. 1979 and the breakout of a full-scale war between Iran and Iraq in Sept 1980 only served to reinforce and exacerbate the old suspicions and fears between India and Saudi Arabia . Saudi Arabia's domestic vulnerability, its fears over Khomeini brand of Islamic fundamentalism engulfing the whole region and the substantial Soviet military presence in Afghanistan only helped to increase Saudi's acute sense of insecurity which drove her headlong in to a closer and more extensive military relationship with the US and Pakistan, a development India looked upon with considerable fear and suspicion. On the other hand, the Saudis did not take kindly to India's rather muted and low-key response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁴²

Ironically, it was these very fears and suspicions that India and Saudi Arabia entertained about each other that made them renew their efforts for better understanding and appreciation of each other's point of view and strive for some common political ground which would act as a launching pad

for both the countries to outgrow their mutual distrust and apprehension.

The Saudis were worried because the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the massive American build up in the Indian ocean which had had an unsettling effect in the volatile Gulf region which was vital for Saudi's own security. They were also nervous about relying almost exclusively on American military protection which would be useful if an Iran-type of situation were to arise in Saudi Arabia. A section in the Saudi hierarchy was also of the opinion that there was no harm in cultivating a country like India which could exert some influence on the USSR instead of courting only Pakistan in an extremely uncertain situation.¹⁴³

India, on its part, wanted to impress upon Saudi Arabia the need to use Saudi influence to find local solutions to regional problems without outside interference. India also hoped that improved relations with Saudi Arabia would act as some constraint on the Saudi inclination to partly underwrite the Pak arm purchases.¹⁴⁴

PRINCE FAISAL'S VISIT TO INDIA, APRIL 1981

It was against this background that the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal visited New Delhi in April 1981. It was the first such trip by a ranking member of the Saudi royal family after King Saud's visit 25 years earlier. The visit

emphasised the commonalty of approach of both countries to a number of mutually important issues.

Both the countries agreed that the Afghan issue should be resolved leading to the elimination of "foreign military presence".¹⁴⁵ The Prince told the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Narasimha Rao that Saudi Arabia was opposed to the establishment of foreign military bases in the Gulf and in Saudi Arabia. Both agreed that the Afghan problem should be solved through political negotiations.¹⁴⁶ It was also emphasised that bilateral ties should be expanded and diversified "on the basis of mutual respect, non-interference in each other's affairs and for mutual benefit".¹⁴⁷

Later, at a press conference,¹⁴⁸ Prince Faisal said that his country did not view her bilateral relations with any country in the light of her ties with a third country. Admitting Saudi Arabia's close relationship with Pakistan in a number of fields including military, he asserted that his country would like to have close ties with India on their "own value". He denied reports that two Pakistani divisions were stationed in Saudi Arabia.

It was quite obvious that India failed to get the sort of assurance that it was looking for from Prince Faisal in relation to Pak-Saudi relations particularly in the military sphere. Nor did Saudi Arabia share India's concern in relation to Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. Answering a specific question regarding Pakistan's nuclear bomb, he said Pakistan

had denied such reports and "We have no reasons not to accept Pakistan's denial".

Though India and Saudi Arabia agreed on a number of issues in general terms, the divergence in their approach became apparent when it came to specifics. For instance, both agreed on a political solution regarding Afghanistan. But Saudi Arabia would do nothing either to stop or curtail Western assistance to the Afghan resistance as a first step in that direction. Nor was Saudi Arabia particularly receptive to Indian misgivings regarding Saudi financing of Pakistan's military acquisitions from the U.S. in response to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The Indian argument that it would create tensions in the region cut no ice with the Saudis.

MRS. GANDHI'S VISIT TO RIYADH, APRIL 1982

Mrs. Gandhi visited Riyadh in April 1982, the first by an Indian Prime Minister after Nehru's visit to the Kingdom way back in 1956. Though Mrs. Gandhi herself described her visit as "very successful" and as heralding a "new chapter" in relations between the two countries, the visit seemed to be of little more than symbolic value. However, as one Saudi paper put it, the end of a long "communication gap" was a welcome gain in itself.¹⁴⁹

The Joint Communique issued at the end of Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Saudi Arabia reflected a general agreement on a variety of issues but little else. On the contentious issue of Afghanistan, "the two sides called for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question on the basis of the withdrawal of all foreign troops, strict observance of the principles of non-intervention and non-interference, and full respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-aligned status of Afghanistan and its membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference".¹⁵⁰ However, the fact that precious little was said about how it could be achieved was indicative of the fact that the two sides merely agreed to disagree on the specifics.

Though it was agreed that "the security and stability of the Gulf area is the responsibility of the Gulf states only, without any foreign interference or intervention", the unstated fact was that few Gulf states were in a position to defend themselves without outside help.

More remarkably, both sides "recognised that the stability and security of the Gulf region and that of the Indian sub-continent were closely interlinked. "This was an implicit acknowledgement that just as India had a legitimate concern in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia too had a stake in the Indian sub-continent. But in real terms, neither had the capability to pursue their interests much beyond their borders, legitimate or otherwise.

Later, at a press conference in Riyadh,¹⁵¹ Mrs.Gandhi defended India's approach to the Afghan issue. She said: "Our view is that there should be no foreign intervention, military or subversive or of any other kind. We have expressed our views very clearly, both privately and publicly, to the Soviet leaders about the presence of their troops in Afghanistan, but have refrained from condemning them. If one condemned them, one would have to condemn all those who were interfering in other parts of the world in various ways".

The closely controlled Saudi press did acknowledge India's independent role and positive influence in international affairs. In the opinion of the "Saudi Gazette", "India represents the safety-lever and the curbing power to check foreign ambitions wanting to reclamp colonial domination on some of the Third World countries though in a different garb and through a new technique".¹⁵²

According to "Al Riyadh", "Mrs.Gandhi's visit was significant to Saudi Arabia as it comes at a very crucial time with Soviet forces in Afghanistan and the US fleet in the Indian Ocean".¹⁵³

It need to be emphasised that the visit failed to elevate the limited political understanding that had already been established between the two countries to a new level. This was so because the general agreement on issues could not be extended to specific measures required to deal with any

given issue. However, both countries displayed a certain maturity and sagacity in their approach to each other which enabled them to set aside minor irritants in their relations and emphasise and concentrate on those areas where their broad interests coincided in the long-run. As one newspaper commented, Mrs.Gandhi's visit appeared "to have given the two countries an opportunity to break out of the restrictive relationship they had got locked in to as a result of those old attitudes and suspicions".¹⁵⁴

The visit, also, did not result in any substantial economic agreements which was a shade disappointing. Nevertheless, "It was perhaps appropriate in the context of the larger purpose behind Mrs.Gandhi's visit that bilateral economic cooperation should have been accorded somewhat secondary importance".¹⁵⁵

To sum up, India failed to take advantage of certain early trends in Saudi policies which were complementary to those of India in relation to the Middle East thereby lost an early opportunity of developing a positive relationship with the Saudi Kingdom. India's own reservations about Saudi religious orthodoxy and political conservatism made it throw most of its support behind Nasser which only further alienated Saudi Arabia.

India also failed to realise that Saudi Arabia's intimate links with Pakistan in the 70s and 80s were based on concrete national interests of both the countries and had

little to do with religious affinity between them. India's undue emphasis on the religious factor made it treat Saudi Arabia almost as a lost cause for a considerable period of time which betrayed a lack of deep and intelligent understanding of the politics of the Arab world on the part of the Indian policy makers and placed artificial limitations on the growth of Indo-Saudi relations for decades.

It goes without saying that India's fixation with Pakistan, exaggerated fears about the emergence of an Islamic bloc cramped India's diplomatic style in the Middle East. Besides, Nehru's strong preference in favour of nonalignment and Nasser needlessly alienated the so called conservative states in the region with whom India had no bilateral disputes whatsoever. Consequently, India's policy towards the region became ideologically rigid and politically diffident and resulted in avoidable distortions and angularities.

It is time India took a fresh look at its policy towards the Middle East in view of the momentous changes that occurred in the South Asian and the Middle Eastern regions in the post-1971 period and adjust its policies accordingly. India's claims to a regional role would gain credibility and substance only if India sheds some of her self-imposed inhibitions and begins to play a much more confident and positive role in a region which has been of utmost importance to her in the past and would continue to be so in future.

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CHAPTER 4

INDIA'S SECURITY AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The fact that the Indian subcontinent has always had a vital link with the Middle East in security and strategic terms is borne out by both geography and history. This chapter seeks to critically evaluate the threat perceptions of the Indian policy makers in relation to the Middle East after independence, the assumptions which underlay such perceptions and the strategies and policies they adopted to counter the same. This will be done in two parts, the first dealing with India's security concerns and responses in the region till the Bangladesh war in 1971 and the second thereafter.

The eastern Arab landmass constitutes a link between three continents, namely Asia, Africa and Europe. This region has variously been described as "the gateway of Asia and Africa" and the "backdoor of Europe" by geostrategists. Consequently, this region has been a hotbed of international rivalry throughout recorded history. When the Suez Canal which linked the Red Sea with the Mediterranean was opened in 1869, "the Arab world became the nerve-center of international communications, both over land and sea".¹

The British policy of preserving the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century was primarily meant to safeguard its lines of communications to India from her European rivals. In fact,

throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the region became a bone of contention among all major powers who had their covetous eyes on India. "Whether it was the British anxiety over the security of the imperial communication lines, Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, Tsarist Russia's drive towards the Persian Gulf or the German *drang nach Osten*, the ultimate object had invariably been India".²

Valentine Chirol, an Englishman, underscored the importance of the Middle East in India's defence calculations when he defined the region as consisting of "those regions of Asia which extend to the borders of India, and which are consequently bound up with the problems of Indian political as well as military defences".³

INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS AND POLICIES IN MIDDLE EAST TILL 1971

It goes without saying that one of the fundamental concerns that governed India's policy towards the region was security. Nehru was acutely aware of this fact when he told the Constituent Assembly in March 1949: "If you have to consider any question affecting the Middle East, India inevitably comes into the picture".⁴

While the Middle East would have been an important region for India's security concerns under any circumstances, the

partition of India and the creation of an exclusively Islamic state, Pakistan, in the subcontinent and the bad blood that accompanied it made the Indian political leadership particularly sensitive to a region which was not only predominantly Muslim but also had geographical contiguity and close cultural ties with Pakistan.

While Pakistan has always been and will always be a very important factor in India's security calculations in relation to the Middle East, it must be mentioned that India's security concerns in the region were by no means confined to it. In fact, it will be argued that India's exaggerated attention to the Pakistani factor over the years rather cramped its approach to the security issues in the region which impinged on India's own safety and security.⁵ As a result, India's security policy to the region became rather self-conscious and overcautious which, in turn, made it rather weak, unimaginative and largely ineffectual.

FEARS OF AN ISLAMIC BLOC

There were two major security concerns for India in the Middle East in the 50s and 60s which were primarily Pak-related. The first was the possible emergence of a Pak-inspired Islamic bloc to the detriment and discomfiture of India's security. Nehru admitted to a veteran journalist Durga Das that one of the principal reasons why he tried to

cultivate progressive Arab leaders was to "counterbalance the conservative Muslim bloc, which stretched from Pakistan to Jordan and posed a threat to India's security and secularism".⁶

Predictably, Pakistan did make an assiduous effort to forge an Islamic alliance among the Muslim states of the Middle East in the late 40s and early 50s. However, Pakistani efforts came to nothing for a variety of reasons.⁷ It was Pakistan's disappointment and disillusionment with Pan-Islamism as a means of achieving its political objectives that primarily prompted it to plump for the Western alliance in the mid-50s.

THE BAGHDAD PACT, 1955

The second major security concern that haunted the Indian policy makers during this period was Pakistan's joining of the Baghdad Pact in 1955. The Baghdad Pact, undoubtedly, constituted the most important challenge to India's security concerns in the Middle East in the 50s. The Pact was the result of the British drive to forge a military alliance among the Muslim countries of the region in order to safeguard its imperial interests, particularly oil and the Pakistani drive to bring about an Islamic grouping in the region as a counterpoise to India. "While the former

threatened to bring the cold war between the East and the West to India's door step, the latter sought to isolate India from a region so vital to its security and economic well-being. By 1955, the two forces converged, and the Baghdad Pact was born".⁸

Apart from his general opposition to military Pacts, Nehru reacted very sharply to the Baghdad Pact primarily because he saw a potential but real threat to India's security from it. Nehru told the Lok Sabha⁹ in March, 1956: "... SEATO and the Baghdad Pact, apart from being basically in the wrong direction, affect us intimately. In a sense, they tend to encircle us".

He was quite sure as to Pakistan's motives in joining the Pact. "But surely, nobody here imagines that the Pakistan Government entered into this Pact because it expected some imminent or distant invasion or aggression from the Soviet Union. The Pakistan news papers and the statements of responsible people in Pakistan make it perfectly clear that they have joined this Pact because of India".

He was, however, "quite sure that the other members of the Baghdad Pact have no hostility to India...". He was also "prepared to accept completely the assurance given to me by the leaders of the United States of America. I am quite sure they did not mean ill to us".

Nevertheless, Nehru was quite disturbed by the possible security implications that these Pacts could have for India.

His first fear was that "Countries get interlocked with one another, each pulls in a different direction and in a crisis they are pulled away in a direction they never thought of going". Secondly, he was also worried about Pakistan's ability to cause mischief by taking advantage of its membership of these Pacts. "The danger is that any odd member of one of these pacts can set in motion something which would gradually pull in not only the members of the pact, but some other interrelated pact of which they are common members".

"That is why, both for larger reasons and for the narrow reason of self-interest, we have taken exception to SEATO and the Baghdad Pact" he explained.

But in purely military terms, the Baghdad Pact failed to pose the sort of threat to India that Nehru imagined or feared it could for a variety of reasons. First, the Pakistani attempt to broaden the definition of aggression by insisting that the threat to the Pact members could emanate from "any source other than the Communist nations" did not cut much ice with the US and Britain.¹⁰

Secondly, the Baghdad Pact failed to develop along the lines of the NATO for various reasons. It failed to agree, unlike the NATO, that aggression against any member country would be construed as aggression against all. It also failed to raise a formidable military force under a unified command. As a result, the cooperation among the Baghdad Pact

countries was confined to joint military exercises and the like. When the coup in Baghdad in 1958 installed a radical Baa'thist regime in power, the Pact more or less ceased to exist.

Nehru, explaining the larger reason behind the collapse of the Baghdad Pact in the Lok Sabha in Aug. 1958 said: "The major fact in West Asia is the growth of Arab nationalism in a very powerful, resurgent way.... This fact, which was patent, was neither liked nor appreciated by many powers, and an attempt was made to split the Arab countries, in fact, Arab nationalism".

"While the Governments carried on a cold war against each other, the people in almost every Arab country were powerfully affected by this tide of Arab nationalism. Thus, in the countries associated with the Baghdad Pact, there was a hiatus between the Governments looking in another direction and rather ranged against this spirit of Arab nationalism. How big this hiatus was can be seen from the coup d'etat in Baghdad... ".11

NON-PAK SECURITY CONCERNS

Though Indian policy makers exaggerated the role of Pakistan and Islam in relation to India's security concerns in the Middle East, there were other important security considerations for India in the region which had little to do with

either Pakistan or Islam. "Closely connected with India's security interests was the question of the international communication lines which lie across the Arab world".¹²

Even in ancient and medieval times, trade between the Indian subcontinent and Europe was carried through the Arab lands both on land and by sea. It was the unreliability of these routes because of the unsettled conditions in the region during the 15th century that prompted Vasco da Gama to discover a sea route to India. However, when the Suez Canal was thrown open to international traffic in 1869, the Middle Eastern route regained its significance.

The strategic significance of the Suez Canal for India's physical and economic well-being need not be overemphasised.

"The Suez Canal indeed cut down the maritime distance between Bombay and London by 4500 miles and in course of time became the veritable life-line of world trade. About three-fourths of India's import and export trade passed through the Suez Canal".¹³ Besides, the Middle Eastern region became an important halting station for India's air services to the West.

The vital importance of this waterway for India's economic plans in general and trade and commerce in particular was driven home in a telling fashion both during the Suez crisis in 1956 and the six-day Arab -Israeli war in 1967 when the Suez Canal was closed temporarily.

During the Suez crisis in 1956, Nehru was quite open about

India's vital interest in the normal operation of the Suez Canal. He told the Lok Sabha in Aug. 1956: "India is not a disinterested party. She is a principal user of this water-way, and her economic life and development is not unaffected by the dispute, not to speak of worse developments, in regard to it".¹⁴

The then Minister of External Affairs Mr. Krishna Menon explained to the Lok Sabha in much more detail in March, 1957, India's vital stake in the Suez Canal. He emphasised that "the Suez Canal to a certain extent is much more our life-line than it may be the life-line of the Western countries. In the autumn last year, 70 percent of our exports and 69 percent of our imports passed through the Canal. This country carried somewhere about 650,000 tonnage through the Canal in that twelve-month period. Therefore, the re-opening which is vital to the progress of our Five Year Plans, to our economic life and to our food prices, is a matter of great concern to us".¹⁵

The story was not much different when the Suez Canal was closed to all traffic following the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967. The then Commerce Minister Mr. Dinesh Singh told the Rajya Sabha in July 1967 that judging from the previous year's exports, the freight charges for 1967 might go up by roughly Rs. 1.8 crores per month as a result of surcharge levied by shipping companies following the closure of the Suez Canal. He further said that if the closure of the Canal

was for a short period, no assistance might be necessary to the exporting industries. If the closure was for a long period, assistance might be necessary and the Government would consider it then.¹⁶

The closure of the Canal also seriously affected India's food supplies from the US. The week-long detour round the Cape of Good Hope by ships carrying foodgrains to India disrupted their even supply at a critical juncture.¹⁷

Despite the fact that the normal operation of the Suez Canal was in the vital interest of India, she failed to contribute much towards that end primarily for two reasons. First, India refused to take any initiative to solve the Arab-Israeli dispute in view of Arab refusal to recognise and negotiate with Israel which made repeated conflicts and repeated closure of the Suez Canal almost inevitable. Secondly, obtaining the cooperation and goodwill of Israel was also necessary for the normal functioning of the Suez Canal. India's decision to more or less ignore Israel diplomatically made any such possibility rather remote. Nor should it be forgotten that Israel could have been used as an alternative transit point for Indian economic dealings with the West in case of extreme emergencies. In fact, Israel offered transit facilities to India through Israel for India's trade with the West which, it was said, could have saved India Rs. 38 crores a year in freight charges.¹⁸ But, India remained more or less a passive spectator, except during the earlier

Suez Crisis in 1956, in relation to an issue which was of great and direct importance to her.

THE INDO-PAK WAR OF 1965 AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The first real test of India's fears and suspicions in relation to Pakistan's ability to garner support in the Middle East, particularly in the military sphere, in any possible conflict with India came in Sept. 1965 when war broke out between the two countries over Kashmir. Kashmir is the only Muslim majority state in India and Pakistan did try her best to give the conflict a communal colour in order to gain the support and sympathy of the Muslim Middle East.

While the diplomatic support to Pakistan from the Middle Eastern countries during the war was substantial, the same could not be said of military assistance. Among the Middle Eastern countries which provided material assistance to Pakistan during the conflict, Iran, perhaps, was the most important. Even Iran's material assistance to Pakistan was rather modest and limited. It supplied Pakistan with jet-fuel, gasoline and some small arms and ammunition.¹⁹

On the other hand, the Shah, in private, urged Ayub Khan to bring the hostilities to an end. More significantly, the Shah made no attempt to interrupt Iran's oil supplies to India. He even sent one of his ministers to India on a friendly visit when the war was still on. Thus, the military

assistance that the Middle Eastern states provided to Pakistan during the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965 was almost negligible.

THE 1971 BANGLADESH WAR AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The Indo-Pak war in Dec. 1971 over the Bangladesh issue again saw the Middle Eastern states throw their diplomatic weight behind Pakistan but little else. Iran once again turned out to be the Middle Eastern country most concerned about the developments in the subcontinent and provided considerable material assistance to Pakistan. In fact, India was so concerned about the possible Iranian assistance to Pakistan that it made no secret of the fact that it expected the Indo-Soviet Treaty to serve as a deterrent as much against possible Chinese intervention as against covert threat of large scale arms transfer from Iran to Pakistan. 20It was also reported that the USSR deployed troops along the Iranian border in order to deter the Shah from helping Pakistan in its war with India over Bangladesh in late 1971.

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The extent of Iranian help to Pakistan during the Indo-Pak conflict became clear when Pakistan issued a communique on 8 May, 1973 on the subject. During the conflict, the entire fleet of Pakistan's Civilian aircraft took shelter in Iran and they were allowed to fly essential supplies to Pakistan

from there. Iran also sent fire-fighting equipment and experts when oil tanks in Karachi were set ablaze. Iran allowed the passage of strategic materials to Pakistan through its territory. It also supplied certain items in critical shortage including ammunition and aircraft and helped in maritime-reconnaissance.²²

Nevertheless, Iran, despite the threats to interrupt oil supplies to India,²³ chose not to carry out the threat. More significantly, Iran resisted Pakistani pressures to activate the CENTO to provide legal basis for Iran's assistance to Pakistan. Iran also did not indulge in any direct provocation nor interfere with the overflights of Indian aircraft.²⁴ As one scholar remarked, "Iran's support in the 1971 war, remained verbal, moral and diplomatic and underscored the fact that this was the most that RCD states could do for each other".²⁵

In addition to Iran, a few Middle Eastern countries provided token assistance to Pakistan during the conflict. However, it is suffice to say that the material assistance that Pakistan received from the Muslim countries of the Middle East during the Bangladesh war was neither substantial nor decisive and proved to be of little more than symbolic value.

The Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 exposed certain fallacies that seemed to have governed India's security policy towards the Middle East till then. First, India's misgivings that

Pakistan would be able to gain the support of the Middle Eastern countries on the basis of Islamic solidarity in any conflict with India proved to be rather unwarranted and grossly exaggerated. The professions of Islamic solidarity on these occasions proved to be little more than rhetoric. Secondly, It also became very clear during these two wars that each Middle Eastern country weighed these conflicts in terms of its national interests and acted on that basis alone. For instance, Iran was the country which provided most assistance to Pakistan during these wars primarily because it considered Pakistan's continued existence as a viable state to be in Iran's national interest not as an expression of Islamic solidarity. Thirdly and lastly, there seemed to be very few countries in the Middle East which were capable of and willing to provide the sort of help to Pakistan which could tilt the scales in its favour in its conflict with India.

Besides, "India has neutralised the potential for active Middle Eastern or Gulf States' support to Pakistan in the latter's disputes with India, through an unwavering Indian alignment behind Arab-Islamic causes in the international forums. Minor forms of support - such as token arms and sympathetic statements provided (to) Pakistan - have been ignored to maintain and stabilise the larger framework of good relations with the Middle East and Persian Gulf states".²⁶

INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE MIDDLE EAST SINCE 1971

The Indo-Pak war in Dec. 1971 over the Bangladesh issue and the subsequent dismemberment of Pakistan constitutes a watershed in India's strategic perspective in relation to the Middle Eastern region.

At one level, India's strategic gains were substantial. India won a moral victory over the US, a political victory over China and a decisive military victory over Pakistan. With the separation of Bangladesh, Pakistan was cut to half of its previous size, resources and population and it was reduced to one tenth of India's size. With the loss of its Eastern wing, Pakistan lost its strategic relevance for SEATO. From being the largest Muslim country in the world in terms of population, the population of what remained of Pakistan roughly equalled that of Muslims in India. Moreover, as a direct consequence of the Bangladesh crisis, "even Pakistan's tomorrow seemed uncertain as regional and separatist elements in the new Pakistan became bolder".²⁷

On the other hand, India's victory over Pakistan was as much military as it was psychological. For the first time since independence, India was able to rid herself of her unhealthy preoccupation with Pakistan and look beyond the subcontinent for a role commensurate with her size and resources. In fact, "India emerged as a dominant power in South Asia, with

no formidable competition in sight".²⁸

Moreover, India's "north eastern flank no longer raised a serious security problem for its military strategists".²⁹

India, in the event of another war Pakistan, need no longer worry about fighting a two front war. Besides, with the collapse of East Pakistan, the secessionist movements in north east India also received a serious jolt. It was also widely believed that it was the Bangladesh crisis that prompted Sheik Abdullah to come to some sort of political understanding with Mrs.Gandhi over Kashmir in 1975.³⁰

However, at another level, Pakistan's strategic position was considerably strengthened. The separation of East Pakistan "has resulted in a more concentrated Pakistani defence system...".³¹

Moreover, Pakistan's policy towards the Middle East, since the secession of East Pakistan became "more concerted and coordinated within the framework of a calculated strategy than it has ever been before".³²

In fact, the Pakistani President Z.A. Bhutto "effectively employed personal diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy and succeeded in winning overwhelming political and diplomatic support from the countries of the Middle East for Pakistan's stand on the unresolved issues emanating from the war of December 1971".³³ Bhutto toured eight Middle Eastern countries in Jan. 1972 and followed it up with another fourteen in May-June of the same year. Countries like Iran,

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the UAE did not recognise Bangladesh till Pakistan recognised it in Feb. 1974 as a token of support to Pakistan.

Given the close cultural and ethnic links between Pakistan and the Middle East, it is but natural that Pakistan tends to look towards the latter for support and sustenance. Moreover, "Pakistan enjoys a special position vis-a-vis this region by virtue of the fact that she occupies the sensitive transitional zone which links the Middle East with South Asia".³⁴

At this critical juncture, the relationship between South Asia and the Middle East underwent a fundamental transformation as a result of the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the oil embargo that followed it and the subsequent steep rise in oil prices. "By 1968, ... it was hard to assess which region - the Middle East or South Asia - was more influential in relation to the other or within the wider international system. By the end of 1973, however, there was no longer ambiguity. In five years, the historic balance of relationships had decisively turned, and seems likely to hold for the foreseeable future. The Middle Eastern - Iranian area had become the source of substantial influences playing on South Asia; there were virtually no influences at work in the opposite direction. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the Arab oil embargo had changed the situation in a flash".³⁵

The two super powers also got much more closely involved in

the region, the US primarily because of oil and the USSR because of the proximity of the region, a development which could not but have caused disquiet in India.

The accumulation of petro-dollars in the Middle East in the mid- 70s following the oil bonanza resulted in the large-scale purchase of sophisticated and advanced arms by a number of states in the region, particularly Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya and some of the Gulf sheikhdoms. The Western countries, hard hit by the steep rise in oil prices were only too keen to supply these countries with extremely advanced weapon systems for economic gain regardless of the political consequences of such arms transfers to a region as volatile as the Middle East. "The security implications (for India) of these trends are more long-term and arise from Pakistan's military ties and involvements in the region, from the strategic interests and arms transfer policies of the great powers in both the Middle East and South Asia, and from various economic dependencies and linkages that have developed between the states of the subcontinent and the oil-exporting Islamic states".³⁶

Hence, Pakistan started looming large in India's defence calculations in relation to the Middle East much more in the 70s than any time before. The most important reason for this was the fact that quite a few Middle Eastern countries envisaged their own national interests to coincide with those of Pakistan much more during this period than ever

before."Whatever the causes, Pakistan and the Middle East have converged economically, politically and psychologically. While the relationship is still evolving, it rests on a mutuality of interests that promises to be enduring".³⁷ As a result, most of the security issues that confronted India in the 70s and 80s in relation to the Middle East were in some way or another Pak-related as we shall see in the course of this narration.

PAKISTAN AND IRAN

The dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 despite its membership of the NATO and the SEATO had an unsettling effect on the Shah of Iran. He considered the survival of the remainder of Pakistan as vital to Iran's own security and stability primarily for two reasons. Firstly, Iran wanted a stable eastern flank and Pakistani support in its rivalry with the Arab states. Secondly, any secessionist tendencies in Baluchistan could cause disquiet in his own considerable Baluchi minority. In a broader context, he suspected and feared the development of a Moscow - New Delhi - Kabul - Baghdad axis to the detriment of Iran's security and regional ambitions.

Consequently, the Shah made a public and unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Pakistan in 1972 by stating that any attack on Pakistan would be considered an

attack on Iran itself.³⁸ Besides, the accumulation of petro-dollars following the hike in oil prices in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war sent Iran on a massive arms purchase spree. In four years between 1974 and 1978, Iran spent \$ 36 billion on arms purchases compared to about \$ 12 billion spent by India during the same period.³⁹ There was a genuine concern in India that Iran might transfer some of these advanced weapon systems to Pakistan in any future conflict between India and Pakistan. The then Foreign Minister of India Mr. Swaran Singh told the Indian Parliament in March 1973 that India's future defence planning would take into account not only the impact of new American arms supplies to Pakistan , but also the possibility of arms being transferred to Pakistan through third countries such as Iran.⁴⁰

However, the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in the world in general and in the regions of South Asia and the Middle East in particular in the 70s saw the convergence of the economic and strategic interests of India and Iran which were emerging as preponderant powers in their respective regions.

"Indeed certain common features are discernible in Iran's and India's security scenarios and their behaviour as dominant regional powers. Both attach the greatest possible value to the attainment of security autonomy, and both have to live with dependence on external security for a fairly

long time. Both are therefore anxious to maintain and assert as much independence and initiative as possible within the framework of their relationship with their respective patron power".⁴¹

So both India and Iran saw the need to coordinate their foreign policies both to exploit the complementarity of their economic and security interests at the regional level and also to avoid any possible friction if not conflict between them. India convinced the Shah of Iran that it had a vested interest in the integrity of what remained of Pakistan and the Shah, in turn, categorically stated that unless India attacked Pakistan, it would not face, either directly or indirectly, the arms Iran was acquiring.⁴² Isolating the Pakistan-factor from the Indo-Iranian relations enabled Mrs. Gandhi and the Shah to strive "to unite Iran and India in strategic cooperation for shared objectives in Southwest and South Asia".⁴³

The Indo-Iranian strategic understanding was so sound that India chose to look rather indulgently at the acquisition of fancy weapon systems by the Shah and the latter readily accepted India's rationale behind its Peaceful Nuclear Explosion in May 1974. The Shah's grandiose scheme for the eventual emergence of an Indian Ocean Economic Community⁴⁴ and his desire for close collaboration between the navies of India and Iran⁴⁵ to keep the Indian Ocean free from outside encroachment underscored this understanding.

However, the strategic understanding and cooperation between India and Iran more or less collapsed with the fall of the Shah and the triumph of Islamic revolution under the spiritual leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.⁴⁶ At one level, the Islamic revolution in Iran improved India's security environment. Khomeini's Iran embraced Nonalignment which asserted Iran's independent foreign policy posture. This resulted in the drying up of supplies of sophisticated weapons from the West, particularly the US. It also meant the end of military collaboration between Iran and Pakistan under the CENTO as Iran withdrew from the CENTO following the Islamic revolution. Khomeini's Iran was also less ambitious in its foreign policy endeavours compared to that of Shah both by design and necessity. The Islamic regime was completely pre-occupied with its domestic problems and as such had little time for external affairs nor did it have the same sort of ambition that the Shah had for Iran. Moreover, the tacit strategic support that Iran had from the U.S for its regional role under the Shah was neither sought by Iran nor extended by the U.S in the changed circumstances.

However, the security scenario for India exacerbated at another level following the Islamic revolution in Iran. The panicky reaction of the U.S to the fall of Shah, one of the "twin pillars" of U.S policy in the Middle East and the subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan increased and

upgraded U.S military presence in the Indian Ocean which was of great concern to India. Iran's alleged proclivities to export Islamic revolution also caused considerable disquiet in India, given its large but poorly integrated Muslim minority. Lastly, the Iran-Iraq war also put India in a diplomatic tight-spot. It had developed considerable political understanding and a fruitful economic relationship with both which now seemed to be in some danger. Besides, "The lessons of the Iran-Iraq war suggested the possibility of Arab financing of Pakistani wars against India in the future".⁴⁷

Furthermore, the eclipse of Shah made it imperative for the U.S to shift its focus to its other "pillar" in the region, Saudi Arabia, which again had serious security implications for India.

PAKISTAN AND SAUDI ARABIA

With the fall of the Shah, Iran ceased to be the American sponsored policeman of the Middle Eastern region. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 which closely followed on the heels of the Islamic revolution in Iran and the ouster of the Shah sent panic waves in the entire Middle East and revived the historical fears of the West in relation to the Soviet drive towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. As a result, Saudi Arabia became a willing

strategic partner and the linchpin of U.S policy in the region in the 80s in order to contain the possible Soviet penetration of the region. The Reagan administration's adoption of Pakistan as a frontline state so that it could act as a conduit to American arms to Afghan resistance brought the U.S, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan together in a strategic drive to insulate the region from further Soviet encroachments.

The Saudi-Pak cooperation in the military sphere did not begin with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan but did elevate it to a new level. The initial contacts for cooperation were made in 1963 though the first formal agreement was reached in 1967 wherein Pakistan agreed to send a small number of its officers to oversee the development of the Saudi army and the airforce.⁴⁸ The Saudis were reportedly impressed by the performance of the Pakistani armed forces against a much bigger Indian army during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Generally speaking, The Saudi-Pak military links remained rather modest and sporadic in the 70s. However, the beginning of the 80s saw the close convergence of Saudi-Pak security interests for a variety of reasons.

The Islamic revolution in Iran posed an ideological threat to the Saudi royal family as well as Zia ul Haq's military regime in Pakistan. Khomeini's branding of these two regimes as un-Islamic and his repeated calls for their overthrow caused great concern in both the countries. Saudi Arabia was

particularly concerned about the disquiet in the Shia population in its eastern province following Khomeini's triumph in Iran. Pakistan too had a substantial Shia population and was concerned about the impact of Khomeini's exhortations on them. More importantly, even when the Shah was at the helm in Iran, Pakistan took with a pinch of salt Iranian assurances in relation to Pakistan's security and integrity. With the advent of Khomeini, Pakistan lost even that psychological assurance. In fact, "Pakistani-Iran relations since 1978 have had a deep-seated but unarticulated element of fear and unpredictability".⁴⁹

The Marxist coup in Afghanistan in 1978 which was closely followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 caused considerable panic both in Riyadh and Islamabad. The Saudis construed the Soviet action as a possible first step in the USSR's inexorable march towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan, Saudis feared, could embolden the Marxist regime in South Yemen whose hand was suspected in the attack of Muslim zealots on the Grand Mosque in Mecca, to indulge in further mischief.

The outbreak of hostilities between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 further underlined Saudi Arabia's military vulnerability despite her large arsenal. As for as Pakistan was concerned, the Soviet presence on its western borders was genuinely unsettling in view of the Indo-Soviet treaty and

its own less than satisfactory relations with Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also shared a deep sense of disappointment and disenchantment with the U.S policy towards its allies and friends. The Saudis were particularly appalled by the American inability or unwillingness to stand by the Shah of Iran and help him in any tangible way in his hour of crisis despite the fact that he was the pillar of U.S policy in the region. Pakistan's disappointment with the American response to its wars with India in 1965 and 1971 hardly needs any repetition. "Faced with mounting threats, Riyadh and Islamabad thus embarked on a two-track policy of calling on Washington's help while augmenting their security through joint moves".⁵⁰

In addition to these general reasons, there were a number of other smaller but not insignificant factors that facilitated the expansion and consolidation of military links between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. For Saudis, given their own acute manpower shortage and the political liabilities that accompanied the direct American presence in the kingdom, the Pakistanis seemed to provide the best way out. Pakistan possessed a significant military establishment and a well-trained and professional army which was tested in the battle-field. While Pakistanis were Muslims, they were not Arabs. As such, it was easier to isolate them from local politics.

For Pakistanis, the Saudi connection, in addition to the

financial rewards that it provided gave them access to highly advanced U.S weaponry which they could not lay their hands on either because of monetary considerations or for political reasons. Pakistanis also could have hoped that the increasing Pak-Saudi military cooperation "might expand the U.S Saudi commitment, either implicitly or explicitly, to the defense of Pakistan".⁵¹

However, information regarding the specifics of Saudi-Pak military collaboration are understandably sparse and nebulous. It was widely believed that Saudi Arabia, at least partly, financed Pakistan's purchase of forty F-16 fighters from the U.S.⁵²

It was also reported that in 1980, the two countries reached an agreement wherein Pakistan agreed to station two of its army divisions in Saudi Arabia which would be equipped and maintained by the latter. Besides, two compensating divisions were to be raised in Pakistan which again would be financed by Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, there was little evidence to suggest that the agreement was actually implemented. Pakistan had only two brigades in Saudi Arabia as of 1985.⁵³ It was also widely rumoured that Pakistan declined to accede to the Saudi request to withdraw Shias from its troops stationed in Saudi Arabia on the grounds that such action would divide her professional army along sectarian lines and was hence unacceptable.

It goes without saying that Pak-Saudi military links caused

great consternation and concern in New Delhi. The Washington-Riyadh-Islamabad axis not only facilitated Pakistani access to sophisticated American weapons but also greatly reduced its financial burden by the Saudi underwriting of the costs of these weapons to a substantial extent. It left India with no alternative but to match the Pakistani weapon acquisitions which put the already overstretched Indian economy under great pressure. Besides, India also had to contend with the possibility that Saudi Arabia could transfer part of her newly acquired arms to Pakistan in any future confrontation between India and Pakistan.

Moreover, the politico-diplomatic significance of Pak-Saudi military ties was not lost upon India. "It serves notice on India and the Soviet Union that although Pakistan may not be a match against either one militarily, it now has a powerful ally with economic and political clout. The cost of any attack thus becomes higher than it has been in the recent past ... ".⁵⁴

THE "ISLAMIC BOMB"

Another major source of concern to India in the 70s in relation to the Middle East was the potential threat posed by what was dubbed as the "Islamic bomb" to Indian strategic environment in general and national security in particular. The "Islamic bomb" was so called because it was alleged to

be the product of Pakistan's technology and the Middle Eastern finance in the 70s. If true, this development could pose serious security concern to Indian policy makers and radically transform the strategic equation between South Asia and the Middle East mostly to India's disadvantage. In analysing this issue, we would confine ourselves to the origins of the "Islamic bomb", how "Islamic" it is and what are the ways and means in which India could counter this potential threat in the context of her own nuclear ambitions and capabilities.

Pakistan's quest for nuclear technology began in 1953 with the establishment of Pakistan Atomic Energy Committee which was soon upgraded to an Atomic Energy Commission primarily in response to India's expanding interest and activities in relation to nuclear technology. However, Pakistan's nuclear programme moved at a snail's pace until it came under the influence of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.⁵⁵ Bhutto himself referred to the crucial role that he played in the development of Pakistan's nuclear programme from his death cell in 1979. "I have been actively associated with the nuclear programme of Pakistan from October 1958 to July 1977, a span of nineteen years. I was concerned directly with the subject as Foreign Minister, as Minister for Fuel, Power and Natural resources and as Minister in charge of Atomic Energy. When I took charge of Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission, it was no more than a signboard of an office. It was only a name. As-

siduously and with great determination, I put my entire vitality behind the task of acquiring nuclear capability for my country". And he went on to add, "Due to my singular efforts, Pakistan acquired the infra-structure and the potential of nuclear capability".⁵⁶

However, Bhutto's nuclear ambitions for Pakistan could be traced back to a much earlier period. Addressing the National Assembly of Pakistan in 1965, Bhutto asserted: "If India builds the bomb, we will eat grass and leaves, even go hungry. But we will get one of our own, we have no alternative".⁵⁷

Bhutto's zeal for nuclear capability for Pakistan, apart from rivalry with India and security considerations, seemed to have a technological dimension as well. In his book The Myth of Independence, he argues: "India is unlikely to concede nuclear monopoly to others and, judging from her own nuclear programme and her diplomatic activities ... it appears that she is determined to proceed with her plans to detonate a nuclear bomb. If Pakistan restricts or suspends her nuclear programme, it would not only enable India to blackmail Pakistan with her nuclear advantage, but would impose a crippling limitation on the development of Pakistan's science and technology".⁵⁸

Bhutto took over a dismembered and distraught Pakistan in December 1971 following the crisis in East Pakistan and the subsequent Indian military intervention which gave birth to

Bangladesh. It was probably this humiliating defeat that crystallised Bhutto's thinking on the nuclear issue and set him irreversibly on the course to nuclear capability.

According to Bhutto's former press secretary Khaled Hasan, Bhutto convened a meeting of Pakistan's top scientists in Multan in January 1972, one month after he took over as President. He reminded the gathering of Pakistan's humiliating defeat a month earlier at the Indian hands and his determination to see Pakistan acquire nuclear capability.⁵⁹ Soon after, Bhutto took personal political charge of Pakistan's Atomic Energy Commission. In 1973, talks were initiated with France for setting up a reprocessing plant at Chasma near Rawalpindi. Thus, Pakistan's quest for nuclear capability started in right earnest well before India's nuclear test.

India's nuclear explosion on May 18, 1974 at Pokhran in Rajasthan not far from the Pakistani border, however, proved to be a mixed blessing for Pakistan. It acted as a spur and a convenient excuse for Pakistan to accelerate its own nuclear programme and justify it to its own people. On the other hand, it made it much more difficult for Pakistan to obtain external assistance in relation to both nuclear technology and materials because Western countries, following India's nuclear test, tightened the laws concerning nuclear proliferation considerably and kept a close watch on nuclear threshold states. Pakistan, which started negotiating with

France in 1973 to buy a plutonium-reprocessing plant despite American pressures not to do so signed a deal for the same in 1976. However, France backed out of the deal in 1978 under American pressure. While negotiations were going on with France, Pakistan thought it unwise to put all its nuclear eggs in one basket. Hence, as an alternative strategy, a determined bid was made to pursue the uranium-enrichment path to nuclear capability which culminated in the establishment of the Kahuta plant in which Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, popularly known as the father of the "Islamic bomb" is said to have played a vital role.⁶⁰

Bhutto's political reaction to India's nuclear explosion was also uncompromising and defiant. He told a press conference in Lahore on 19 May, 1974: "Pakistan would never succumb to nuclear blackmail by India. The people of Pakistan would never accept Indian hegemony or domination in the subcontinent. Neither would it compromise its position on the right of the people of Kashmir to decide their own future".

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Pakistan also tried to use India's nuclear test to its advantage in other ways as well. Bhutto warned the U.S that unless it lifted its embargo on arms sales to Pakistan, Islamabad would be forced to match India's nuclear capability. In the event, the U.S did lift its arms embargo on Pakistan, if only partially. Pakistan also suggested an Indo-Israeli collaboration in the nuclear test conducted by India in or-

der to rouse the feelings of the Middle Eastern nations (to whom Pakistan was moving closer politically) against India's nuclear test and probably also as a ploy to attract Middle eastern petro-dollars to assist Pakistan's own nuclear effort.

It was Bhutto's own reference to the "Islamic" nature of the Pakistani bomb in his testimony from his death-cell that added a new and ominous dimension to Pakistani nuclear programme. "The Christian, Jewish and Hindu civilizations have this capability. Only the Islamic civilization was without it, but that position was about to change".⁶² While there is no conclusive evidence to establish a definite link between Pakistan's nuclear programme and the Middle Eastern petro-dollars, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence not to brush aside such reports lightly. For instance, there were persistent reports that Libya was underwriting Pakistan's purchase of uranium from Niger.⁶³ There were also reports of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Turkey assisting Pak nuclear activities.⁶⁴

Be that as it may, the Pakistani professions of commitment to peaceful uses of nuclear technology started sounding rather hollow following a series of incidents in the 80s. In 1984, Nazir Vaid, a Pakistani national was caught trying to smuggle 50 electronic switches out of the U.S which could be used for detonating nuclear bombs and was deported.⁶⁵ At about the same time, Pakistan tried to purchase high-speed

industrial cameras from the West which could be used for designing the conventional explosive trigger of a nuclear bomb.⁶⁶ Again in July 1987, one Arshad Pervez was arrested in Philadelphia on charges of trying to smuggle 'maraging' steel to Pakistan which could be used in the rotors of centrifuges.⁶⁷

In an interview with an Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar in early 1987, Dr. Khan confirmed that Pakistan did possess nuclear capability.⁶⁸ "What the CIA has been saying about our possessing the bomb is correct and so is the speculation of some foreign newspapers".⁶⁹ More importantly, Dr. Khan was quite outspoken about the implications of Pak bomb for India. "Nobody can undo Pakistan or take us for granted. We are here to stay and let it be clear that we shall use the bomb if our existence is threatened". He went on to add, "I personally think that the only way to stop nuclear warfare between us (India and Pakistan) is to come to an agreement".⁷⁰ Hinting at the futility of any Indian attack on Kahuta, Dr. Khan asserted, "India knows what price it would have to pay for attacking Kahuta. In any case, the plant is well protected and we have not put our eggs in one basket".⁷¹

Though Dr. Khan vehemently denied giving the interview later, the timing of the interview was of utmost significance. The Pakistanis knew that the real worth of nuclear weapons was their "deterrence value" not their "use value". The interview came at a time when the Indian army

was conducting a massive military exercise called "Operation Brasstacks" close to the Pak border and there was persistent speculation of a preemptive strike on Kahuta either by India alone or in collaboration with Israel. It was also probably a hint to the Americans not to link the nuclear issue with the American aid package to Pakistan by presenting the Americans with a nuclear fait accompli.

Now let us examine India's possible response to the Pakistani bomb in the context of India's own nuclear policies and ambitions. It is obvious that India sees in technology the means to achieve economic progress and military might which would revive India's political fortune and enable it to deal with the developed countries on equal terms and possibly from a position of strength.

Nehru was acutely conscious of this when he observed in 1948, "Consider the past four hundred years of history, the world developed a new source of power, that is steam-- the steam engine and the like-- and the Industrial age came in. India with all her many virtues did not develop that source of power. It became a backward country in that sense; it became a slave country because of thatnow we are facing the atomic age; we are on the verge of it....if we are to remain abreast in the world as a nation which keeps ahead of things, we must develop this atomic energy..."⁷²

Nehru was also aware of India's potential strength and hence it was all the more important for her to take the lead

in science and technology. "If we do not set about it now, taking advantage of the processes that go towards the making of atomic energy...we will be left behind....That is not good enough for any country, least of all to a country with the vast potential and strength that India possesses."73

It goes without saying that India's nuclear space programmes are amongst the most sophisticated, advanced and comprehensive in the world and are designed to and capable of meeting India's civilian and military needs simultaneously.74

In view of India's nuclear capabilities as demonstrated by the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) at Pokhran in 1974 and the simultaneous development of Rocket technology which would provide India, if it so desired with the required delivery systems, the inevitable question that arises is whether India would exercise its nuclear option and cross the nuclear threshold or would it persist with its current policy of voluntary nuclear abstention.

In trying to answer this question, first we must examine the basic attitude of India's political leadership to the issue of application and adaptation of science for military purposes. From the very beginning, the Indian leaders have not been either innocent of or averse to the idea of military applications of science. Nehru made this quite clear as far back as 1946. "As long as the world is constituted as it is, every country will have to devise and use

the latest scientific devices for its protection. I have no doubt India will develop her scientific researches and I hope Indian scientists will use the atomic force for constructive purposes. But if India is threatened she will inevitably try to defend herself by all means at her disposal."⁷⁵

He, more or less, reiterated this position while participating in the Constituent Assembly Debates in 1948: "Indeed, I think we must develop it [nuclear technology] for peaceful purposes....of course, if we are compelled as a nation to use it for other purposes, possibly no pious sentiments of any of us will stop the nation from using it that way."⁷⁶ Thus the Indian leaders, since independence, despite their pacifist and peaceful professions, have been aware of the military potential of scientific knowledge and had no qualms about making use of it if the situation demanded it.

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It must also be borne in mind that India's nuclear development, in general terms, has been independent of China's or much later of Pakistan's nuclear threat. India's quest for nuclear technology began, in right earnest, in 1948 when neither China nor Pakistan were factors in India's nuclear calculations. Moreover, India has had serious disagreements with the super powers on the question of instituting international controls on the nuclear programmes of developing countries. "India...viewed international con-

trols in atomic energy as downright dangerous and discriminatory, and as a form of economic and technological colonialism."⁷⁸

Thus, India's nuclear outlook has been that of a potential great power which is capable of and determined to follow an independent path in terms of its own national interests and perceptions in defiance of objections from other great powers. While China and Pakistan continue to influence India's nuclear policy, they have never been fundamental to it, though they could serve as convenient excuses when India decides to go nuclear.

It must also be noted that Indian nuclear and space programmes are unlikely to be inhibited by the economic costs involved. They have wide-ranging economic and civilian applications which tend to defray the costs in the long run by contributing to the overall development of the nation. India can also make its nuclear and space programmes cost-effective by entering the international market for construction of nuclear plants or satellites for civilian purposes or by providing launching facilities particularly for Third World countries.

Secondly, the probable answer to this question must also be discussed in the context of the two major objectives that underlie and govern all of India's foreign policy endeavours namely the attainment of great power status and the security of the nation.

As we have already seen, it has been India's endeavour since independence to emerge as an independent and autonomous centre of power, an objective which it pursued with tenacity and relentlessness despite occasional setbacks and pitfalls. "The fact is that there has been a consistency in India's policies of national centralization and unification since independence, as well as a foreign policy that has been global in its objectives. Criticism from outsiders has not deflected India from its recognition of itself as a major nation that has achieved great power status."⁷⁹

"Indeed, the most precious element in the concept of non-alignment has been the instinctive affirmation of India's will to be genuinely independent and a source of influence in her own right. If this is the role that India wills to play, it is inevitable that she must strive to possess sufficient defensive military power, including limited nuclear capability, so that her image is not blurred by her vulnerability. It may sound strange to some, but it is true that limited nuclear armament has now become an inescapable requirement for the preservation of our real independence which constitutes the core of our non-alignment."⁸⁰

This leads us to the crucial and related question of security which has been a dominant theme of India's external posture ever since independence. Simply put, the question is can India remain non-aligned and non-nuclear and still cope

with the security threat? The answer, at least, in the long-run seems to be an emphatic no.

Let us now consider the options that are open to India if it chooses to remain non-nuclear. First, India can abandon its non-alignment and seek nuclear guarantees from the super power of its choice. Given India's experience in the matter in the 60s, this is easier said than done. Moreover, nuclear guarantees obtained even after a formal alignment have not been considered particularly effective or reliable by the Indians. To quote Mrs. Gandhi, "In the final analysis...the effectiveness of a nuclear shield would depend not on the spirit in which protected powers accepted it, but on the vital and national interests of the giver".

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Abandonment of non-alignment, may also prove to be too high a price for such unreliable nuclear guarantees. As we have already seen, nonalignment is fundamental to India's foreign policy. It is both a strategy and an outlook. It is the essence of India's existence and continuance as an independent and autonomous entity and its abandonment would simply mean that India could not and would not go it alone.

Giving up nonalignment may also have serious internal repercussions for India. The internal stimulus for non-alignment is much more important than the external one. This explains the survival and strengthening of nonalignment despite an abatement in the cold war. The delicate internal

balance which has been so assiduously built over the years on foreign policy issues in India may disappear giving room for significant internal bickering and strife which India can certainly do without.

If an aligned India is unlikely to get credible nuclear guarantees, there is little reason to believe that a non-aligned India would be able to do so. Hence, the logic of nonalignment inevitably leads India on the path of the development of nuclear weapons. If India were to achieve a credible nuclear deterrent, it would only strengthen and give substance and credence to its nonalignment. No credible nuclear umbrella would be provided to a nonaligned India. Nor could India's misgivings about being provided a credible nuclear shield even after alignment can be brushed aside lightly. Thus, alignment and development of nuclear weapons appear, at least, in the long-run to be mutually exclusive options for India. As Mrs. Gandhi made it clear in 1967, "We for our part may find ourselves having to take a nuclear decision at any moment and it is therefore not possible for us to tie our hands".⁸²

In other words, "In a wider framework, India's national role conceptions are those of a big state. They seek symbolic, universalist, and pragmatic gains. The search for independent political and military power is an inevitable concomitant of such societal self-images".⁸³

While India has been justifiably concerned about

Pakistan's nuclear programme, it is difficult for India to be self-righteous about it. India can not deny to Pakistan what it claims to be within its own right to pursue.

However, nuclear proliferation in South Asia might have serious implications to regional and even global security. It can undermine confidence in the nonproliferation regime and the will of the nuclear powers to maintain it. Given the strategic linkage between South Asia and the Middle East, it can suck in certain Middle Eastern states, particularly Israel in to the equation with unpredictable consequences. Alternatively, "The competition between Pakistan and India for political and economic advantages in the Middle East ... creates powerful albeit shortsighted temptations to use nuclear leverage in more substantial ways".⁸⁴

Nevertheless, at the subcontinental level, given the necessary political wisdom and will, India and Pakistan could come to some sort of modus vivendi which would spare the region of many apocalyptic predictions that have been made in relation to possible nuclear holocaust in the region. Possession of nuclear weapons by both India and Pakistan could eliminate both conventional and nuclear conflict between the two countries and initiate a process of negotiation as the only feasible way of settling bilateral disputes. The recent agreement between the two countries not to attack each other's nuclear installations is a step in that direction.

Nevertheless, the only practical way in which India can counter the threat of an "Islamic bomb", apart from keeping its own powder dry is to cultivate the Israeli option. Indo-Israeli interests converge in this crucial aspect and there is an urgent need for Indian policy makers to make Israel an integral part of their security thinking in relation to the Middle East.

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

Another major security concern of India in the 70s in relation to the Middle East was the growing tide of Islamic fundamentalism⁸⁵ in the region. India was always wary of Islamic groupings in the region and opposed them consistently and firmly ever since independence. However, the rise of Saudi Arabia as an economic super power in the region and the Islamic revolution in Iran towards the end of 70s posed more of an ideological rather than a political threat to many countries including India.⁸⁶

In the case of India, the threat is of considerable importance in the context of India's troubled secular polity, a large and vocal Muslim minority, the existence of an unfriendly and avowedly Islamic Pakistan and India's own delicate but substantial relations with the Muslim Middle East. In analysing this issue, we would strictly confine

ourselves to the nature of the threat that Islamic fundamentalism poses to India and a critical appraisal of the ways and means that the Indian leadership adopted to deal with it.

"One of the cardinal tenets of Islamic Fundamentalism is to protect the purity of Islamic precepts from the adulteration of speculative exercises. Related to fundamentalism is Islamic revival or resurgence, a renewed interest in Islam".

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However, in a multi-religious country like India which has been undergoing a sustained process of modernization since independence, any religious revivalism and orthodoxy could create serious problems and come in the way of political integration of various religious communities for national purposes.

Ever since independence, the policies and strategies adopted by the Indian political leadership to integrate the religious minorities, particularly Muslims, into the national mainstream have been rather half-hearted and diffident. The Pakistani factor and Hindu sensitivities to the Muslim Middle East in relation to the Indian Muslim minority put the Indian leadership on the defensive from the beginning.

The external props that the Indian National Congress resorted to in order to persuade the Muslims to join the national political mainstream before independence spilled over

in to the post-independence period was totally unnecessary and proved to be counterproductive in the long-run. The INC's support to anachronistic issues like Khilafat, frequent appeals to anti-imperial solidarity and vociferous demands for justice to Palestinians did touch a respondent chord among Indian Muslims.

But these were grossly inadequate to induce Indian Muslims to join the national mainstream because they did not address the most fundamental issue that was exercising the Muslim community in India i.e. the political status of Indian Muslims in India after the British departure. It was the INC's failure, whatever the reasons, to solve this basic problem that eventually led to the partition of India.

There is some justification for the INC to resort to these external and artificial props in desperation in the face of an active divide and rule policy of the British and the veto they exercised over granting independence to India on the ground of keeping communal peace. However, the failure of such policies before independence and the departure of the British from India should have alerted the Indian political leadership to the irrelevance and untenability of such policies after India's independence. But that was not to be.

Nehru not only considered secularism as fundamental to India's survival as one nation but also described it as his greatest contribution to independent India. Nevertheless,

Nehru failed to approach the issue head-on and left the job only half-done. The most striking failure of Nehru, in this sphere, was his reluctance and eventual failure to enact a common civil code for the entire country without which no country can realistically claim to have laid a sound basis for a secular society.

Admittedly, Nehru did have his reasons for not doing so. He was worried about the impact of such a measure on the Indian Muslim community which was experiencing a sense of psychological insecurity following partition and the communal violence that accompanied it. Nehru was also concerned that any attempt at domestic reform in relation the Muslims might give the conservative elements in the community an opportunity and a pretext to raise the slogan of Islam being in danger. Besides, he felt that "The fate of India is largely tied up with the Hindu outlook. If the present Hindu outlook does not change radically, I am quite sure that India is doomed. The Muslim outlook may be and, I think, is often worse. But it does not make very much difference to the future of India".⁸⁸

But in the event, Nehru was wrong and the Muslim outlook did make a difference. It gave the conservative elements among Hindus a potent and plausible argument to accuse Nehru of double standards and of pampering the Muslim minority. There were demands that Hindu personal law should also be left untouched by the government. The fact that no other religious

minority except the Muslims were given such a privilege made matters worse and there were accusations of appeasement. It also created the impression that Muslims were opposing and avoiding the family planning programme so vital to the nation's progress on religious grounds and hence their loyalty to the country was suspect. This, in turn, enabled the extremist elements among the Hindus to argue that Muslims would outnumber Hindus in due course in India and hence the latter should also oppose family planning.

As Dr. S. Gopal points out, "Paradoxically, in his efforts to make the Muslims feel at home in India, Nehru declined to enact a common civil code and insist on monogamy and rights of divorce, property and inheritance for all Indians of whatever faith. Nehru prided himself on what he had done for the emancipation of women, which was to him the test of a civilization; but he had to reconcile himself to the denial of equality, proclaimed by the constitution, to Muslim women. In the interests of unity and integration, this aspect of the social revolution, on which Nehru laid great store, was deliberately held back from completion".⁸⁹

It is difficult to agree with Dr. Gopal, at least in retrospect, that Nehru's lack of decisiveness in this regard was in the "interests of unity and integration". If anything, it had just the opposite effect. Nehru had the stature, appeal and the necessary trust among people, both Hindus and Muslims, to have pushed through such legislation. If

he could not do it, it is unfair to expect any of his successors to even touch it. Hence, a reform which Nehru himself considered to be of utmost importance was put more or less permanently in cold storage.

What was worse was the fact that the lesser and less scrupulous leaders that followed Nehru made the issue a political football to be kicked around for short-term electoral gains. Sending an official delegation to the Islamic Conference in Rabat in 1969 and parading India as the third or fourth largest Muslim country in the world were the results of such attitude. As B.G. Verghese so aptly pointed out "the tragedy is that while secularism means modernity, in regard to Indian Muslims the concept of secularism has been retrograde, tradition-bound, even superstitious".⁹⁰

Moreover, in the 70s serious compromises were made in relation to India's secular credentials for short term electoral gains. The government's inability or unwillingness to deal with the real problems facing the Muslim community in India such as economic and educational backwardness and unemployment and the cosmetic and almost comical measures it resorted to (like more Urdu teachers, more news print for Urdu newspapers more Qawalis on radio and TV) to curry their favour would be of no avail in the long run.⁹¹

On the eve of the general elections in December 1979, there were a series of dinners hosted by the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, Libya and other Arab countries in honour of Mrs.

Gandhi which could not be dismissed as coincidental. It is possible that either Mrs. Gandhi was trying to project her image and that of her party in a favourable light to the Indian Muslims or the Arab diplomats themselves were implicitly suggesting to the Muslim voters in India that they favour Mrs. Gandhi for the leadership of the country.

The editorial in one of the leading newspapers accurately portrayed the implications of these "political dinners". "The Muslim community, as one of our numerically and politically important minorities, deserves not only a fair but a generous deal, but any such arrangement arrived at with the patronage or support of a foreign government would be intolerable. It would be bad for the foreign government concerned and worse for the Muslim community in India and the local political leaders who promote or encourage such liaison in the name of building international bridges. The impact on members of the majority community of efforts to build an Islamic brotherhood across the oceans basically to gain a few million votes ... can prove to be disastrous".⁹²

There was also the case of conversion of Harijans to Islam in the village of Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu in the late 70s reportedly with Middle Eastern money which caused considerable communal tension in the country. The report of the Intelligence Bureau regarding the conversions was quite disturbing. It said: "The proselytising effort of the Muslim organizations and institutions has received a fillip because

of the inflow of money from the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries and the Pan-Islamic Agencies. Promises of jobs and scholarships in the Muslim countries and deputation of some of the more promising of the converts to places like Madina University for higher religious learning are being made. As an atmosphere favourable for conversions is created ... it is likely to attract more and more attention of the Muslim countries and foreign Islamic organizations".⁹³

However, even such a potentially explosive issue was used for narrow political gains without any regard for its long-term implications. The then Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. K. Karunakaran allowed two "black-listed" visitors from Kuwait, Hashim-al-Rifai and Yakub-al-Rifai to visit Kerala in January 1986 to keep his Muslim League partners in good humour despite the fact that their entry in to India was banned by the Home Ministry. Hashim-al-Rifai was the Chairman of the World Muslim Minority Community, an international Muslim organization. It was this organization that reported to have provided huge sums of money for the conversion of Harijans to Islam in Meenakshipuram.⁹⁴

The only real threat that Islamic Fundamentalism poses to India is that it could delay the integration of the Muslim community with the rest of the population for national purposes. It is a threat to the extent that it "distorts" and "disorients" the Indian Muslims.⁹⁵ However, the Islamic

fundamentalists in India work on the "periphery" of the Muslim community in India, not from its "core".⁹⁶

To sum up, while Islamic fundamentalism is "not a major concern", it is "always at the back of our mind".⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the best way to counter it is to address the real and material problems of the Muslims in order that they would be, psychologically and materially, in a position to resist fundamentalist appeals. The propensity for soft options and short-term gains of successive governments made India "more Islamic, in a very narrow way, than most Muslim countries".⁹⁸

The Shah Banu controversy is a case in point.⁹⁹ According to Vasant Sathe, an erstwhile Cabinet Minister in Rajiv Gandhi's Government, the reversal of the Supreme Court judgement made Rajiv's government lose credibility with both Hindus and Muslims. As he frankly stated "We ourselves are responsible for giving credence to this communal feeling because, in the name of secularism, we ourselves were not secular. In the name of pragmatism, the government had succumbed to fundamentalists".¹⁰⁰ What is needed is a bold and imaginative policy which emphasises long-term gains as opposed to short-term electoral benefits.

THE SOVIET INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 con-

stitutes a watershed in India's security perceptions in relation to the Middle East. In fact, it crystallised and aggravated most of the security concerns that India has had in relation to the region in the 70s. As a consequence of the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan, "the traditional strategic divide in South Asia- between Pakistan and India- was now meshed with the Soviet-U.S. divide in the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and indeed in the global arena".¹⁰¹ It heralded a "new cold war" between the two superpowers with all the attendant implications for India's security. President Carter made it very clear that "Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force".¹⁰² And the Carter Doctrine was born. The Carter administration went on to develop the concept of a "regional security framework" for Southwest Asia which envisaged a massive U.S. naval and military build-up in the Indian Ocean including Diego Garcia and some of the littoral states like Egypt, Oman, Kenya and Somalia.¹⁰³

It was clear that "the developments of 1980 marked a major threshold in the evolution of U.S. strategy in the region. Not only was the U.S. military presence at its highest level in history but there was also an underlying conviction that this region represented a major strategic zone of U.S. vital

interests, demanding both sustained attention at the highest levels of U.S. policy making and direct U.S. engagement in support of specifically U.S. interests".¹⁰⁴

More importantly for India, Pakistan became a "front line" state and once again a key member in the U.S. military strategy in containing further Soviet inroads into the region. In fact, Pak-U.S. relations were at a low ebb following the overthrow and hanging of Bhutto by his army Chief Zia ul Haq, the seizure of Grand Mosque in Mecca by Muslim fanatics which resulted in the burning down of American Embassy in Islamabad and the U.S. concern about Pakistani efforts to acquire nuclear capability which led to the termination of all U.S. military and economic aid to Pakistan in April 1979. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, however, changed all this. A two-year \$ 400 million package of aid was proposed by the Carter administration to Pakistan which was turned down by Zia as "peanuts". Nevertheless, negotiations continued between the two countries for Pakistan knew only too well that it was the only possible conduit of Western arms to the Afghan resistance after the fall of the Shah of Iran.

When Ronald Reagan took over as President in January 1981, he showed much less concern and sensitivity to Indian misgivings in relation to the proposed U.S. military aid to Pakistan than Carter did. Pakistan became a part of American "strategic consensus" vis-a-vis the USSR and in return the

Reagan administration announced a package of \$ 3.2 billion in economic and military aid to Pakistan over a six-year period including the sale of 40 F-16 aircraft. Besides, the Reagan administration virtually turned a blind eye to the Pakistani nuclear ambitions in order to forge a strategic alliance against the USSR when the Congress waived the provisions of the Symington Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act which would have prohibited such aid in the absence of progress on nonproliferation.

Another disturbing development, as far as India was concerned, was the intimate links, particularly in the security sphere, that Pakistan managed to establish with the Gulf states after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pak-Saudi military ties have already been discussed in some detail. Pakistan also managed to establish a military foothold in other Gulf states like Kuwait, the UAE and Oman. The Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, given their meagre manpower resources, would be in no position to intervene directly in any Indo-Pak war. However, the substantial financial resources that these states command and the availability of compatible U.S. supplied war material in these countries as well as Pakistan could make the costs prohibitively high for India in any future war with Pakistan.¹⁰⁵

India was also extremely concerned about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism as a consequence of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The Western trumpeting of the struggle be-

tween the Afghan resistance and the Soviet occupation forces as a "jihad" for short term gains and the close involvement of avowedly Islamic regimes like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan in it, India feared, could boomerang badly with serious implications for the whole region. Hence, "The possibility that an extremist Islamic government could take over in Kabul continues to excite very real Indian anxiety".

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There is very little doubt that India's rather subdued reaction to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan caused considerable consternation and disquiet in the Islamic world and "isolated India from the conservative Islamic countries of Southwest Asia".¹⁰⁷ These countries were already suspicious of India's treaty with the USSR and India's close political and economic ties with Iraq which had a similar treaty relationship with the Soviet Union. India's apparent acquiescence if not approval of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan¹⁰⁸ gave further credence to the charge that India was acting as USSR's cat's paw in the region.

India's stand on Afghanistan also made its position in the Nonaligned movement rather uncomfortable and awkward. While India's treaty with the USSR diluted her Nonaligned credentials considerably, India's perceived acquiescence to the Soviet occupation of a Nonaligned Afghanistan made matters worse.

Most importantly, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan

struck a mortal blow to India's newly acquired and somewhat grudgingly acknowledged status as a regional power. The Soviet action posed "an unprecedented threat to India's hard-earned status as South Asia's regional power, dismantling the favorable balance of regional power in South Asia that India had been able to bring about with its victory over Pakistan in the Bangladesh war in 1971, and the South Asian security regime erected on that balance".¹⁰⁹ It provided Pakistan with an opportunity to taunt India's inability to do anything about regional security in relation to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan despite India's self-proclaimed role as a dominant power in South Asia. It appeared as though India was over-anxious about her regional status without any stomach for corresponding responsibilities.

To sum up, India's threat perceptions in relation to the Middle East seem to exaggerate the importance of Islam in forging military alliances. However, the reality has been otherwise. Pakistan's increasing military links with Middle Eastern states in the 70s and 80s were, unlike before, based on mutuality of interests and as such tend to be more more enduring. Consequently, India need to evolve realistic and imaginative policies to counter these threats effectively.

India's traditional policy of supporting Arab causes in general and the Palestinian cause in particular is no longer adequate to counter the new and serious threats that could

emanate from the region in the changed circumstances of the 70s and 80s. For instance, neither India's pro-Arab stance nor consistent support to the Palestinian cause dissuaded Saudi Arabia from elevating its political and military relationship with Pakistan to new heights, in spite of Indian protests, in the late 70s and 80s following the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Nor does it appear that any of the Middle Eastern states share India's concern and anxiety about Pakistan's nuclear ambitions and this stance is unlikely to change no matter how strongly India supports the Arab causes.

Pak-Saudi security links and Pakistan's increasing role as a provider of security services including direct presence in the Gulf Sheikhdoms has to be watched closely by India. The possible nuclearization of Pakistan could have serious implications for the Middle East and rule out any soft options for India in this regard. Should such development lead to a nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan, there is every possibility that Middle Eastern countries could get sucked in to it in more than one way. Pakistan, given her limited resources, might be forced to depend more and more on the oil-rich countries of the Middle East to sustain such costly arms race with India. This may result in Pakistan playing a more direct and decisive role as a security provider in the region which could not but cause concern to India. Alternatively, it may place Pakistan under con-

siderable obligation and even pressure to transfer nuclear technology to any of the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Any such eventuality would invariably drag Israel into the picture. "The potential thus exists ... for some quite dramatic fusions of South Asian and Middle Eastern security interests as a result of developments in the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan".¹¹⁰

Given the seriousness and probability of these developments, India needs to take a bold and pragmatic view of the changing security scenario in relation to the Middle East. There seem to be only two dependable and realistic ways of dealing with the situation. One is to develop bilateral relations with the Middle Eastern states on mutuality of interests in order to discourage them, to the extent possible, from moving too close to Pakistan either politically or militarily. The second is to gradually upgrade India's relations with Israel, particularly in the security sphere where the interests of India and Israel seem to coincide, in order to demonstrate to the Middle Eastern states that India was not devoid of options in the region and it would make use of them if forced to do so.

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CHAPTER 5

INDIA'S ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

India's economic interaction with the Middle East has always been a factor in the calculations of Indian policy makers ever since independence. However, in this chapter, we would concentrate on India's economic relations with the region since the oil boom in the mid-70s. In doing so, an attempt would be made to evaluate the relative importance of economic factors vis-a-vis India's politico-strategic interests in the region. It would be argued that despite the substantial increase in India's economic stake in the region, India has more enduring political and security interests in the Middle East. While trying to put India's economic interests in the region in perspective, an attempt will be made to quantify India's economic dealings with the region and their importance in India's overall economic goals and strategies.

It is pertinent, at this stage, to make some general observations in relation to India's foreign economic policy before we proceed to deal with India's economic interaction with the Middle East in specific sectors. India is a large country with a huge population and fairly well-endowed with a variety of natural resources. As such, one need not overemphasise the importance of domestic market in India's plans for national development. "While there can be variations of emphasis, the centrality of the domestic market in India's developmental strategy cannot be denied. A con-

tinental economy of India's size has no structural compulsions to pursue a path of export-dominated growth, let alone export led growth. If it must still push its exports, it is because exports help pay for those critical inputs which are so necessary to build a national economy. In other words, exports are a means, not an end in themselves".¹

Secondly, India (or anyone else for that matter) neither anticipated the oil bonanza nor was it ready to take full advantage of it. It was, more or less an accident which caught India napping in an economic sense. In the short-run, it only served to expose the limitations and obsolescence of India's industrial structure.

Thirdly and lastly, self-sufficiency has been a central and long-standing goal of India's economic planning and development. As such, we need to examine India's economic ties with the Middle East in the light of this important objective of India's national endeavour.

Trade

India's trade with the Middle Eastern countries since the oil boom, though has gone up considerably in absolute terms, its share in the total imports of these countries has been remarkably small. Since the Indian businessmen enjoyed a large and well-protected domestic market, they hardly ever felt the urge or the need to export to the rest of the world on highly competitive

terms. As one World Bank official put it, "From the very beginning, the attitude of accepting exports as an integral part of policy has been missing in India".² So when the oil boom came in the mid-70s, India neither anticipated it nor was it ready for it.

Consequently, India failed to take full advantage of the buying spree that the oil rich Middle Eastern countries indulged in following the accumulation of petrodollars. A glance at Table 1 would make this crystal clear. In 1955, when the combined imports of the Middle Eastern countries totalled about \$ 1.4 billion, India's exports to these countries amounted to \$ 45 million - a mere 3.3 per cent of the total. In 1975, when the imports of these countries were valued at \$ 27 billion, India's share of it was \$ 694 million and its share in the total imports fell to 2.6 per cent. The decade after 1975, a period of phenomenal increase in the Middle Eastern imports from the rest of the world, India's share in it further declined to just 1 per cent.

Despite India's geographical proximity and age-old cultural and commercial ties with the region, India failed to penetrate the Middle Eastern markets to the extent it could have. The reasons for India's rather lack-lustre performance are many. The major reasons, however, are the inability of Indian exporters to ensure quality and delivery schedules at competitive prices. Poor packing is often mentioned as another factor. Besides, it has also been a matter of concern to the Indian Government that most of India's exports to the region continue to be perishable goods and

consumer items rather than engineering goods and durables that it would like to sell in larger quantities.³

LABOUR

India's labour exports to the Middle East have been substantial ever since the mid-70s. Table 2 depicts the steady increase in the annual labour outflows to the region from India which reached a peak in the mid-80s. Table 3, on the other hand, provides an estimate of the Indian migrant population in the Middle East between 1975 and 1987 when it reached its peak of about a million. However, "two important characteristics" distinguish the migration of Indians to the Middle East compared to the earlier migrants from India. Firstly, most of these migrants are at the "lower end of the spectrum of skills as also of incomes" whether in India before their departure or in their work place in the Middle East. Table 4 underlines this point in no uncertain terms. Secondly, an overwhelming proportion of these migrants are "temporary migrants" who would return to India after a definite period of work overseas, often not more than two years.⁴

Given the fact that the Indian economy has always had a large labour surplus and also the temporary nature of migration to the Middle East, the impact of the Middle Eastern migration on unemployment in India at a macro level is almost negligible. Moreover, it looks as though India's manpower exports to the Middle East have already reached a plateau. India has also been

encountering stiff competition from other labour exporting countries like South Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Philippines.

REMITTANCES

Closely related to India's labour outflows to the Middle East is the remittances that the Indian migrant labour has been sending home ever since the oil boom in the Middle East. Table 5 details the estimated composition of remittances to India from various sources between 1974 and 1985. It is obvious from the above Table that from a modest figure of Rs. 259 million and about 11 % of the total remittances in 1974-75, the Middle Eastern component of India's overseas remittances has increased dramatically thereafter and constituted more than 50 % ever since 1977-78.

It goes without saying that the Middle Eastern remittances constituted an important source of foreign exchange earnings for India in the late 70s and 80s. It played a considerable role in easing India's Balance of Payments situation and enabled it to enjoy a fairly large Foreign Exchange Reserves for considerable length of time.

However, it must be noted that the gross inflow of remittances constituted just 1.5 per cent of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the mid-80s when the remittances were at their peak.⁵ In the words of an Indian scholar, the Middle Eastern remittances had little more than a "cushioning effect" on India's Balance of Payments situation.⁶ Besides, the remittances from the Middle

East constituted not only the money remitted to support families while abroad but also "once-and-for-all repatriation of savings on return home" in view of the temporary nature of emigration to that region. This is one of the principal reasons for the huge remittances from the region during the period under consideration. It must also be borne in mind that greater part of India's Middle Eastern remittances were used up to pay for the oil imports from the Middle East. There are also people who are worried about the impact of the Middle Eastern remittances on Indian economy in the long run."Some disturbing trends are discernible which will have a more lasting impact on the (Indian) economy and on society than the crucial but temporary relief provided by this money in meeting the country's external payments obligations".⁷

OIL

India's dependency on the oil imports from the Middle Eastern countries constitutes an important segment of India's relations with the region. Tables 6, 7, and 8 depict India's country-wise import of crude oil from 1971-72 to 1985-86. As Table 6 indicates, India imported its crude oil requirements from 1971-72 to 1976-77 from five Middle Eastern countries, namely Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E. and Egypt. But as Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate, India thought it wise to diversify its oil imports from 1977-78 onwards for economic as well as political reasons. India's oil imports thereafter not only spread among more than a

dozen countries but also one-third of them were non-Middle Eastern countries.

India also, during the same period, made a vigorous and fairly successful effort to reduce its dependency on Middle Eastern oil both for economic and political reasons. Table 9 India's crude oil production between 1979-80 to 1986-87. Crude oil production in the seventies (1970-71 to 1980-81) had increased by 55 per cent, from 6.8 million tonnes to 10.51 million tonnes. In the next two years, output doubled to 21.1 million tonnes. A further 24 per cent increase was achieved in 1983-84 and production reached 26.0 million tonnes.⁸

During 1984-85, crude oil production increased by 11.4 per cent to 29.00 million tonnes. As a result of increased production of oil, the level of self-reliance in oil improved to about 70 per cent during 1980-85.⁹

It should also be remembered that India has never had a problem in relation to oil supplies as such. Even during the two Indo-Pak wars in 1965 and 1971 when the political support of the Middle Eastern countries to Pakistan was considerable, the oil supplies to India were never interrupted. India's basic problem was the high price of oil and the fact that it had to pay for it in hard currency. However, the Middle Eastern countries made it very clear from the very beginning that there was no question of a dual price system for oil, one for the developing countries and one for the rest. Hence, the future price of oil will always be determined by the market forces and India's political support to

the Arab causes would have no impact on it.

LOANS AND AID

It also instructing to see as to what extent India benefited from the Middle Eastern oil bonanza in terms of loans and aid. Table 10 makes it very clear that India's traditionally good relations with the Middle East did not cut much ice with the oil rich countries of the region so far as providing loans to India was concerned. As the above Table clearly illustrates, the Middle Eastern component of the total authorised loans that India has been able to obtain between 1974-79 to 1985-86 has never exceeded 5 per cent and as such is not very significant.

As far as aid is concerned, India has not been able to obtain a single dinar in the form of a grant as of 1986.10

CIVIL CONSTRUCTION AND INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS

As Table 11 makes it clear, India was one of the principal beneficiaries in relation to civil engineering and construction projects in the Middle East. India, enjoyed a natural advantage over her rivals in this area because of cheap labour and proximity of the region. However, the same can not be said of India's industrial projects in the region as Table 12 indicates. India's participation in the industrial projects in the region has been rather uneven and the demand also seems to be tapering

off a bit.

Although India did make considerable gains from the tremendous upsurge in the purchasing power of oil exporting countries in the Middle East following the steep rise in the price of oil in the mid-70s, "it was more in the nature of a spill-over than anything else. It was not the outcome of any concerted effort. Looking at these gains, it is generally lamented that India missed an opportunity".¹¹

Moreover, there is a need to appreciate the serious limitations, international as well as domestic, within which India had to respond to and take advantage of the Middle Eastern markets. In the international context, "it is not sufficiently recognised that the Arab Gulf market is, in its present orientation at any rate, closer to the Western market, whether in the matter of skills, technology, finance, or commerce. The entire industrial edifice is built on Western technology; the outlet or market for the hydro-carbon and petro-chemicals is in the West; and the investments too are from the West".¹² Consequently, "All their economic policies and management are, therefore, geared to respond to the changing nature and sensitivities of the Western market".¹³ It must be, therefore, pointed out that these structural limitations impose severe restrictions on India's efforts to increase its economic stake in the Middle East beyond a point.

There are also serious domestic constraints which would come in the way if India tries to expand its economic interaction with the Middle East in a big way. The Indian economy which has so far

largely developed around its large and protected domestic market is facing serious constraints in penetrating highly competitive international markets. "The obsolescence of its technological base is becoming more obvious with India's increasing desire to participate in the external market".¹⁴ It is difficult to envisage India overcoming this serious handicap at least in the shortrun given its institutional, financial and infrastructural constraints.

Above all, India's economic interaction with the Middle East should take in to account its own developmental priorities and strategies and should not be allowed to lead to distortions and scarcities in the domestic market.

All things considered, India's economic stake in the Middle East need to be seen in its proper perspective. The Middle Eastern oil boom was an accident. While it was extremely useful to India in the shortrun, its longterm viability and utility for India are doubtful. It looks as though it is a passing phase, an extended one at best. It only served to rationalise and justify India's traditional policy of friendship with the Middle Eastern states rather than being its outcome. India, in this sense, has more enduring political and security interests in the region. It should be remembered that India's policy was not fundamentally different even in the 50s and 60s when India's economic stake in the Middle East was less than substantial. Besides, India's economic breakthrough with major Middle Eastern countries followed political understanding and accommodation and not vice versa.

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TABLE 1

India's share in total imports of Middle Eastern countries: 1955 to 1985

| | Total imports by country US \$ millions | | | India's exports to each country US \$ millions | | | India's % share of exports to each country | | |
|--------------|--|--------|---------|--|-------|--------|--|------|-------|
| | 1955 | 1975 | 1985 | 1955 | 1975 | 1985 | 1955 | 1975 | 1985 |
| Bahrain | 174 | 1,198 | 3,159 | 4.8 | 21.0 | 32.5 | 2.76 | 1.75 | 1.03 |
| Iran | 337 | 10,343 | 11,635 | 11.0 | 325.0 | 77.5 | 3.26 | 3.14 | 0.67 |
| Iraq | 272 | 4,215 | 10,556 | 4.8 | 76.0 | 29.0 | 1.76 | 1.80 | 0.27 |
| Kuwait | 94 | 2,390 | 5,934 | 7.4 | 56.0 | 99.8 | 7.87 | 2.34 | 1.68 |
| Oman | 8 | 1,047 | 3,080 | 1.4 | 23.0 | 52.7 | 17.50 | 2.20 | 1.71 |
| Qatar | 17 | 410 | 1,162* | 2.9 | 13.0 | 26.5* | 17.06 | 3.17 | 2.28* |
| Saudi Arabia | 245 | 4,214 | 33,696* | 1.3 | 72.0 | 215.6* | 0.53 | 1.71 | 0.64* |
| UAE | NA | 2,669 | 7,043 | NA | 79.0 | 235.6 | NA | 2.96 | 3.35 |
| Yemen,North | 14 | 294 | 2,962 | NA | 19.0 | 21.8 | NA | 6.46 | 0.74 |
| Yemen,South | 210 | 313 | 1600 | 11.2 | 9.0 | 19.7 | 5.33 | 2.88 | 1.23 |
| Total | 1,371 | 27,093 | 80,827 | 44.8 | 694.0 | 810.7 | 3.27 | 2.76 | 1.00 |

*1984

Source: South, March, 1988, p.33.

TABLE 2

ANNUAL LABOUR OUTFLOWS FROM INDIA: 1976-86

| Year | Number |
|------|--------|
| 1976 | 4200 |
| 1977 | 22900 |
| 1978 | 69000 |
| 1979 | 171000 |
| 1980 | 236200 |
| 1981 | 276000 |
| 1982 | 239545 |
| 1983 | 224995 |
| 1984 | 205922 |
| 1985 | 163035 |
| 1986 | 113649 |

Source: Ministry of Labour, Government of India, New Delhi.
The above figures refer to the number of Indian workers who obtained emigration clearance from the Protector General of Emigrants.

TABLE 3

ESTIMATES OF THE INDIAN MIGRANT POPULATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST: 1975-1987

| Country | 1975 | 1979 | 1983 | 1987 |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bahrain | 17250 | 26000 | 30000 | 77000 |
| Iraq | 7500 | 20000 | 50000 | 35000 |
| Kuwait | 32105 | 65000 | 115000 | 100000 |
| Libya | 1100 | 10000 | 40000 | 25000 |
| Oman | 38500 | 60000 | 100000 | 184000 |
| Qatar | 27800 | 30000 | 40000 | 50000 |
| S. Arabia | 34500 | 100000 | 270000 | 240000 |
| U.A.E. | 107500 | 152000 | 250000 | 225000 |
| Others | - | 38000 | 21000 | 21000 |
| Total | 266255 | 501000 | 916000 | 957000 |

Source: Deepak Nayyar, International Labour Migration from India: A Macro-Economic Analysis, Working Paper No.3, Asian Regional Programme on International Labour Migration, U.N. Development Programme, New Delhi, 1988, p.14.

TABLE 4

THE SKILL COMPOSITION OF LABOUR OUTFLOWS FROM INDIA: 1984-86

| | 1984 | | 1985 | | 1986 | |
|-------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| 1. Unskilled workres | 88575 | 43.0 | 55710 | 34.2 | 45577 | 40.1 |
| 2. Skilled workers | 86041 | 41.8 | 86037 | 52.8 | 53432 | 47.0 |
| 3. White-collar workers | 7477 | 3.6 | 5753 | 3.5 | 7351 | 6.5 |
| 4. High-skill workers | 6495 | 3.2 | 7378 | 4.5 | 5958 | 5.2 |
| 5. Others | 17361 | 8.4 | 8157 | 5.0 | 1331 | 1.2 |
| Total | 205922 | 100.0 | 163035 | 100.0 | 113649 | 100.0 |

Source: Ministry of Labour, Government of India, New Delhi.

TABLE 5

| Year | ESTIMATED COMPOSITION OF REMITTANCES TO INDIA BY ORIGIN: 1974-85. (Rs. Million) | | | | | | % of Middle Eastern Remittances |
|---------|---|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| | North America | Western Europe | Britain and Australia | Middle East Oil-exporting Countries | Other Developing Countries | Total Remittances | |
| 1973-74 | 432 | 189 | 442 | 74 | 287 | 1424 | 5.20 |
| 1974-75 | 670 | 349 | 443 | 259 | 481 | 2202 | 11.76 |
| 1975-76 | 1105 | 502 | 620 | 1316 | 694 | 4237 | 31.06 |
| 1976-77 | 1651 | 664 | 590 | 2704 | 628 | 6237 | 43.35 |
| 1977-78 | 1382 | 786 | 1026 | 4868 | 1111 | 9173 | 53.07 |
| 1978-79 | 1566 | 949 | 1013 | 4813 | 1097 | 9438 | 51.00 |
| 1979-80 | 2210 | 1192 | 1631 | 7904 | 1784 | 14721 | 53.69 |
| 1980-81 | 2100 | 1684 | 2548 | 12194 | 2771 | 21297 | 57.26 |
| 1981-82 | 3355 | 1866 | 2195 | 10975 | 2438 | 20829 | 52.69 |
| 1982-83 | 3363 | 1828 | 2494 | 13708 | 2915 | 24308 | 56.39 |
| 1983-84 | 3871 | 2119 | 2460 | 15000 | 3033 | 26483 | 56.64 |
| 1984-85 | 4589 | 2220 | 2550 | 17140 | 3320 | 29819 | 57.48 |

Source: Deepak Nayyar, op.cit., p.26.

Table 6

COUNTRY-WISE IMPORTS OF CRUDE OIL 1971-72 TO 1976-77 : Qty: '000 Tonnes ; Value: Rs./Crores

| Country | 1971-72 | | 1972-73 | | 1973-74 | | 1974-75 | | 1975-76 | | 1976-77 | |
|----------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value |
| Iran | 10014 | 116.12 | 9382 | 113.75 | 8885 | 250.04 | 6460 | 426.02 | 5782 | 451.09 | 5992 | 509.70 |
| Iraq | 40 | 0.51 | 213 | 3.71 | 1168 | 49.87 | 3099 | 217.22 | 2779 | 219.65 | 2984 | 247.01 |
| S.Arabia | 2897 | 30.39 | 2489 | 28.91 | 3821 | 116.48 | 4457 | 273.75 | 3817 | 279.17 | 4028 | 322.05 |
| U.A.E | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1246 | 101.85 | 967 | 90.92 |
| Egypt | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 77 | 6.23 |
| Total | 12951 | 147.02 | 12084 | 146.37 | 13874 | 416.39 | 14016 | 916.99 | 13624 | 1051.76 | 14048 | 1175.91 |

Source: Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals
Government of India, New Delhi.

TABLE 7
COUNTRY-WISE IMPORTS OF CRUDE OIL (Qty. 000 Tonnes : Value Rs. Crores)

| COUNTRY | 77-78 | | 78-79 | | 79-80 | | 80-81 | | 81-82 | | 82-83 | |
|-----------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value |
| Iran | 6191 | 537.99 | 3601 | 299.37 | 3714 | 574.34 | 5901 | 1281.91 | 5035 | 1246.09 | 3456 | 797.78 |
| Iraq | 3349 | 288.42 | 5981 | 530.07 | 5758 | 762.58 | 3629 | 675.94 | 1623 | 400.92 | 3445 | 876.45 |
| S. Arabia | 2941 | 242.34 | 2410 | 193.22 | 3017 | 352.25 | 2520 | 503.44 | 3680 | 815.68 | 6189 | 1431.81 |
| U.A.E. | 872 | 79.68 | 1117 | 99.88 | 1417 | 198.42 | 1553 | 326.39 | 1605 | 410.84 | 1196 | 307.42 |
| USSR | 962 | 82.90 | 1548 | 128.63 | 1998 | 275.61 | 1782 | 362.97 | 2000 | 493.30 | 2588 | 610.80 |
| Qatar | - | - | - | - | 217 | 24.33 | 19 | 3.99 | - | - | - | - |
| Kuwait | - | - | - | - | - | - | 419 | 92.93 | - | - | - | - |
| Egypt | 192 | 14.87 | - | - | - | - | 50 | 8.30 | - | - | - | - |
| Algeria | - | - | - | - | - | - | 195 | 53.29 | 792 | 225.52 | - | - |
| Malaysia | - | - | - | - | - | - | 51 | 11.42 | - | - | - | - |
| Mexico | - | - | - | - | - | - | 129 | 28.39 | - | - | - | - |
| Venezuela | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 563 | 144.03 | 75 | 19.48 |
| Total | 14507 | 1246.20 | 14657 | 1251.17 | 16121 | 2187.53 | 16248 | 3348.97 | 15298 | 3736.38 | 16949 | 4043.74 |

TABLE 8
COUNTRY-WISE IMPORTS OF CRUDE OIL (Qty. 000 Tonnes: Value Rs. Crores)

| | 1983-84 | | 84-85 | | 85-86 | |
|--------------|---------|---------|-------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value | Qty. | Value |
| Iran | 3340 | 743.42 | 1840 | 468.82 | 3456 | 868.32 |
| Iraq | 3500 | 778.36 | 2650 | 668.02 | 2147 | 541.05 |
| S. Arabia | 4600 | 1010.22 | 4520 | 1121.28 | 2398 | 595.14 |
| U.A.E. | 970 | 218.97 | 540 | 134.56 | 2173 | 503.70 |
| U.S.S.R. | 3430 | 761.70 | 3110 | 792.54 | 2570 | 647.25 |
| Egypt | - | - | - | - | 514 | 114.95 |
| Qatar | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kuwait | 50 | 10.27 | 370 | 82.58 | 302 | 59.77 |
| Oman | - | - | 610 | 162.54 | 1584 | 356.61 |
| Algeria | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Malaysia | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mexico | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Venezuela | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Neutral Zone | 80 | 18.11 | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 15970 | 3541.05 | 13640 | 3430.34 | 15144 | 3686.79 |

TABLE 9

INDIA'S CRUDE OIL PRODUCTION 1979-80 TO 1986-87
(Million Tonnes)

| 1979-80 | 80-81 | 81-82 | 82-83 | 83-84 | 84-85 | 85-86 | 86-87 |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 11.8 | 10.5 | 16.2 | 21.1 | 26.0 | 29.00 | 30.2 | 30.5 |

Source: Economic Survey 1984-85, p.17.
Economic Survey 1987-88, p.25.

TABLE 10

AUTHORISED LOANS FROM THE MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES
(Rs. Lakhs)

| | 1974-79 | 79-80 | 80-81 | 81-82 | 82-83 | 83-84 | 84-85 | 85-86 |
|---|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Iraq | 60.41 | 1.33 | 78.77 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Iran | 932.21 | 11.65 | 16.56 | - | - | - | - | - |
| U.A.E. | 52.50 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kuwait Fund | 51.24 | - | - | 52.50 | 30.03 | 30.66 | - | 14.70 |
| Saudi Arabia Fund | 58.96 | - | - | - | - | 17.23 | - | 28.72 |
| Abu Dhabi Fund | 12.92 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| OPEC Special Fund | 26.85 | 15.00 | 37.50 | - | 22.50 | 16.87 | - | - |
| Total | 1195.09 | 27.98 | 132.83 | 52.50 | 52.53 | 64.76 | - | 43.42 |
| Total authorised loans from all sources | 6592.80 | 779.94 | 2896.80 | 2160.06 | 1878.28 | 1473.58 | 2594.95 | 3301.50 |
| The % of Middle Eastern share | 18.13 | 3.59 | 4.59 | 2.43 | 2.80 | 4.39 | - | 1.32 |

Source: Report on Currency and Finance 1985-86, pp.156-157.
The Reserve Bank of India.

Table 11

Civil Engineering and Construction Projects (Rs. in Crores)

| | 1979 (Cumulative) | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 |
|---|----------------------|---------|---------|--------|
| Iraq | 526.19 | 1040.20 | 967.38 | 173.51 |
| Libya | 473.83 | 114.95 | 600.43 | 107.14 |
| PDRY | 25.69 | 1.40 | 0.77 | - |
| YAR | 61.60 | 72.30 | - | - |
| Qatar | 9.19 | - | 24.84 | 0.12 |
| Kuwait | 286.27 | 18.64 | - | 58.00 |
| Saudi Arabia | 43.15 | - | - | 5.71 |
| U.A.E. | 185.76 | 64.29 | 0.27 | 0.21 |
| Oman | 32.00 | 5.38 | 2.09 | - |
| Total | 1643.68 | 1317.16 | 1595.78 | 344.69 |
| Total for all countries including Middle East | 1684.61 | 1324.10 | 1604.81 | 421.06 |
| % of Middle Eastern share | 97.57 | 99.48 | 99.44 | 81.86 |

Source: Handbook of Export Statistics, 1981-82, Project Export Supplement, p.14, Engineering Export Promotion Council, Calcutta.

Table 12

| | Industrial Projects (Rs. Crores) | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | 1980 (Cumulative) | 80-81 | 81-82 | 82-83 |
| Iraq | 182.47 | - | - | - |
| Saudi Arabia | 106.82 | 15.12 | 23.99 | - |
| Libya | 194.28 | 17.44 | - | - |
| Iran | 4.15 | - | 16.17 | 2.47 |
| Kuwait | 4.67 | - | - | - |
| Qatar | 2.48 | - | - | - |
| Syria | - | - | 10.18 | 11.20 |
| Behrain | - | - | - | 1.80 |
| Total | 494.87 | 32.56 | 50.34 | 15.47 |
| Total for all countries including Middle East | 653.73 | 112.40 | 104.64 | 161.47 |
| % of Middle Eastern share | 75.70 | 28.97 | 48.11 | 9.58 |

Source: Handbook of Export Statistics, 1981-82,
Project Export Supplement, p.3, Engineering Export Promotion Council, Calcutta.

CHAPTER 6

INDO-ISRAELI RELATIONS

"If unrequited love exists in international relations, then this is the story of Israel as a suitor and India as an unresponsive partner".¹ This comment from the Israel Economist sums up the nature of Indo-Israeli relations in the last four decades. Ironically, there has been no conflict of interests - at least in bilateral terms - between the two countries over the years. In fact, at times there has been the odd convergence of interests. Nevertheless, Indo-Israeli relations failed to 'take-off'; they remained cool but correct, friendly but low-key, intermittent but secretive.

It is no exaggeration to say that Israel has been one of the 'blind-spots' of India's foreign policy endeavours. In certain respects, it demonstrates the falsity and far-fetchedness of some of the assumptions that underlie it. What is more remarkable, and perhaps disturbing, is that no attempt seems to have been made to undertake a thorough re-appraisal of India's policy to a region which has undergone momentous changes since the early seventies.

In the following pages, an attempt will be made to trace the Indian attitude to the Palestinian issue at the UN, the creation of the state of Israel and the factors and

personalities that governed India's subsequent policy towards the Jewish state in the light of India's own broad foreign policy objectives in the region. In addition, it would be argued that the changing politico-strategic scenario at the global, regional and the subcontinental levels since the early 70's has made it imperative for India to have a fresh look at the state and status of the Indo-Israeli relations in the context of India's overall policy to the region.

BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

India's policy towards Israel in the post-Independent phase appears to be a hang-over of the attitude of the Indian National Congress (hereafter as INC) towards the Palestinian question.² Its approach to the problem was influenced by moral, emotional as well as pragmatic considerations. While both Gandhi and Nehru had much sympathy for the long-suffering Jews, they considered it anything but moral to 'impose' the Jews on the reluctant Palestinians through unlimited immigration, and thereby reduce the Arabs to the status of second class citizens in their own land.

Nehru's response was emotional in the sense that he had participated in a prolonged and successful freedom struggle against British imperialism in India. He saw the Palestinian

question as part of the larger issue of colonialism. He inferred that the British were pitting Jewish 'religio-nationalism' against Arab nationalism, in order to retain their tenuous imperial possessions in the region.

At a more pragmatic level, the INC and its leaders could in no way support any nationalism which was exclusively based on religion. That would have been fundamentally at variance with their professed secular form of nationalism. In short, Nehru saw a parallel between the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan and the Zionist demand for a Jewish State on the one hand, and an opportunity for the British to resort to their age-old divide and rule policy, on the other.

It is against this background that we need to look at India's approach to the Palestinian issue, after the British (finding the problem intractable) washed their hands of it by referring the matter to the U.N.

The INC, on the other hand, was no longer a national movement to adopt a highly moralistic attitude to issues. It had, under the stewardship of Nehru, transformed itself into a full-fledged political party committed to the preservation and promotion of India's national interests in a balanced and pragmatic manner. But as it turned out, India's policy towards Israel, once it came in to existence, was neither balanced nor pragmatic and failed to subserve India's interests in the region, as we shall see in the course of

this chapter.

AT THE U.N.

On 2nd. April 1947, the U.K. requested that Palestine be placed on the agenda of the next regular session of the General Assembly, and "to summon, as soon as possible, a special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of constituting and instructing a special committee to prepare for the consideration" of the Palestinian problem.³ On 21st. and 22nd. April, five member countries (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and South Africa) requested the Secretary General to include an additional item on the agenda of the Special Session viz. "The termination of the Mandate over Palestine and the declaration of its independence".⁴

The Special Session of the General Assembly was convened on 28th. April 1947. After a lengthy discussion in the General Assembly, the First Committee took over the issue for a threadbare discussion. It decided to refer the issue to a Special Committee. However, the drafting of the resolution containing the Special Committee's terms of reference led to an acrimonious debate and procedural wrangling. Nevertheless, the General Assembly finally adopted a resolution constituting a Special Committee comprising eleven members, including India.⁵ The purpose was to "ascertain and record facts and to investigate all

questions and views relevant to the problem of Palestine." During these debates, the Indian representative Mr. Asaf Ali⁶ adopted a balanced and conciliatory approach to the Palestinian question. He described it as "a question, fundamentally, of human rights". He referred to Jews as "friends" and recalled that in India "the Jews have never suffered throughout their history", and "have always been treated with the best regard". Stating that the issue must be settled amicably by the Arabs and the Jews between themselves, he underlined the untenability of religion as the sole basis of statehood.

The Special Committee, known as the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), held its first meeting on 26th. May 1947 and finalised its report⁷ on 31st. August 1947. The UNSCOP Report contained twelve general recommendations of which eleven were unanimously approved. These eleven recommendations, inter alia, provided for the termination of the Mandate, independence for Palestine after a transition period under U.N. supervision, preservation of the Holy places, Minority rights, economic union, and an appeal to both the parties to eschew violence.

Furthermore, the Committee came up with two alternative plans:-

1. Plan of Partition with Economic Union: This was supported by seven members of the Committee (Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, The Netherlands, Peru, Sweden and

Uruguay), and came to be known as the '**Majority Plan**'. It envisaged the partition of Palestine into two states, one Arab and the other Jewish, with the internationalisation of Jerusalem under U.N. jurisdiction.

2. Federal State Plan: This was supported by three members (India, Iran and Yugoslavia), and came to be known as the '**Minority Plan**'. This plan called for an independent State of Palestine comprising an Arab state and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem as their capital. The federal State would have a federal government, and governments of Arab and Jewish states. The federal government would look after defence, foreign relations, and communications, whereas the Arab and Jewish governments would have full power over their respective local self-government. There was to be a single Palestinian nationality and citizenship, with guaranteed equal rights for all minorities and free access to the Holy places.

The General Assembly referred this report to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question on 23rd. Sept. 1947. The Ad Hoc Committee met from 25th. Sept. to 25th. Nov. 1947. Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who led the Indian delegation to the U.N. at the 1947 Session, explained India's stand on the Palestinian issue to the Ad Hoc Committee on 11th. Oct. 1947.

Mrs. Pandit asserted that peace in Palestine and the Middle East was of vital importance to India because of its

geographical proximity to the region. She insisted that the Palestinian question be separated from the issue of displaced Jews in Europe. The latter should be handled independently as a responsibility of the U.N. The fundamental issue was the termination of the Mandate without delay and the recognition of Palestine as an independent State. Palestine was predominantly an Arab country, and this predominance should not be altered to the disadvantage of the Arabs.

However, India had much sympathy for the Jews and was aware of their great contribution to world culture. Once Palestine became independent, the Jews could be given wide autonomy in areas where they were in the majority. India herself had suffered in the past because of the different interpretations of the promises of the governing power and hence she could not but sympathise with the Arab viewpoint.⁸

Later, the Indian representative at the U.N., Mr. Bajpai, argued against the contention that since the U.N. had approved of the partition of Palestine by two-thirds majority earlier, it should be consistent and endorse the plan in order to maintain its own dignity. He reminded the members that majorities were not 'infallible' and said that India 'fortunately' had not been among the majority. India had opposed partition earlier and did so now, because it was convinced by its own experience and by history that brute force never solved this kind of problem.⁹

However, as it turned out, the Zionists accepted the Majority Plan which partitioned Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. But the Arabs rejected both the Majority and Minority Plans because the former destroyed the territorial integrity of their homeland and placed a large Arab population in the proposed Jewish state as a permanent minority, and the latter because of its implicit partitionist content.

Three Sub-Committees were appointed and various modifications were suggested with a view to arrive at an agreed solution. Ultimately, however, the Majority Plan submitted by UNSCOP was adopted by the General Assembly with certain modifications.

The Plan was adopted by vote - 33 in favour, 13 against, and 10 abstentions. India voted against the Plan along with the Arab countries, and Afghanistan, Cuba, Greece, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. The U.K., Ethiopia, Yugoslavia, and several Latin American countries abstained. The other permanent members of the Security Council favoured the Plan.

Interestingly, the Indian delegation and its leader Mrs. Pandit, it appears, were disgusted when they were asked to vote against the partition Plan.¹⁰

THE FIRST RUMBLINGS

After the partition Plan was adopted, the Arab Higher Committee rejected the Plan and refused to cooperate in its implementation. Instead, it requested the British government to hand over Palestine to 'its Arab peoples'. Thereafter, sporadic attacks against the Jews began on 30th. Nov. 1947 and gradually spread to the rest of Palestine. The Arabs, with the help of about six to seven thousand volunteers from neighbouring countries seemed to have had the upper hand till the end of March 1948.

However, in early April 1948, the Israeli Haganah reversed this trend, scored a chain of victories, and consolidated the Jewish hold over the zones assigned to them by the General Assembly resolution. On 14th. May 1948, the Provisional Government with Ben Gurion as the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, issued its declaration of independence and announced the creation of the State of Israel.

On the 15th. May 1948, the regular armed forces of Trans-Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, along with a small force from Saudi Arabia were sent to Palestine to deal with the nascent State of Israel.

The Secretary General of the Arab League justified the Arab action on the ground that, with the end of the Mandate, there was no legally constituted body to administer law and

order, and to protect life and property in Palestine. The Arab states would hand over the government to the Palestinian Arabs once law and order was restored.

However, the Arab forces failed to achieve their military objectives as the Israelis, in the meantime, were able to acquire arms from Europe and elsewhere, and to recruit a number of Jewish veterans of World War II. After three broken truces, the General Armistice Agreements between Israel on the one hand and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria on the other were negotiated on the Greek island of Rhodes in Jan. 1949.

INDIA'S POSITION: A REFORMULATION

As can be seen from the foregoing analysis, India's attitude towards Palestine had gone through two distinct phases. First, it considered the Palestinian problem as a colonial question and regarded the elimination of colonialism (i. e. the ending of the British Mandate and the establishment of independent Palestine) as the fundamental issue. India regarded the Jewish question as a minority problem, to be settled by extending to the Jews the rights and safeguards normally accorded to minority groups in other countries. In this phase, its criticism was primarily directed against the British exploitation of the Arab-Jewish differences to perpetuate its rule over Palestine.

The second phase began with the large scale migration of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe to Palestine between 1935 and 1947 primarily because of Nazi persecution. While India profoundly sympathised with the suffering of the Jews, it was opposed to a separate State for Jews in Palestine on two grounds. First, it regarded any state exclusively based on religion as untenable. Secondly, it considered a remote historical connexion with the area as an insufficient ground for the creation of a separate Jewish State. Hence, it supported the Minority Plan, which envisaged a single Palestinian State based on federal principles.

The Indian approach to the Palestinian question contained two important elements. First, it opposed the partition of Palestine as a solution, which was consistent with her own domestic stand vis-a-vis the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. Hence, India advocated substantial autonomy for Jews in areas where they were in majority.

Secondly, it de-emphasised the religious basis of the conflict between the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine. Rather, it sought to project it as a political struggle, which again was calculated to dilute Pakistan's efforts to flaunt its Islamic credentials to gain support and sympathy in the region. Such a stand was also taken by India in order to subserve its domestic political requirements as a multi-religious state.

Explaining India's stand Nehru said, "we took up a

certain attitude in regard to it which was roughly a federal State with autonomous parts. It was opposed to both the other attitudes which were before the United Nations. One was partition which has now been adopted; the other was a unitary State. We suggested a federal State with, naturally, an Arab majority in charge of the Federal State but with autonomy for the other regions -- Jewish regions."

"After a great deal of thought we decided that this was not only a fair and equitable solution of the problem, but the only real solution of the problem. Any other solution would have meant fighting and conflict. Nevertheless our solution...did not find favour with most people in the United Nations. Some of the major powers were out for partition; they, therefore, pressed for it and ultimately got it. Others were so keen on the unitary State idea and were so sure of preventing partition at any rate or preventing a two-thirds majority in favour of partition that they did not accept our suggestion."

"When during the last few days somehow partition suddenly became inevitable and votes veered round to it, owing to the pressure of some of the powers, it was realised that the Indian solution was probably the best and an attempt was made in the last 48 hours to bring forward the Indian solution, not by us but by those who wanted a unitary State. It was then too late."

"I point this out to the House as an instance, that in

spite of considerable difficulty and being told by many of our friends on either side that we must line up this way or that, we refused to do so, and I have no doubt that the position we had taken was the right one and I still have no doubt that it would have brought about the best solution."¹¹

It should be noted here that the creation of Israel had followed the partition of the Indian sub-continent by just a few months and, this inevitably influenced and shaped India's perceptions and policies towards the region in general and towards Israel in particular.

When Israel applied to the U.N. for admission, the matter was put to vote in the General Assembly on 11th. May 1949. Israel was admitted to the membership of the U.N. by 37 votes to 12 with 9 abstentions. In addition to the six Arab States, India, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Ethiopia and Burma voted against the resolution. Explaining India's stand the Indian delegate stated that "India could not recognise an Israel which had been achieved through the force of arms and not through negotiations."¹²

India's reason for voting against Israel's admission to the U.N. is rather curious. It is an open secret that both the Arabs and Jews indulged in violence and terror. In fact, it was the Arabs who used armed force to overturn the U.N.'s decision to partition Palestine, whereas Israel had accepted the decision.

Moreover, the State of Israel was a reality by then and

could not be wished away. Hence, it would have been advisable for India to have either abstained or absented itself, rather than vote against Israel's admission. Such a decision would have been tactful, realistic and perhaps even fair.

It is this ambivalence on the part of India which later led to diplomatic hair-splitting with regard to the recognition of Israel and exchange of ambassadors which should have followed each other logically.

RECOGNITION ISSUE

Once the State of Israel was proclaimed, its Provisional Government approached various countries, including India, for recognition. This was confirmed by Nehru (while answering a question from H.V. Kamath) in the Constituent Assembly when he said that "a telegram containing the request for recognition was received from Mr. Moshe Shertok, the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Government of Israel, in the middle of June 1948 and the Government of India decided to defer consideration of this question".¹³

Explaining further he said, "The obvious reasons were that a new State was formed and we had to wait. Normally we should have to be satisfied and know exactly what the international position is before taking any step".¹⁴

Dr. B. V. Keskar, the Deputy Minister of External

Affairs, commenting on the delay in recognising Israel stated, "The Government of India are closely studying the situation and are keeping in touch with the latest developments. The Government of India will take appropriate decisions as soon as they consider the time is ripe for it".¹⁵

It is obvious from the above that the Indian Government delayed the recognition of Israel because the situation in the Middle East in relation to the Arab-Israeli dispute was still fluid and confusing. India thought it wise to delay the recognition rather than accord premature recognition to the Jewish State.

More importantly, India was aware of the hostile attitude of the Arab states to Israel and their refusal to recognise it. The Arab governments imposed economic sanctions against Israel and Egypt maintained that it was in a state of war with Israel. Egypt also felt that "Recognition of Israel would encourage the Zionists to pursue their aggression and their incursions on Arab rights...".¹⁶ Moreover, India had hopes of co-ordinating her foreign policy pursuits with these countries in the interest of Afro-Asian solidarity.

India also had to contend with the emerging 'Pakistan-factor', which, if not handled with care and delicacy, could complicate its relations with the Muslim Middle East. Pakistan refused to recognise Israel, and had declared that

"recognition of Israel was constitutionally wrong and morally unjust".¹⁷ Any hasty action on India's part could be used by Pakistan as a political stick with which to beat India.

Moreover, even after partition (and the communal holocaust that accompanied it), India was left with a large Muslim population which was still recovering from the physical and psychological wounds of partition and was going through an acute sense of insecurity. A Muslim member of the Indian Constituent Assembly, Begum Aizaz Rasul, was echoing these sentiments when she asked Nehru, "Will the Honourable Prime Minister keep in mind the fact that there are a large number of people living in the Indian Dominion whose wishes and sentiments in this regard should be kept in view regarding the recognition of the State of Israel, and they are definitely opposed to it ?"¹⁸ Nehru's reply was that the "Government have to keep in mind all the factors governing a particular situation."¹⁹

Answering another question in the Constituent Assembly in Dec. 1949 on the same issue, Nehru explained the reasoning of his government: "The Government of India have had the question of the recognition of Israel under constant review. Israel is now a member of the United Nations and its recognition by other member States cannot obviously be indefinitely deferred. The Government of India would like to act in this matter, which has been the subject of some

controversy among nations with whom we have friendly relations".²⁰ A few months later, he went a step further and stated that "the fact of Israel being there as a State is recognised by us."²¹

India's recognition of Israel eventually came on 17th. Sept. 1950, in the form of a terse 'one-liner' from the Government of India: "The Government of India has decided to accord recognition to the Government of Israel."²²

However, the Government communique also contained a fairly detailed account of the factors and circumstances that prompted the Indian Government to accord recognition to Israel. It was explained that "as in the case of Communist China, India's decision to recognise Israel is the recognition of an established fact".²³ For "the Government of Israel has been in existence for two years and there is no doubt that it is going to stay".²⁴

Again, "India and Israel have been working together for the last two years in the United Nations and other international bodies, and Israel has been throughout this period collaborating with other members of the United Nations for furthering the cause of world peace and establishing better economic and social conditions in all parts of the world".²⁵ Hence, "continuing non-recognition is not only inconsistent with the overall relationship but even limits the effectiveness of the Government of India's role as a possible intermediary between Israel and Arab

states".²⁶

Stating that "India will always value the friendship of Egypt and other Arab states" the Government of India emphasised that "the recognition of Israel does not mean that there is no difference between India's attitude and that of Israel over questions like the status of Jerusalem and Israel's frontiers. These questions would be judged by India on merits and due regard would be given to Arab claims".²⁷

It is clear, therefore, that the delay in India's recognition of Israel had little to do with India's opposition to partition of Palestine as imagined in some quarters. India had to take into consideration a number of factors, both internal and external, and weigh them in terms of its own national interests before it could cross the Rubicon. Hence, India's cautious and belated recognition of the Jewish State was both understandable and justified.²⁸

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

However, what cannot be easily understood or justified is, having recognised the State of Israel, India refused to establish diplomatic relations with it which was both illogical and ill-advised. Scholars like K.P.Mishra argued that India's recognition of Israel was a reflection of India's desire to "subscribe to the principle of defactoism

even if it was at the risk of some misunderstanding or alienating the sympathies of some of her best friends in the world".²⁹

India, he further, argued made a distinction between "recognition as a legal act and the establishment of diplomatic relations as a purely political act..."³⁰, presumably in deference to the sentiments of the Arab countries

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see that Mr. Mishra has adopted a purely legalistic approach to an essentially political question. This line of reasoning almost appears like a convenient after-thought. Moreover, it was neither consistent with the official communique issued by the Government of India nor with the subsequent behaviour of the Indian Government which came very close to establishing diplomatic relations with Israel.

The communique itself referred to the Indo-Israeli co-operation in the U.N. and other international bodies to promote world peace, and to the possibility of India acting as a go-between between the two warring parties. The Indian Government could not possibly have envisaged such a role for itself without the necessary diplomatic apparatus to facilitate such a process.

In fact, India all but established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1952. In early 1952, the Director-General of the Israel Foreign Office, Mr. Walter Eytan, came

to Delhi as a guest of the Indian Government, and had negotiations with the Indian officials about diplomatic relations between the two countries. Nehru agreed that it was time the issue was 'reconsidered'.

In Mr. Eytan's own words, "Before Israel's representative left New Delhi, he was informed that the Prime Minister (Nehru) had approved the proposal. He was now questioned in detail on housekeeping problems: what was the cost of living in Israel, would it be better for India's minister to buy or rent a house, what were the prospects of hiring servants ? A draft budget for the Indian Legation was being prepared, though the formal decision to establish diplomatic relations still remained to be confirmed by the Cabinet. This was to be done as soon as the new Government was set up following the elections a few weeks later".³¹

However, nothing came of these talks and Eytan was left wondering as to the reason for this "sudden change of mind" on the part of the Indian Government.

Michael Brecher³² unravelled this mystery almost a decade later. According to him, it was Maulana Azad's 'forceful intervention' against normalising relations with Israel that was responsible for India's backtracking. He was the Minister of Education in Nehru's Cabinet, and was a close friend of the Prime Minister. He 'exerted great influence' on India's Middle East policy till his death in 1958.

Maulana was worried about the repercussions of such a move in the Arab world, particularly at a time when the Kashmir dispute was raging both in and outside the U.N.. Such a move could provide Pakistan an opportunity to fish in troubled waters. He was also sensitive to the unsettling effect it could have on the Indian Muslims. These were weighty arguments and carried the day, probably against Nehru's own better judgement and preference.

However, an Israeli Consul was permitted to function in Bombay in 1953, but no counterpart was established in Israel.

Be that as it may, there is still no convincing explanation as to why diplomatic relations were not established at the time of extending recognition to Israel. Exchanging ambassadors two years after recognition, as Brecher pointed out, "would suggest a conscious act of friendship" and "this was precisely the Indian error".³³ Both Nehru³⁴ and Krishna Menon³⁵ admitted as much, but why it was not done is a question which probably would never be answered, at least in a satisfactory manner.

This inexplicable slip looks all the more inexcusable, at least in retrospect, for it pushed the Indian policy into a groove from which India found it impossible to extricate itself over the years. In the process, India, instead of playing a positive and purposeful role in the Middle East, seemed to have settled down for something akin to diplomatic

self-abnegation in the region.

Nehru was half-apologetic when he tried to explain India's stand on the issue again in 1958 at a Press Conference in New Delhi. "This attitude was adopted after a careful consideration of the balance of factors. It is not a matter of high principles, but it is based on how we could best serve and be helpful in the area... After careful thought, we felt that while recognising Israel as an entity, we need not at this stage exchange diplomatic personnel".³⁶

While this attitude was certainly not a 'matter of high principle', it is difficult to see as how it was "based on how we could best serve and be helpful in that area". In fact, it made India forego whatever leverage it had with Israel, foreclosed even the limited diplomatic options it had earlier, and reduced India to a passive spectator in the region.

Answering a question in the Rajya Sabha on the same issue in 1960, Nehru made a rather ambivalent statement, "...As for Israel, the position is somewhat different, because we have recognised Israel but we have not built up a diplomatic mission there nor have (we) an Israeli mission here. That obviously, as the Hon. Member also knows, is very much entangled in important and rather international issues".³⁷ This statement sounds more like a rationalisation and an apology, rather than an explanation of India's curious approach to the issue in question.

While India has always had close bonds of friendship with the Muslim countries of the Middle East, it is not often emphasised that there was also much mutual admiration and goodwill between the Jewish and Indian leaders, in spite of India's opposition to the Zionist demand for a Jewish State and the subsequent partition of Palestine.

The Jewish leaders had great admiration and love for Indian leaders like Gandhi and Nehru. Gandhi was revered for his moral leadership and spiritual disposition. Gandhi had very close and trusted Jewish friends from his South African days which prompted him to remark "I am half a Jew myself". Some of them tried to win Gandhi's approval for the Zionist aspirations in Palestine, without much success.³⁸

Nehru was admired because "his was the voice of rationalism, modernity, progress, and westernisation".³⁹ He had profound sympathy for the Jewish sufferings under Nazi tyranny. He also had entertained the "idea of starting a new university that would be staffed wholly or mainly by (Jewish) refugee intellectuals" in India. Unhappily enough, this idea proved to be a non-starter because of the lukewarm attitude of the British administration.⁴⁰ Interestingly, Nehru's autobiography was translated into Hebrew in the thirties, when Nehru was relatively less known outside India.

There was also tremendous goodwill and affection for India among Jews in general because the Jewish communities

which settled down in India over the centuries experienced no anti-Semitism whatsoever. This almost unique experience of Indian Jews endeared India to Jews the world over and they looked up to India with gratitude and respect.⁴¹

There was also an ideological affinity between the ruling classes of the newly formed states of India and Israel. "Socialist Israeli leaders expected to find a common language with Asian socialist leaders such as Nehru and U Nu, and to open paths to them on the basis of their common socialist ideology."⁴² In the early fifties, the socialist parties of Israel Mapai and Histadrut played a key role in forging ties between Asian leaders of similar ideological persuasions which culminated in the first Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon in 1953 to which Israel was an invitee.

Moreover, there was some convergence of political outlook between Israel and the Non-Aligned stance that was being adopted by increasing number of Afro-Asian countries, with India being one of its leading lights. By joining the Nonaligned Movement (NAM), "Israel hoped to rid itself of charges levelled against it by Nehru and other Asian leaders that Zionism came to Palestine under the protection of British bayonets", and "between 1948 and 1950 there was a marked preference among its leaders for pursuing a foreign policy independent of the two superpowers of the cold war".⁴³

According to an Israeli scholar,⁴⁴ there were, at least, five general factors that moulded Israel's "attempt at maintaining an international orientation of non-alignment". The first factor was "the recognition of the unity of the Jewish people, scattered throughout the world and in each of the two blocs, and the responsibility for its condition and fate".

The second was "the historic fact that the State of Israel had been established through the consent and support of both world blocs; Israel was to a certain extent grateful to both superpowers and anxious to sustain good relations with them in order to overcome the difficulties of realizing independence". The third was "concern for world peace and the desire to abstain from encouraging great power rivalry by aligning itself with one of them".

The fourth was "the desire to maintain internal peace within the country's Labor movement". "Israel's extremely delicate situation during its formative years provoked fears within the leadership of a political conflict with the Israeli Left, which was viewed as an important political power...". These fears necessitated attempts at "forming an undisputed basis for Israel's international policy".

The fifth and the last factor was "self-esteem". The "conception of ... a nation with its own morality and responsibility, seeking to be free of any external links so as to be able to choose its own path according to its own

concepts, principles and aspirations".

"The political line of nonalignment was thus motivated by a positive foreign policy consideration unlinked to international power combinations as well as a pragmatic assessment of the current international constellation...".

Brecher refers to this as the "non-identification" phase of the Israeli foreign policy. Israel hoped that non-alignment would open the door for her to the Afro-Asian world. It would enable her to "combat growing political enmity and economic boycott practised against it by the Arab States", and "break through the wall of hostility which Arab States attempted to erect around its borders".⁴⁵

Given all these factors, Israelis hoped that Nehru, a "non-Muslim but highly respected by the Arabs, would be willing and able to moderate Arab hostility and, perhaps, provide a bridge between Israelis and Arabs".⁴⁶

However, that was not to be. India's decision not to establish diplomatic relations after recognising Israel definitely impaired whatever chances there were for India's mediatory role in the region. This is in complete contrast to India's approach to China.

In the case of China, India not only recognised China to the obvious displeasure of the U.S., but also went out of its way to facilitate its integration in the international community. The latter was done on the ground that isolating China would only drive it further into the Russian hands.

The same logic was not applied in the case of Israel. It is difficult to envisage as to what extent such a course would have helped the cause of peace in the region. However, the very fact that it was not given an honest chance is somewhat of a misfortune in itself.

To be sure, at least a part of the responsibility for what had happened lies on Israel's shoulders. At one stage India was prepared to accept Israel's representative in New Delhi, but Israel's insistence on reciprocity precluded any such possibility which certainly was a mistake on Israel's part.⁴⁷

There was another complication as well. Countries such as the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. which recognised Israel immediately after its creation, established their embassies in Tel Aviv. However, by the time India recognised Israel, Western Jerusalem became its capital. Israel's insistence that all new embassies should be located in Jerusalem was not acceptable to India.⁴⁸

It goes without saying that India could have established diplomatic relations with Israel. That it was not done proved to be a serious handicap in India's dealings with the region thereafter.⁴⁹

The passage of time only exacerbated the Arab-Israeli dispute. Gradually India ceased to be a factor in potentially the most destabilising dispute in a region, which was of utmost importance to India, as India found to

its dismay at Bandung.

BANDUNG, 1955

A. The Background

The Bandung Conference of 1955 was a turning point in the history of Indo-Israeli relations, in the sense that it symbolised the culmination and crystallisation of various undercurrents which affected them. The conference took place at Bandung in Indonesia from 18th. to 24th. April 1955. This Afro-Asian conference was sponsored by five countries, namely India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Ceylon and Burma. They declared that all independent States would be invited.

However, it was decided to exclude Israel from the Conference despite the fact that Israel was recognised by many States including three of the sponsors India, Burma and Ceylon.⁵⁰ The way this decision was arrived at was important because it sort of set the pattern for almost all future Afro-Asian conferences in dealing with the Arab-Israeli dispute.

B. The Decision-Making

There were two informal meetings in Colombo (Ceylon) and Bogor (Indonesia),⁵¹ which served as preparatory

meetings for Bandung.

At Colombo, the Pakistani Prime Minister, Mr. Muhammad Ali, introduced a draft resolution which described the creation of Israel as a violation of international law, condemned Israel's aggressive policy, and expressed concern over the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

Nehru while sympathising with the Arabs, pointed out that since India recognised Israel, he could not condemn it as a violation of international law. Moreover, the Pakistani resolution would adversely affect the U.N. efforts to settle the dispute. After some debate, it was decided to delete two paragraphs from the Pakistani resolution and retain only the reference to the Palestinian refugees.

At Bogor, U Nu told Nehru that if Israel were not invited to Bandung, Burma might stay away. Nehru, while accepting that on the basis of logical and geographic principle Israel ought to be invited, pointed out that an Arab boycott of Bandung would mean that the whole of the Middle East would go unrepresented. In which case, India should consider whether her own participation would be worthwhile.

Pakistan and Indonesia were strongly opposed to Israeli participation from the beginning. Burma was now rather subdued in her support to Israel. Ceylon was in favour of inviting Israel, and proposed that the Arabs should be "approached and reasoned with." Indonesia pointed out that

the Arab League had already warned that an invitation to Israel would be considered an unfriendly act. Nehru summed up the discussion by saying that though such invitation might be justified, he did not think the matter should be pressed against the wishes of the Arab states. And so it was decided.

At the conference itself, Nehru maintained a very balanced approach to the Palestinian question, taking a principled stand and at the same time keeping India's interests in mind. First, he sought to relegate the religious factor into the background by emphasising the political nature of the conflict.

He also refrained from directly criticising Israel. He told the delegates to understand "the forces behind the (Zionist) movement" and added, "Obviously it becomes a matter of power politics..."⁵²

He also took exception to Mr. Ahmad Shukairy, a Palestinian, (a member of the Syrian delegation) who, in the course of his speech said that a negotiated settlement was not possible. Nehru asserted that, "sometime or other, whether you are enemies or whether you have fought a war, there must be negotiations. There is always some kind of settlement...After all, one can settle things either by compulsion, that is by pressure or by negotiation".⁵³

C. The Decision

The final communique issued after the conference had this to say on the Palestinian issue: "In view of the existing tension in the Middle East, caused by the situation in Palestine and of the danger of that tension to world peace, the Asian-African Conference declared its support of the rights of the Arab people of Palestine and called for the implementation of the United Nations resolutions on Palestine and the achievement of the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question".⁵⁴

"Although the practical significance of this resolution was limited, the symbolic victory of the Arabs was not".⁵⁵ Nasser, who represented Egypt at Bandung later remarked "It is just a resolution. However, it has some moral value".⁵⁶

D. The Aftermath: The Collective Perspective

Nevertheless, the Bandung Conference had some really important consequences for all the parties involved. First, Israel was rejected as an Asian country by the majority of Afro-Asian countries. After Bandung, Israel had no chance whatsoever of participating in any of their official or unofficial gatherings.

"The Third World is regarded in Israel as a potentially powerful catalyst for effecting an Arab-Israel reconciliation. Friendly with both Israel and the Arab

States, desirous of maintaining stable relations with both protagonists, basically unhampered by preconceptions or prejudices regarding either, and neutral in the dispute, Third World nations are seen in Jerusalem as a force which will provide moral backing for - indeed, will insist upon - the commencement of direct negotiations between the protagonists as a first stage toward conclusive peace agreements".⁵⁷ The Bandung Conference put paid to any such hopes.

Secondly, as a logical consequence of this, Israel was also excluded from the NAM which was predominantly Afro-Asian and was formally launched in Belgrade in 1961. This in essence meant that the 'no war-no peace' stance of the Arabs was acquiesced (if not accepted) by the majority of Afro-Asian nations. This, in turn, sidelined both the Non-Aligned as a collectivity and India as a country (which was on good terms with both the Arabs and the Israelis) as possible mediators between the two antagonists. The result was a dangerous and potentially explosive deadlock.

Thirdly, it was also clear by then that the superpowers were trying to manipulate and exploit this dispute to further their own narrow interests in the region. A peaceful solution to the problem at this stage would not only have been easier, but it would also have minimised the chances of superpowers to meddle in the affairs of the region (which again was the avowed objective of the NAM).

E. The Aftermath: The Indian Perspective

Nehru realised this explosive situation, but expressed his helplessness to do any thing to stem the rot in his talks with Brecher. It is worthwhile to quote at length Brecher's interview with Nehru just after Bandung Conference.

NEHRU....Arab nations and Israel don't sit together. They do sit at the United Nations, but apart from that, they just don't sit. And one is offered this choice of having one or the other. It is not logical, my answer, but there it is. When the proposal was made for Israel to be invited...it transpired that if that were done the Arab countries would not attend...our outlook on this matter was based on some logical approach. Our sympathies are with the Arab nations in regard to this problem. We felt that logically Israel should be invited but when we saw that the consequences of that invitation would be that many others would not be able to come, then we agreed. Our approach, obviously, if I may add, is that it is good for people who are opponents to meet.

BRECHER. Yes, but the Arabs have refused every invitation to sit and talk about the question of peace in West Asia.

NEHRU. It is obvious that there is the way of war to settle the question and, if you rule out war, then the only

way is to meet - or allow things to drift.

BRECHER. But drift has the great risk surely that it may itself lead to war.

NEHRU. Yes, I know, but actually there is no other way.⁵⁸

Therefore, the Bandung Conference only allowed "things to drift" with regard to the Middle East. Moreover, it had inadvertently contributed to the Palestine issue reaching a boiling point.

F. The Aftermath: The Israeli Perspective

The impact of the Bandung Conference on Israel was "devastating". It felt both humiliated and isolated. As one high ranking Israeli official put it: "Bandung was our greatest diplomatic setback. It was the greatest trauma we ever suffered. That two and one half billion people could be united in such a way against 1.8 million people in Israel was in itself soul-shattering to all of us in the Foreign Ministry".⁵⁹

The general sense of insecurity and concern that enveloped Israel following the reverses it suffered in the international arena prompted Ben-Gurion to return from his self-imposed seclusion, and take over as the Prime Minister from Sharett. Sharett was considered too "soft" in foreign affairs and, was also thought to have placed too much faith in the U.N. and the major powers to ameliorate Israel's

deteriorating security environment.

"The change in leadership was interpreted at home and abroad as signifying a stiffening of foreign policy and a more aggressive Israeli stand on all fronts".⁶⁰ Consequently, the year 1956 saw an "agonising reappraisal" of Israel's foreign policy so that the future policy would be "geared to facts, not hopes".

"In the long run, the reappraisal brought about powerful diplomatic drives upon Afro-Asia. In the short run, it dictated a stiffening of Israel's policy vis-a-vis her neighbours, which led directly to the 1956 Sinai Campaign [the Suez crisis], designed to extricate her from the unendurable daily provocations and an adverse balance of power".⁶¹

THE SUEZ CRISIS, 1956

The Suez crisis of 1956 constituted a watershed in India's relations with Israel. Here, we would confine our analysis to the impact this crisis had on Indo-Israeli relations.⁶²

When the U.S. and the U.K. withdrew their offer of assistance to the construction of Aswan Dam, Egypt reacted by nationalising the Suez Canal. While efforts were still underway to settle the dispute, Israeli forces invaded Sinai on 29th. Oct. 1956. To make things worse, Israel was joined

in this adventure by the U.K. and France a few days later, in accordance with the prior understanding reached with Israel.

India's reaction to this development was sharp and forthright. An official statement issued on 31st. Oct. denounced Israeli aggression as a flagrant violation of the U.N. Charter, and in opposition to all the principles laid down in the Bandung Conference.⁶³ Nehru publicly branded Israeli action as "clear naked aggression", and was critical of the British and French backing it received.⁶⁴

Whatever might have been the provocations, the open Israeli attack on Egypt created much anger and resentment in India. The fact that Israel collaborated with ex-colonial powers like the U.K. and France, in attacking a Third World country dissipated whatever sympathy and understanding the Indian leadership and the intelligentsia had had for Israel.

The attack also gave credence to certain notions which existed in certain quarters in the Afro-Asian world about Israel. It reinforced the view that Israel was an outpost of Western imperial interests, and that it was essentially a European country in the wrong continent.

Nevertheless, the Suez crisis did have a silver lining as far as India was concerned. India's posture towards Israel till then was rather inconsistent and awkward. "Indian attitudes subsequent to 1956 almost betrayed a sense of relief that what was an uncomfortable posture could now

be continued with a feeling of moral righteousness."⁶⁵

The Suez Crisis came at a particularly awkward moment for Israel. It took place on the very day the former Israeli foreign minister Moshe Sharett's meeting⁶⁶ with Nehru in New Delhi. Sharett himself was strongly against the Sinai campaign but having presented with a fait accompli, he had no choice but to defend Israel's action.

Nehru was highly critical of Israel's aggressiveness and imperviousness to the fate of Arab refugees. Regardless of the merits or otherwise of the Israeli Sinai campaign, one unfortunate outcome of this action was that whatever possibility that might have existed for full diplomatic relations between India and Israel had now definitely receded.

Israelis, on their part, were not exactly amused by the vacillation and ambivalence that characterised the Indian Government's approach to the Jewish State. "Israeli attitudes have run the gamut, from expectation to hope to disappointment to dismay, and, finally, to anger."⁶⁷

They found the Indian attitude to Israel to be at variance with what India had been preaching in international forums like friendship with all, judging issues on their merits, and accepting political facts of life. Their disappointment in Nehru was intense; it was as if their personal trust in Nehru was shattered.

Ben-Gurion made a pointed reference to this when he

said, "I cannot understand how Mr.Nehru fits his behaviour to Israel with Gandhi's philosophy of universal friendship. Mr.Nehru gave definite promises to the Director-General of our Foreign Ministry eight years ago that he would soon establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel, but so far he has not kept his word."68

Later, in an article reviewing Israel's position in world politics, Ben-Gurion was sharply critical of Nehru. He said, "Nehru too claims allegiance to neutrality....He is not even neutral in regard to Israel and the Arabs, for he has close ties and normal relations with the Arab countries -- but he has stubbornly refused to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, and in his frequent visits to the Middle East he has on every occasion -- and not by accident -- overlooked Israel".69

At this juncture, it must be emphasised that "difficulties of finance and personnel" were never the consideration in India not establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. Nor was it ever the thought that Israel was not important enough for India to have full fledged diplomatic ties, as alleged in some quarters.70

COVERT CONTACTS

A. The Early Initiatives

It was India's inability or unwillingness to take initiative of any sort or adopt a more active diplomatic posture towards the Arab-Israeli dispute, that more or less compelled it to keep its relationship with Israel under the wraps. Whatever may have been India's official and public posture towards Israel over the decades, there is no gainsaying that India has always maintained a working but covert relationship with the Jewish State.

Surprisingly enough, there have been extensive contacts between the two countries - official and private - at various levels.⁷¹ This in itself is ample proof of the fact that Israel is not as insignificant a factor in India's policy calculations as it appears. To dismiss Israel as expendable to India's policy concerns in the Middle East seems to be a mere rationalisation at best.

After Israeli foreign minister Moshe Sharett's secret visit to India in 1956, another approach was made to Nehru in Washington by the then Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban in 1960. Nothing came of this meeting either.

It was about this time that the Israeli Foreign Office instructed its officials not to broach the subject of diplomatic relations with their Indian counterparts again.

As Yaakov Shimon, the Deputy Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry explained, "Until then our policy was to ask for an exchange of ambassadors on every possible occasion...but we have some pride left....We were tired of being told, 'Please do not worry us' and being put off repeatedly".⁷²

B. The Sino-Indian War, 1962

The next important contact between the two countries was at the time of the Sino-Indian war of 1962. The Indian military debacle shook Nehru, and in his hour of need he turned to Israel.⁷³ India mainly sought light mortars of 81- and 120- millimeters from Israel. Even in times of such grave national crisis, New Delhi could not get over her self-imposed inhibitions with regard to Arab sensitivities to such a deal.

Hence, Israel was asked if the weapons could be delivered in ships that did not fly the Israeli flag. Ben-Gurion's blunt reply was, "No flag, no weapons". In the end, the Israeli cargo ship 'Jarden' arrived in Bombay with "automatic rifles, mortars, grenades, etc". The Israelis, on their part, imposed no preconditions such as exchange of ambassadors, and responded promptly to the Indian call for help.

In Jan. 1963, the then Chief of the Indian Army Gen. J. N. Chaudhuri invited his Israeli counterpart Gen. Shateel

and the Chief of Military Intelligence, who were on an official visit to Burma, to visit Delhi on their way back for an exchange of views following India's military debacle against China. This could not possibly have done without Nehru's knowledge and approval.⁷⁴

C. The Indo-Pak War, 1965

Again, India received a modest amount of military hardware from Israel during the 1965 war over Kashmir with Pakistan. According to Israeli Consul-General Yaakov Morris, Israel supplied heavy mortars to India during the conflict. He also said that Israel supported India's case on Kashmir, and had stated in the U.N. that Kashmir belonged to India.

He offered transit facilities through Israel for Indian trade with the West which could have saved India Rs. 38 crores a year in freight charges. Israel would also appreciate Indian efforts to bring Israel and the Arabs to the conference table so that they could have direct negotiations.⁷⁵

MOMENTS OF PETTINESS

While India maintained covert contacts with Israel ever since her creation, its public stance vis-a-vis Israel often lacked diplomatic finesse, and at times almost bordered on pettiness and uncivility.

For instance, the Israeli Consul in Bombay wanted to hold the National Day reception of his country in New Delhi in April 1964. But the Indian Government refused him permission on the ground that he would exceed his functions as Consul in Bombay.

The establishment of the Indo-Israeli Friendship Society in Aug. 1964 annoyed the Arabs. In Oct. of the same year, the presence of an office bearer (Miss Romila Thapar) of the Indo-Israeli Friendship Society, at a dinner given by the Ministry of External Affairs (in honour of a Lebanese newspaper editor) led to a walkout of the Ambassadors of Lebanon, Iraq and Morocco, and the Arab League representative. The Lebanese Ambassador was later summoned by the Ministry of External Affairs and questioned about his undiplomatic action in leading the walkout.⁷⁶

In May 1966, the Food and Agriculture Minister Mr. C. Subramaniam told the Lok Sabha that Israel offered to supply fertilisers to India but India declined the offer because of "political considerations". On being asked whether people should be allowed to starve because of the government's politics, he replied "We had to take into account other reactions. In the judgement of the Government, we thought we need not accept it".⁷⁷

Reacting sharply to the above incident, The Times of India editorially commented that India's handling of the Israeli offer showed, "a deplorable lack of finesse". "In

fairness to Arab countries, it must be mentioned that there is no reason to believe that they would have attributed sinister motives to such an innocent and marginal contact with Israel". It advised the government that its policy should be based on "mature considerations and not on inhibitory fears".⁷⁸

Again in 1966, the Calcutta Police permitted Arab demonstrations to come close to the Israeli President Shazar who was passing through India on an official visit to Nepal. The Indian Government refused to let President Shazar rest overnight in New Delhi, and sent no official to greet him at the airport when his plane stopped for refuelling.⁷⁹

There was an outcry both in the Lok Sabha and in the Indian Press over the "curt and uncivil treatment" meted out to the Israeli President by the Indian Government.⁸⁰

It is difficult to imagine the possible motives behind the actions of the Indian Government in the series of incidents narrated above. It could not possibly be attributed to India's abhorrence of Israeli policies, for India always had a working private relationship with Israel. If it was meant to please the Arabs then, it is an insult to Arab intelligence for the Arab States themselves always weighed their actions in terms of their concrete national interests and not in terms of petty and frivolous considerations.

Perhaps, the more probable explanation for these

indefensible, inexplicable and almost laughable actions of the Indian Government was its extreme self-consciousness and timidity, in its dealings with the region in general and with the Arab-Israeli dispute in particular.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, 1967

The uneasy and fragile peace that obtained in the Middle East after the Suez Crisis could not have been maintained indefinitely. What was needed was a mere spark to set off the powder keg which the region had become on account of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The recurring Syrian commando raids into Israel provoked an Israeli threat of retaliation in May 1966. This, in turn, led to Damascus invoking the military pact it had signed with Egypt in 1966. Nasser responded by saying that the U.A.R. would fight if Israel attacked Syria.

Meanwhile, the U.N. Secretary-General U Thant flew to Cairo for discussions with the leaders of the U.A.R. on 21st May. Then came the U.A.R.'s decision to close the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and to other shipping carrying strategic goods for Israel. And the die was cast.

On 6th. June the Israeli Air Force, in a preemptive strike, more or less destroyed the U.A.R. Air Force in a couple of hours. This was followed by a rout of the Arab

armies by the Israeli forces. In the six days that the war lasted, the Israelis seized the Sinai, the Gaza, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from the Arabs.

The way the Indian Government handled this crisis generated much heat and controversy within the Government, in the Parliament and in the national press.

On 25th. May 1967, the Minister of External Affairs, Mr.M.C. Chagla made a statement in both the Houses of Parliament. The first sentence he uttered - "The creation of Israel has given rise to tension between Israel and the Arab countries"⁸¹ - caused much resentment. Some members interpreted it to mean that he was questioning the very existence of Israel.

Regarding the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba, he said that the Indian Government had accepted that "the Gulf of Aqaba is an inland sea and that the entry to the Gulf lies within the territorial waters of UAR and Saudi Arabia".⁸² Mr. Chagla seemed to implicitly acknowledge and justify the U.A.R.'s right to close the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel.

Addressing the Lok Sabha again in July 1967, Mr. Chagla justified his statement about the creation of Israel by saying that it was a "factual statement", and reminded the members that India had recognised Israel.⁸³

Regarding the Gulf of Aqaba (i.e. whether it was in the territorial waters of the U.A.R. or whether it was an international waterway), Mr. Chagla quoted statements made

by Mr. Dulles in 1957 and the British Foreign Secretary Mr. George Brown in 1967 to justify the Indian Government's stand.⁸⁴

What Mr. Chagla seemed to conveniently forget was the fact that the issue, by then, had gone beyond legal semantics, and that the closing of the Gulf of Aqaba could have meant cutting off Israel's lifeline.

How long could Israel have tolerated such a situation to continue while waiting for international mediation to solve the problem is anybody's guess. There could be very little doubt that it was Nasser's rash action of closing the Gulf of Aqaba that precipitated the crisis which resulted in another Arab military debacle.

However, Mrs. Gandhi seemed completely impervious to this reality when she told the Lok Sabha on 6th. June 1967, "I do not wish to utter harsh words or use strong language. But on the basis of information available there can be no doubt that Israel has escalated the situation into an armed conflict, which has now acquired the proportions of a full scale war".⁸⁵

The attitude of the Indian Government to the conflict predictably came under severe attack from the opposition. The Swatantra Party felt that India should be neutral between the Arabs and Israel. The Jana Sangh accused the government of being "a war monger". The Praja Socialist Party felt that India had gone too far in supporting the

U.A.R. One Jana Sangh member even accused the government of converting India into the 14th. Arab state. Some MPs enquired if the government's anti-Israeli policy would jeopardise American food aid to India. These opposition parties had their own reasons for being critical of the government's blatantly pro-Arab policy.⁸⁶

What did come as a surprise, though, was the fact that "Dissatisfaction with the West Asia policy is as widespread as it is strong. It is by no means confined to the ranks of the opposition;...Even within the Cabinet's Foreign Affairs Committee, serious doubts were expressed by some of the most senior Ministers before they agreed to the policy statement eventually made by Mrs. Gandhi in Parliament....The angularities, excesses and distortions of the West Asia policy have apparently become the enemy of its pith and substance".⁸⁷

On 20th. July, it was reported that there were sharp exchanges between Mrs. Gandhi and the members of the Congress Party Parliamentary Executive over the government's Middle Eastern policy. Some of the members later admitted that the party was split on the issue, and that many of its members were opposed to the Government's line. The issue became so contentious that Mrs. Gandhi felt compelled to threaten a General Election to demonstrate popular support for her government's Middle Eastern policy.

A couple of days later, amid rumours of opposition to

her the Middle Eastern policy from the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Mr. Morarji Desai and the Defence Minister Mr. Swaran Singh, she denied that there was rift in the Cabinet over the issue.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, "enough had happened to indicate that opposition to the Government's Middle East policy was sufficiently widespread to bring its very existence into jeopardy".⁸⁹

Moreover, this was the first time that there was such extensive criticism both in the press and the public about the Indian Government's attitude to the Arab-Israeli dispute. All the major newspapers were critical of India's unqualified and unwarranted support to reckless Arab actions, such as ordering the withdrawal of the U.N.E.F. and the closing of the Gulf of Aqaba which precipitated the crisis and made conflict inevitable.⁹⁰

Moreover, an opinion poll was conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion in the middle of July on the the Middle East conflict in the cities of Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. Two out of three respondents in these cities were opposed to India extending unqualified support to the Arabs, and were of the opinion that India needs to take a "more objective and impartial stand" on the Arab-Israeli dispute.⁹¹

To cap it all, India chose to play a partisan role in the U.N. in favour of the Arabs in spite of the fact that it was one of the non-permanent members of the Security Council

at that time. India's Permanent Representative Mr. G. Parthasarathy, more or less endorsed the Arab and particularly the U.A.R.'s position in the dispute,⁹² and placed the responsibility for the "grave situation" prevailing in the Middle East "squarely on Israel".⁹³

Mr. Chagla, addressing the Fifth Emergency Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly on 21st. June, stated that "The first thing to be insisted upon, and to be implemented, has to be withdrawals, total and unqualified, immediate and unconditional, of all Israeli forces from all Arab territories".⁹⁴

India also introduced a Draft resolution⁹⁵ along with Mali and Nigeria. It envisaged Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, right of every State to live in peace and security, a just settlement of the question of Palestine refugees, and freedom of navigation in accordance with international law in the area.

The Israeli foreign minister, Mr. Abba Eban, predictably rejected the Indian resolution on the grounds that it was formulated without consulting Israel, and that it prejudiced Israel's negotiating position in advance. "The suggestion that Israel should move from the cease fire lines without a peace treaty defining permanent and secure frontiers is unacceptable" he said.⁹⁶

It is difficult to believe that India expected Israel to take this resolution seriously, as a possible basis for

solving its dispute with the Arabs. To expect Israel to withdraw from occupied lands without an overall settlement is rather naive. In fact, this is in complete contrast to India's own approach to regaining the territory it lost to China during the Sino-Indian war of 1962. It is possible that the resolution was intended more as a demonstration of India's support to the Arab cause rather than as a fair and realistic basis for negotiation.

Incidentally, it may be of interest to note that Syria off-handedly rejected the Indian resolution on the Middle East together with that of the U.S. Both these drafts were unacceptable to Syria because they subjected Israeli withdrawal to conditions.⁹⁷

India was much more directly involved in the six-day war than any other Middle Eastern conflict. Apart from the fact that India was one of the non-permanent members of the Security Council at the time of the conflict, an Indian, Maj. Gen. Inderjit Rikhye, commanded the U.N. Emergency Force in the Gaza and Sinai, and a battalion of the Indian Army was a part of that force. When the fighting broke out on 5th. June, the Indian contingent came under artillery fire and air-strafting from the Israelis (in all probability, by mistake).⁹⁸ Fourteen Indian soldiers were killed, twenty-one wounded, and nineteen reported missing. Mrs. Gandhi described these attacks as "deliberate and without provocation", and asked the House to "unreservedly

condemn this cowardly attack".⁹⁹

There can be little doubt that this incident cost Israel considerable sympathy in India. However, there was opposition to a move in Parliament to condemn this attack on the ground that Indian troops should have been withdrawn from the battlezone earlier. Later, the Israeli Government expressed condolence and offered to pay compensation, but the Indian Government rejected both the offers.

Purely from a military point of view, though, Israeli achievements in the brief war seemed to have impressed quite a few Indians. The Indian defence minister, Swaran Singh, told the Lok Sabha that "India is deeply impressed by the achievements of the Israeli armed forces and particularly their tactics of speedy mobilization at extremely short notice. It was, therefore, keen to find out how Israel had been able to mobilize her entire force in less than 24 hours and in such a manner that it ensured positive results".¹⁰⁰

Major Ranjit Singh, a member of Lok Sabha and founder member of the Indian Parliamentary Defence Council, visited Israel for a on-the-spot study of the six-day war. He recommended a defence system similar to that of Israel, against China and Pakistan. Moshe Dayan reportedly told Mr. Singh that Israel used to its advantage, the tactics employed by the Indians against Pakistan in 1965.¹⁰¹

The Jewish Chronicle [London] referred to Maj. Singh's visit and said: "India urgently needs a system of defence

similar to Israel's 'Nahol' [soldier farmer] settlements to safeguard her frontiers from Chinese and Pakistani aggression. Major Singh believed that there were many similarities between the origin, course and outcome of the six day war and those of Indo-Pak war of 1965".102

The Arab military debacle only reinforced Arab intransigence and hostility towards Israel. The Arab summit in Khartoum in Aug. 1967 passed a resolution which contained three 'Nos': No recognition, No negotiation, and No peace with Israel. Politically, the Arab-Israeli dispute was back to square one.

Notwithstanding the publicly partisan attitude of the Indian Government during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, India maintained cordial but low-key contacts with Israel thereafter. The Israeli foreign minister, Abba Eban, attended a reception for Mrs. Gandhi in New York in Oct. 1968.103

Mrs. Ruth Dayan, wife of Israeli defence minister Moshe Dayan, visited New Delhi to attend an International Labour Organization Conference of experts on the role of handicrafts in the national economy. Speaking at a reception held in her honour in New Delhi, she hoped for greater understanding between India and Israel.104

Though India always maintained that its support for the Arabs was based on the merits of their case and was independent of other considerations, the fact of the matter

was that India always expected a quid pro quo from the Arabs in terms of their support for Pakistan (in relation to its dispute with India).

After the Rabat fiasco in 1969, the Indian foreign minister, Dinesh Singh, had an half-hour meeting with the Israeli foreign minister, Abba Eban, at the "latter's request" in New York on 3rd.Oct. 1969. The meeting was primarily intended to underscore the point that friendship implied "reciprocity" to those Arab countries which sided with Pakistan to keep India out of the Islamic summit in Rabat.¹⁰⁵ However, the fact that India's insistence on Arab "reciprocity" found no takers in the Arab world was clearly demonstrated within a couple of years during the Bangladesh crisis.

THE BANGLADESH CRISIS, 1971

The Bangladesh crisis, and the lack of understanding shown by the the Middle Eastern countries to the influx of millions of refugees into India (following the military crackdown in East Pakistan), once again brought under a microscope India's policy to the region, especially India's relations with Israel.

Israel's response to the crisis was prompt and predictable for obvious reasons. Dr.DOV. B. Schmorak, the Director of Foreign Publicity of the Government of Israel,

said at a news conference in New Delhi that, Israel had great sympathy for the sufferings of the people of Bangladesh. He also pointed out that Israel had already announced its decision to extend aid for the relief fund. He added for good measure that Israel would welcome the establishment of diplomatic relations with India.¹⁰⁶

In July 1971, the ruling Congress Party member, Sant Bux Singh, supported the opposition-demand of India exchanging ambassadors with Israel. This demand was made in view of the lack of understanding displayed by the the Middle Eastern countries in relation to developments in East Pakistan.¹⁰⁷

Amid reports that the Indian Government was reconsidering her Middle East policy on account of the attitude of the countries of that region towards the Bangladesh issue, the Indian foreign minister, Swaran Singh, told the Rajya Sabha in July that there was no change in India's support to the Palestinian cause, because India's stand on the issue was in consonance with "justice and facts of the situation".¹⁰⁸

During the war, India received some military hardware and logistical support from Israel. According to Dr. Swamy, D.P.Dhar "organised a certain crucial weapons" import from Israel.¹⁰⁹

In Jan. 1972, India scotched all rumours that it was going to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. An

official spokesman described the rumours as "totally false and baseless". However, one can not help wondering as to why the Indian Government chose not to upgrade its relations with Israel during the Bangladesh crisis. This would have been a diplomatic slap on the face of the Arabs not to take India's support for granted. Public opinion in India, generally speaking, would have welcomed such a move.

The Press was certainly critical of the treatment meted out to Israel. One newspaper commented that India's policy reflected "neither the realities of power in the area nor the civilities of customary diplomatic behaviour" but only the "myopia of a lobby in South Block ".¹¹⁰

Another opined that "India will benefit more through opening up its options in West Asia. It is an overdue move and if in making it our relations with some of the Arab states suffer a temporary setback well then, isn't India strong enough to take that in her stride ?".¹¹¹

Obviously, the Indian Government considered discretion to be the better part of valour and chose not to take the plunge. Looking back, it looks as though it was a good opportunity that India let go. Consequently, India was hardly in any position to do anything positive or constructive when the Arab-Israeli stalemate was shattered in Oct. 1973 by the booming Arab guns.

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR, 1973

When Egypt and Syria launched a simultaneous and surprise attack on Israel on 7th. Oct. 1973, the Indian Government reacted in a way which had almost become customary by now."The Government have consistently declared that the cause of the tension in the area is due to Israeli aggression and refusal to vacate territories occupied by armed force. This intransigence on the part of Israel is clearly the basic cause leading to the present outbreak of hostilities. Our sympathies are entirely with the Arabs whose sufferings have long reached a point of explosion" said the official statement.¹¹²

The next day, foreign minister, Swaran Singh, talking to pressmen in New Delhi stated that "justice denied for long creates frustration. And that is what happened in West Asia".¹¹³

Mrs.Gandhi, talking to pressmen in Gauhati on 10th. Oct., said that India could not do much to end the conflict in the Middle East. "Actually it is for the Arab states and others to decide what to do. Because all these times something was possible, but somehow the situation went on deteriorating".¹¹⁴

India's Permanent Representative at the U.N., Samar Sen, demanding the withdrawal of Israel from occupied

territories stated that "it will be both unfair and unjust for the Council to ask for a cease-fire, which will leave vast territories of Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the illegal occupation of Israel".¹¹⁵

India's stand once again reflected a total support to the Arabs and conveniently ignored certain unpleasant facts in relation to the conflict. While Israeli intransigence was berated no reference was made to the Arab refusal to negotiate. The fact that the Arabs had initiated the hostilities was by-passed. Moreover, India's stand at the U.N. seemed to justify the Arab use of force to regain the lost territory.

Suffice to say that India's stand on the issue was neither constructive nor realistic. It once again betrayed a desire to curry favour with the Arabs by assuming a vociferously pro-Arab stand with little regard to the facts of the situation a tendency which it displayed again when it chose to side with the Arabs in branding Zionism as a form of racism at the UN a couple of years later.

ZIONISM-AS-RACISM RESOLUTION, 1975

It goes without saying that India made a major blunder in 1975 by voting for the U.N. General Assembly resolution No.3379 which determined that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination".¹¹⁶, at the 2400th Plenary

meeting on 10th. Nov. 1975. India always maintained that the Arab-Israeli dispute was a political one, which was consistent with her own secular approach to politics. It also deemphasised the importance of religion in the Middle Eastern politics which again was in her own enlightened self-interest.

Hence, it would have been more prudent and more consistent with her own stand if India had either abstained or even absented itself from voting. By voting for the resolution, India had diluted her own principled stand on the issue, and made a mockery of her own long-term interests. India's Ambassador to the U.S., T.N.Kaul's, explanation that the Indian support to the resolution was not an act against Israel or Jews but to protest against what he termed "anti-Arabism".¹¹⁷, sounds rather unconvincing and simplistic.

THE JANATA GOVERNMENT AND ISRAEL

When the first non-Congress Government was formed in New Delhi in 1977 following Mrs.Gandhi's electoral debacle, hopes were raised of a fresh look at the successive Congress Governments' foreign policy. The fact that the Janata Party, during its election campaign, promised to subscribe to "genuine nonalignment" gave rise to such speculation. When a former Jana Sanghite and a vocal critic of traditional

Indian policy towards the Middle East Mr.A.B. Vajpayee took over as foreign minister, expectations rose even further. However, the Janata Party's foreign policy initiatives, such as they were, proved to be "much ado about nothing".

The Israeli foreign minister, Moshe Dayan, paid a secret visit to India in Aug. 1977, which he himself described as "somewhat odd and not very important".¹¹⁸ The visit had to remain secret because the then Director of the Intelligence Bureau, John Lobo, told Morarji that he could not guarantee Dayan's safety in India if he came openly.

Dayan met both Morarji and Vajpayee. Morarji reiterated India's traditional stand on the Middle East saying that Israel should withdraw from occupied territories which should be proclaimed a Palestinian State. Regarding diplomatic relations, he said that it should have been done at the time of recognition and he could not do it now. He further said that he would be out of office if Dayan's visit became public but he took the risk for the sake of peace.

Then Moshe Dayan raised a very pertinent point. "Now, when his [Morarji's] help was needed on behalf of peace, he could do nothing, since he had no diplomatic relations with Israel; and once peace was attained, and India were to establish such relations, its help would no longer be necessary".¹¹⁹

However, it must be admitted that the Janata Government was in no position to take such a momentous decision for it

was a weak coalition Government. Only a strong, cohesive and confident government could have made such a major foreign policy decision.

Besides, the foreign minister, Vajpayee, was a former member of the Jana Sangh, and as a member of the opposition, was a vocal critic of the Congress Party's Middle East policy. When he took over as the foreign minister, he was very much on the defensive in relation to the Middle East, and was bending backwards to assure the Arabs of continued Indian support.

More importantly, India's economic stake in the region had increased substantially after the oil boom, and the Janata Government was understandably loathe to do anything that might jeopardise it.

For instance, in Dec. 1977, Vajpayee flatly denied that his government had anything to do with a reported statement by an official of his Ministry that Sadat's visit to Israel was a "bold step". Prem Bhatia, writing in Nagpur Times, described this as "a most unedifying example of the Janata Government's slavery to the policy of timidity in the conduct of international affairs which has come down to the present regime from its predecessor".¹²⁰

Finally, when Sadat's courageous and bold initiative broke the decades of diplomatic silence between the Arabs and Israel, and led to the signing of Camp David Accord, the Janata Government's reaction was extremely cautious and

mented. Vajpayee stated at a press conference that India did not welcome it because:

1. Palestine was the hard core of the the Middle Eastern problem, and there could be no peace unless the rights of the Palestinians were restored;

2. The Accord was silent on the status of Jerusalem;

3. The PLO was not accepted as the representative body of the Palestinians.¹²¹

A few weeks later, the Janata Government extended a qualified support to Camp David saying that it "cannot but commend the efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to the problems of an area which has seen dangerous conflicts".¹²²

However, the proof of India's real appreciation of the signing of the Camp David Accord came later when India firmly opposed the move by some Arab countries to expel Egypt from the NAM for signing a separate peace treaty with Israel. Morarji told Cuba that he would stay away from the Havana summit if any effort was made to exclude Egypt from the conference.¹²³

The Janata Government's contacts with Israel continued even after Dayan's visit to India. When Morarji went to London to attend the Commonwealth Conference, he met the Israeli defence minister, Weizman, who urged closer contacts between the two countries. The Israelis offered their military technology to India including the Mirage III, the

Kaffir jet fighters and the Merkevah tanks through third countries.

V.Shankar, the Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, visited Israel for four days in early 1979 to explore this offer. But no deal could be struck because the Janata Government fell in July 1979.¹²⁴

But Dayan's visit to India remained a secret till Mrs. Gandhi made it public in early 1980, after she returned to power following the collapse of the Janata Government. At a press conference¹²⁵ in May 1980, Vajpayee said that Dayan "came on his own initiative, in cognito and without any prior knowledge of the External Affairs Ministry". He said he had earlier denied the visit in "national interest". "I am also constrained to say that the closest relationship between the two countries was in 1962, 1965 and 1971 and not during my tenure in the external affairs Ministry" he added. He accused Mrs. Gandhi of using the episode for electoral gains [Assembly elections], and retorted that "The eye-patch of Mr. Moshe Dayan is insufficient to cover the price-rise for sugar, baby food and all essential commodities".

However, according to Dr. Swamy, Mrs. Gandhi's government did not snap the links established by the Janata Government with Israel. Defence deals worth about Rs.60 crores were negotiated with Israel through third party contacts.

THE ISRAELI INVASION OF LEBANON, 1982

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 brought about a strong condemnation from India. India's foreign minister, Narasimha Rao, addressing a function organised by All India Indo-Arab Friendship Association on 19th. June in New Delhi, said: "This naked aggression adds yet another sordid chapter to Israel's already infamous history of misdeeds. It is an action indicative of intransigence, utter disregard of basic human values and international public opinion, and open defiance of them".

"It is an attempt to exterminate a people whose hearths and homes Israel has occupied illegally for well over three decades..." he added.

He implicitly criticised the U.S. for not restraining Israel by saying that Israel must be "made to see reason by those who are in a position to do so".¹²⁶

Mrs. Gandhi minced no words when she told the Lok Sabha on 9th. July 1982: "This Israeli action is a flagrant violation of all canons of international law and behaviour. It is indicative of an arrogance which has shown callous disregard for the rights of other nations and peoples". She called upon "nations who are in a position to influence Israel to take immediate steps to lift the siege of West Beirut and withdraw its troops to its own territory".¹²⁷

India also rushed medicines, medical equipment, and

food stuffs to Lebanon. Two medical teams were sent to Damascus to render aid to the injured.

THE PAKISTANI BOMB AND INDO-ISRAELI COOPERATION

Even before India's virulent criticism of Israel's invasion of Lebanon had died down, there were reports in the international press that India and Israel were in touch with each other, because of their mutual concern about Pakistan's nuclear programme. It was reported that Israel was worried that Pakistan might pass on its nuclear technology to its Arab friends.

Mrs. Gandhi, the report said, seriously considered a pre-emptive strike against Pak nuclear targets in 1982 but decided against it because of the fear that Pakistan would inflict equal damage to Indian nuclear installations. The Indian officials were quite dismissive about such speculation but reports persisted that India and Israel had held secret discussions about Pakistan's nuclear progress.¹²⁸

It is difficult to vouch for the authenticity or otherwise of these rumours. However, going by past experience, it is fairly likely that there could have been some sort of cooperation between the two countries in monitoring Pak's nuclear programme, and in coordinating their security policies to counter this potential and mutual

threat. It is plausible that this was one of the reasons why Mrs.Gandhi's Government resisted strong pressures both from the Arab Ambassadors and in the Parliament to close down the Israeli Consulate in Bombay in 1981.¹²⁹ Again, in July 1982, the Indian foreign minister Mr.P.V. Narasimha Rao assured the Lok Sabha that the "strong" demand for the closure of the Israeli Consulate was under "very serious consideration".¹³⁰ However, the Indian Government thought it wise not to carry out its threat.

INDO- ISRAELI RELATIONS: A REAPPRAISAL

India's lackluster and low-key policy towards Israel ever since its creation is just an element of India's generally timid and passive posture towards the the Middle East as a whole, and is not a result of any unfriendly feelings towards the Jewish State. The creation of Pakistan and its efforts to cultivate its co-religionists in the Middle East in the name of Islamic solidarity put Indian policy makers on the defensive from the word go.

"The fact that the Muslims constitute the predominant section of the inhabitants in the region led to the belief that supporting the Muslim Arab states against the Jewish state of Israel per se, would be sufficient to promote India's interests. Implicit in it was the assumption that

conflicts in West Asia were virtually coterminous with the Arab-Israeli conflict".¹³¹

Consequently, India's policy towards Israel tended to become more and more of a by-product of such attitude. India, having recognised Israel, refused to establish diplomatic relations with it, ostensibly in deference to Arab sentiments.

Thus, India, consciously or unconsciously started using Indo-Israeli relations to balance Pak-Arab relations, and as a result India's policy towards Israel was cast in a very rigid mould. This is very obvious from the way the Indian Government, over the years, made subtle threats to upgrade its relations with Israel whenever it felt slighted by the Arabs.

However, it can not be "reasonably argued that India obtained a quid pro quo from the Arab countries in her disputes with Pakistan. As a matter of fact, none of the Arab countries, including Egypt, ever supported India on the issue of Kashmir".¹³²

On the other hand, "It is also entirely possible that if Indian policy had been more flexible and imaginative at certain crucial stages... India might have been instrumental in bridging the gap between the Arabs and the Israelis".¹³³

It is really doubtful if Arabs would have reacted harshly and concertedly if India had exchanged ambassadors with Israel at the time of recognition. After all, the Arabs

have been doing business with scores of other countries that have had diplomatic relations with Israel. Nor was India an insignificant and nondescript country for the Arabs to just brush her aside.

On the whole, however, Indians were aware of the importance and usefulness of contacts with Israel. Hence, they followed a dual policy towards Israel: "private contact with and public denunciation of Israel".

Whatever little balance India had displayed in its relations with Israel, simply disappeared with the emergence of Mrs. Gandhi on the Indian political scene. Her domestic electoral strategy of cultivating the depressed classes and minorities particularly Muslims as her "vote-banks" contributed in no small measure to this development. Mrs. Gandhi, instead of addressing the real problems and fears that haunted the Indian Muslims and trying to solve them on a longterm basis, adopted a vociferously pro-Palestinian and overtly anti-Israeli stance in order to gain the support of the Indian Muslims on the cheap.

According to one scholar "The first five months of Mrs. Gandhi's Premiership were marked by an unmistakable hardening of this [anti-Israeli] attitude in comparison not only with the Nehru era but even with the immediately preceding Shastri regime".¹³⁴

The verbal excesses that India has committed in criticising Israel and supporting the Arabs helped neither.

Supporting the Arabs against Israel is a negative way of earning their goodwill. Moreover, it cannot go on for ever. India can and should base her relationship with the Middle Eastern countries on a more positive and concrete basis which can be more durable. Nor should India allow the Arab-Israeli dispute to dominate its thinking vis-a-vis the Middle East. An overtly anti- Israeli stance in no way benefits the Indian Muslims. The policies pursued by successive governments over the years have made India irrelevant in the region - ignored by Israel and taken for granted by the Arabs.

Whatever may have been the compulsions of such a policy in the 1950s and 1960s, it can not be justified in the 1970s and 1980s when the strategic environment in the subcontinental, regional and global terms has undergone radical changes.

After the Bangladesh war in 1971, the balance of power has shifted decisively in favour of India in the subcontinent, and Pakistan's pretensions to parity with India were put paid. India has been in much more confident frame of mind in relation to its security concerns regarding Pakistan.

Pakistan itself has moved closer to the Middle Eastern countries particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia since its dismemberment. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 made Pakistan a frontline State, and a recipient of massive

American military and economic aid. With the threat of Islamic bomb looming large over the horizon, India cannot but consider Israel as a potential ally in any future dealings with the Middle East.

The attitude of the Arab countries themselves towards Israel has undergone changes in the 1970s. After the Camp David Accord in 1978, Egypt has normalised its relations with Israel. Without Egypt, the Arab military option against Israel is non-existent.

Saudi Arabia, along with Israel has been part of American strategic consensus vis-a-vis the U.S.S.R. The Fahd Plan has implicitly acknowledged the existence of Israel as a State too. With its enormous wealth, Saudi Arabia would wield considerable influence in the region for a long time to come and given their political preferences, they are most likely to use this influence on the side of moderation and reconciliation. Iran's relations with Israel under the Shah were good though not publicised. Even Khomeini's Iran bought arms from Israel for its war with Iraq.

There have been reports that China has been importing arms and technology from Israel.¹³⁵ The U.S.S.R., too, has softened its attitude towards Israel in the 1980s.¹³⁶ It has exchanged consular delegations with Israel, and has also adopted a liberal policy in relation to Jewish emigration from the U.S.S.R.

Even the Palestine Liberation Organization's attitude

to Israel has undergone a remarkable change over the last two decades. Under Arafat's charismatic, moderate and pragmatic leadership, the PLO's approach to Israel has softened over the years, and is now much more conciliatory and realistic.¹³⁷

Besides, Israel has been one of the most powerful and stable countries in the region over the last two decades or so. Any policy which fails to take cognizance of this simple truth is doomed to failure. In short, the power realities in the region by themselves necessitate a reorientation of India's policy towards the region in general and Israel in particular.

Given the nature of the American political system, the Jewish lobby in the U.S. would continue to wield political influence which would be out of all proportion to its numbers. India would be well-advised to take advantage of this peculiarly American phenomenon and have the Jewish lobby on its side.¹³⁸ This would facilitate India's dealings with the U.S., and also counter whatever influence Pakistan has built up in the U.S. Congress and outside over the years.

Apart from increased trade, India can also benefit from Israel's experience in drip irrigation, desalination, horticulture, poultry farming, solar energy and medicine.

Indian policy makers over the years have shown a remarkable lack of sensitivity to the changing scenario in

the region, and seemed to have been obsessed with playing it safe all the time. By and large, India has failed to develop a well-thoughtout, balanced and integrated approach to the Middle East. Its approach to the region has been piecemeal in nature, smacked of ad hocism, and suffered from inexplicable political diffidence and self-consciousness. This is nowhere better demonstrated than in India's relations with Israel over the decades. It is nothing less than scandalous that India failed to include Israel as an integral part of its policy towards a region which has been of utmost importance to her from the beginning. India's claims to regional preponderance would sound rather hollow if India failed to act with confidence and imagination in a region where it has so much at stake.

This is not to advocate that India should immediately upgrade its relations with Israel. The change should be gradual and incremental, and can be done, perhaps, even with the prior consultation of India's Arab friends. That way, India would regain its leverage with Israel, and serve its own enlightened interests as well as those of the Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, much more positively and effectively than she was able to in the past.

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CHAPTER 7

INDIA AND THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION

India's policy towards the Palestine Liberation Organization (the PLO), has been one of the less understood but more sensible aspects of India's policy towards the Middle East. India, of course has been closely following and concerned with the Palestinian issue from the very beginning.¹

In this chapter, an attempt would be made to study the Indian attitude to the Palestinian question in two parts, the first part dealing with the Indian approach to the issue after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 till the assumption of leadership of the PLO in 1969 by Yasser Arafat and the second with the Indian attitude to the PLO thereafter.

In doing so, the emphasis would be on examining and analysing the motives and calculations behind India's consistent support to the Palestinian cause. It would be argued that India's support to the Palestinians was, of necessity, rather unspectacular and less than substantial even in material terms. Since India was in no position to extend anything more than diplomatic support to the Palestinian cause, it need to be examined whether India used this option with dexterity and imagination. It would also be discussed whether India's non-relationship with Israel, which was

deliberately cultivated to keep the Arab states in good humour, came in the way of India making a more effective contribution in furthering the Palestinian cause. Finally, it would be argued that the mere extension of vocal support to the Arab causes in general or the Palestinian issue in particular is a totally inadequate basis for promoting the Indian interests in a region which has been undergoing tremendous changes in the last decade.

INDIA AND THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION TILL 1969

Though India's political elite consistently and firmly upheld the cause of the Palestinian Arabs even before India won independence, one could discern a subtle change in their attitude to the issue after India became free in 1947 and particularly after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 in spite of India's steadfast opposition to partition. While India did vote against the partition of Palestine and subsequently against the admission of Israel to the U.N. in the General Assembly, Indian attitude to the issue, at this stage, was governed by two important factors. First, Israel was, by then, a reality which simply could not be wished away. India could not but take cognizance of this basic fact regardless of what the Arabs felt or thought about it. Secondly, India was now an independent country and as such it could not get carried away by its emotional pre-

independence sentiments towards the Palestinian issue. It, now, had to weigh the issue in terms of its concrete national interests in the sense that principle had to yield some place to pragmatism.

DIFFERENCES IN THE INDIAN AND ARAB APPROACHES

The Indian attitude to the Palestinian issue, from this point onwards, was characterised by the recognition of the reality of the State of Israel, a firm belief in the necessity and possibility of solving the Palestinian issue through negotiations and a deep concern for the fate of the Palestinian refugees who were uprooted from their homes as a result of the Arab-Jewish conflict over Palestine.

In view of India's vociferous support for the Palestinians Arabs in the latter years, it is not often realised that India was one of the earliest countries to recognise the State of Israel. India, in fact, extended formal recognition to Israel on 17th Sept. 1950 in spite of considerable opposition from the Arab countries. According to the Official Communique, "... India's decision to recognise Israel is the recognition of an established fact".² However, there seems to be so little awareness even in India with regard to India's recognition of the State of Israel that even a minister of state of external affairs, as late as in the 1980s, having been asked if India recognised Israel de jure, could

only mumble "I don't know" after a lot of dithering.³

India also thought that it was both necessary and feasible to solve the Palestinian issue through negotiations. It was, of course, in India's interest to settle the issue amicably and through negotiations which would ensure peace and stability in a region which was so close and important to India. The Official Communique, in fact, makes a direct reference to this when it states that continuing non-recognition "limits the effectiveness of the Government of India's role as a possible intermediary between Israel and Arab states".⁴

India, at this stage, recognised the problem of displaced Palestinians only as a "refugee" problem. Hence, the accent of India's approach was on the early return and rehabilitation of the displaced Palestinian Arabs and the need to look after them till then. Though India abstained from voting on the U.N. General Assembly resolution No. 194 (III) of 11 Dec. 1948, its basic stand, thereafter, was in consonance with it.

The resolution, inter alia, states that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return..." and efforts should be made to "facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and

the payment of compensation... ".5

It is absolutely important to emphasise these three elements in India's approach to the Palestinian question in order to demonstrate that there have been fundamental differences in the Indian approach and that of the more extremist elements among the Arabs and the Palestinians to the issue from the very beginning though these differences have been somewhat obscured by India's loud and consistent support for the Palestinian cause over the years.

Firstly, it is often overlooked that India never associated itself in any way with the extreme Arab demand for the liquidation of the state of Israel. Once India recognised the existence of Israel as an established fact, it implicitly accepted the position that whatever solution put forward for solving the Palestinian refugee problem should address and take care of the legitimate security interests of the Jewish state.

To cite just one instance, in one of the preparatory meetings in Colombo for the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung in 1955, the Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Ali introduced a draft resolution which, inter alia, described the creation of Israel as a violation of international law. Nehru took serious exception to this and pointed out that since India recognised Israel, he could not condemn it as a violation of international law.⁶ India maintained this position firmly and consistently over the years which certainly is a major

departure from the traditional Arab/Palestinian position of not accepting the existence of the State of Israel and an open commitment to its destruction.

Secondly, India never endorsed the Arab position of refusing to negotiate with Israel. India, over the years, stuck to the position that only direct negotiations between the Arabs and Israel would provide a way out of the Arab-Israeli stalemate. Nehru himself, time and again, "probed in his talks with Arab leaders, especially Nasser, into whether there was an opening for reconciliation with Israel, but he had always come up against a wall of steel".⁷

However, Nehru refused to give up. At the Bandung conference, he took exception to Mr. Ahmad Shukairy, a Palestinian and a member of the Syrian delegation, who, in the course of his speech said that a negotiated settlement was not possible in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nehru maintained that "sometime or other, whether you are enemies or whether you have fought a war, there must be negotiations. There is always some kind of settlement... After all, one can settle things either by compulsion, that is by pressure or by negotiation".⁸ Thus, India, from the beginning, desired and supported a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute despite the fact that such a stand was not entirely to the liking of the Arabs.

Thirdly, India was genuinely concerned with the plight of the displaced Palestinians, though at this stage, India

merely considered them as "refugees" and even thought it possible that some of them, at least, could be absorbed by various Arab countries. Hence, India extended consistent support to all efforts aimed at providing immediate relief as well as long term rehabilitation of the Palestinian refugees. This can be seen from the stand taken by Indian representatives and delegations at the U.N. over the years.

INDIAN SUPPORT TO THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEES AT THE U.N.

A member of the Indian delegation, Mr. Akbar Ali Khan, making a statement⁹ at the United Nations Special Political Committee in Nov. 1958 argued that "The responsibility for relief and rehabilitation of the refugees is the responsibility of the United Nations because the refugees would not have become a homeless people had it not been for a political decision taken by the United Nations, and in spite of their opposition".

He further argued that "compensation is not a benefit to be conferred by someone on someone else - we feel that compensation is a natural human right which never can be denied, irrespective of political considerations".

He asserted, somewhat over optimistically that "it is not beyond the ability of the Arab states and Israel to work out some arrangement whereby it will be possible for the

refugees to have the right to go back as citizens of Israel or be compensated in order to begin their lives elsewhere". He also opposed any "sudden conclusion of the activities" of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency), or any attempt to "impose a political solution on people who are not as yet ready for such solutions". He supported the continuation of UNRWA activities "with stress on vocational and educational needs, and appeal to all governments to contribute to the funds of the agency".

India's Permanent Representative C.S. Jha, making a statement¹⁰ on the report of the UNRWA in Nov. 1959 stated that "the problem of Palestine refugees is not merely an intensely human problem; it is also one of great political importance and indeed affects the entire complex of political relations in the Middle East. It can not be treated in isolation and purely in terms of economic rehabilitation".

Stressing the importance and need for UNRWA to continue its activities, Mr. Jha said that his own Government "fully recognising the nature of the problem and moved by humanitarian considerations has made contributions, both in cash and in kind". It has not been possible for us to make more than token contributions because of India's own colossal expenditure towards the rehabilitation and resettlement of its own over nine million refugees".

A member of the Indian delegation Mr. C.D. Pande, making a statement¹¹ at the U.N. Special Political Committee in Nov.

1960 bemoaned that "It is indeed tragic, that, for the twelfth successive year, we are considering the problem of the Palestine refugees". He emphasised that "The problem of Palestine refugees needs to be dealt with now while time is still on our side in a more earnest manner than hitherto". He acknowledged that "the problem forms part of a wider question but the lives of so many people can hardly await final solutions". He envisaged a "more active" role for the Conciliation Committee in this context.

THE 1967 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

The six day Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 was a watershed in the history of the Middle East. The rout of the Arab armies and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem changed the whole complexion of the Middle Eastern politics. Inter alia, it disabused the Palestinians of any hope that the Arab countries on their own would be able to deliver them from their physical misery and uncertain political future. This realisation prompted the Palestinians to think in terms of self-reliance and self-help and a determination to shape their own destiny. Moreover, the Israeli occupation of new territories not only brought millions of Palestinian Arabs under direct Israeli rule but also compounded the refugee problem by dis-

placing thousands of Palestinian Arabs afresh.

The Indian response to these developments have been both prompt and profound. The India-UAR Joint Statement¹² issued during Mrs. Gandhi's visit to Cairo in Oct. 1967 underlined "the urgency of finding a just solution to the problem, especially the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories occupied by them since June 5".

More importantly, the statement also expressed "support for the just rights of the Palestinian people". The term "Palestinian people" was significant because this was the first time that such an expression was officially used and was, perhaps, meant to acknowledge and approve the moves made by the Palestinians to steer their future as they deemed fit.

Mr. D.P. Dhar, a member of the Indian delegation, making a statement¹³ at the U.N. Special Political Committee in Dec. 1967 reiterated the new Indian position which recognised the Palestinians as a people and not merely refugees when he said: "It can not be over-emphasised that the conflict of June 1967 and the consequent occupation of vast Arab territories has greatly complicated the situation in West Asia. It is our firm belief that lasting solutions of the many problems existing at present can be worked out only when the key issue of the refugees is dealt with and steps are taken to ensure the just rights of the Arab people of Palestine on the basis of paragraph 11 of resolution 194 (III). It will

be appreciated that the refugee question is not only a humanitarian question of great importance but central to the political stability of the entire area".

He also argued that without greater contributions from more prosperous countries, UNRWA "could hardly be expected to maintain, much less expand, its humanitarian assistance to the refugees ...". He pledged that for its part India would "maintain its previous level of contributions, apart from direct bilateral assistance to the states concerned for the benefit of refugees".

INDIA AND THE PLO

India, as has already been pointed out, both welcomed and supported the moves made by various Palestinian factions to come together in order to present a united front to Israel and enable them to pursue their interests without being too dependent on external help. India also could not but have welcomed the removal of Mr. Ahmed Shukairy from the Chairmanship of the PLO in 1968 as a direct consequence of the six day war which spelt disaster for the Arabs. Many in the Arab world felt that it was his inflammatory utterances which made Israel fear that an Arab attack was imminent and resort to a pre-emptive strike. Another sore point was his insistence that he should be accepted as the head of a government in exile. Not surprisingly, he became a source of

discord among Arabs and Tunisia reportedly refused to attend some top level Arab meetings because Mr. Shukairy's participation in them as the head of a Palestinian delegation.

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It was about this time that the Indian Government plumped for the largest of the various Palestinian factions that came under the umbrella of the PLO namely Al Fatah and its leader Yasser Arafat. India's preference for Al Fatah and Arafat is understandable. Firstly, Al Fatah was essentially nationalistic in its approach and shunned the ideological militancy of some of the other PLO factions and that was to India's liking. Secondly, it also tried to steer clear of mixing religion with politics by characterising its struggle with Israel as political rather than religious. Its secular credentials could not but endear itself to the Indian leadership which was so concerned about religious resurgence in the region and the Pakistani ability to exploit it to India's discomfiture. Thirdly and lastly, India saw in Arafat a pragmatic and charismatic leader who more than anyone else could carry the various factions of the PLO along with him and when the time came for eventual settlement, he would be able to deliver it from the Palestinian side.

An Al Fatah delegation visited India in Sept. 1969 on the invitation of the Indian Association for Afro-Asian solidarity. During the visit, the delegation called on the

Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Dinesh Singh and requested permission to open an office in India. Mr. Singh assured the delegation that the Government of India would consider its request sympathetically.¹⁵ Besides, the Al Fatah delegation collected Rs. 80,000 for their cause. The money was left in a trust as no permission was sought to take it out of India.

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In Aug. 1970, the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Swaran Singh assured the three Al Fatah delegates Abu Ghassan, Abu Bashar and Abu Javad that he would favourably consider their request for opening an information centre in New Delhi.¹⁷

The Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi, addressing the Third Conference of Non-Aligned countries at Lusaka on Sept. 9, 1970 made a pointed reference to the Palestinian issue when she said: "Israel should be prevailed upon to comply fully with the U.N. Security Council Resolution of November, 1967. We cannot deny to the people of Palestine their inalienable right to the homelands from which they were exiled".¹⁸

However, when fighting broke out between the Jordanian troops and the Palestinian commandos in Jordan in Sept. 1970, India maintained a neutral stance by taking the view that it was an internal affair of Jordan.¹⁹

THE BANGLADESH CRISIS AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

The Bangladesh crisis and the lack of understanding shown by

the Arab countries to the influx of millions of refugees to India and the economic burden and the social tensions that the influx generated made some people in India to call in to question the wisdom of continuing India's strong and unwavering support to the Palestinian refugees. A Member of Parliament Mr. Kishan Kant pointedly asked the Indian government whether it would consider the possibility of treating the Arab refugee problem as an internal problem of the Arab countries in view of the Arab stand that the crisis in then East Pakistan was an internal affair of Pakistan. The Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Swaran Singh wisely ruled out any such possibility saying that India's stand on the Palestinian refugees was in consonance with "justice and facts of the situation". The government did not think that it should reverse its policy because "certain Arab countries are not in complete accord with our stand" (in relation to Bangladesh).²⁰

However, the Indian representative Mr. I.J. Bahadur Singh while making a statement²¹ at the special Political Committee at the U.N. on Nov. 26, 1971 shrewdly drew a parallel between the problem of the Palestinian refugees imposed on the Arab states by Israel and the intolerable burden of refugees that Pakistan's inhuman policies in the then East Pakistan imposed on India's fragile economy and delicate social fabric. Inter alia, he said: "We ourselves at this very moment are burdened with nearly 10 million refugees. The

Palestine refugees pose the largest unsolved problem whereas the East Bengal refugees confront us by their numbers and suffering with the most unprecedented tragedy of modern times".

"The very fact that a section of a population is obliged to take refuge in a neighbouring state or states is indicative of the gross violations of human rights. The international community cannot absolve itself from its duty by paying conscience money for the pitiful maintenance of refugees in camps".

"The only solution to the problem of refugees is that they go back to their hearths and homes".

"Refugees are a direct responsibility of the state which has forced them to flee and not of the state who has come forward to their succour".

"Israel has disrupted the economy of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria by forcing refugees on their territory. The influx of these refugees has created political pressures, social problems and economic difficulties for these countries. To hold these countries to ransom for the ultimate solution of the fate of the refugees is unjust and inhuman".

"We maintain that Israeli responsibility towards its refugees is independent of her relations with her neighbours. Arab neighbours of Israel are not bound either legally or morally to negotiate, cooperate or discuss the subject of refugees with Israel. Israel must take back its

refugees. It is her duty to create a climate of confidence in which these refugees go back to their homes in safety with dignity and honour enjoying full right of self-determination".

"In spite of our own burden to which I have already referred my government has decided to increase its 1972 contribution to UNRWA by 20% of the level of its 1971 contribution".

By drawing a close parallel to the refugee situation in the Middle East and in the Indian subcontinent, the Indian representative implicitly but pointedly warned the Arab states against adopting double standards in relation to the refugee situation in the subcontinent. Thus, while the Indian government refused to use its support to the Palestinian people as a bargaining chip to persuade the Arab states to support the Indian stand in relation to Bangladesh crisis, it did not hesitate to make it clear to Arab states of the untenability and unacceptability of their stand that the crisis in East Bengal was an internal affair of Pakistan. India also chose to express its solidarity and commitment to the Palestinian cause by resisting pressures to establish diplomatic relations with Israel in reaction to unsympathetic attitude adopted by most of the Arab countries in relation to the Bangladesh issue.²²

THE MUNICH MASSACRE, SEPT. 1972

The Indian government reacted sharply to the slaying of 11 Israeli athletes by Palestinian commandos in the Olympic village in Munich on Sept. 6, 1972. A statement of the Ministry of External Affairs said: "The act resulting in this tragedy was senseless and condemnable. It remains so whatever the dissatisfaction and frustration leading to it. There is no justification for dragging terrorism into the arena of sports". It went on to add "Terrorist activities of this type are deplorable and damage the very cause which is sought to be advanced".²³

The Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi too was quick to condemn the Munich massacre. She said: "This shocking and senseless violence cannot but be condemned in the strongest terms. Such a dastardly act of hatred can never solve any problem".²⁴

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

When the uneasy peace in the Middle East was broken by the surprise attack launched by Egypt and Syria on Oct. 7, 1973, the Ministry of External Affairs came out with a statement²⁵ which was totally supportive of the Arabs. It said: "The Government have consistently declared that the cause of the

tension in the area is due to Israeli aggression and refusal to vacate territories occupied by armed force. This intransigence on the part of Israel is clearly the basic cause leading to the present outbreak of hostilities".

"Our sympathies are entirely with the Arabs whose sufferings have long reached a point of explosion".

"The immediate implementation by Israel of the U.N. resolution No. 242 of 1967 constitutes a solution which can arrest the tragic march of events threatening the peace of the region and the world at large".

Meanwhile, India's Deputy Permanent Representative at the U.N. Mr. N.P. Jain, addressing the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly for the announcement of voluntary contributions to UNRWA on Nov. 30, 1973, announced a contribution of Rs. 100,000 in kind. He also mentioned that India had been awarding scholarships directly to the Palestinians which would continue the following year as well. He further said: "This should reflect our concern for and firm principled support to the unfortunate Palestinian refugees whose suffering remains unabated and who continue to need not only our moral sympathy but also material support. The extent of tragedy can be realised if it is recalled that a whole new generation has been born in refugee camps with no future in sight".²⁶

A little later, Mr. Swaran Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, addressing the Rajya Sabha in Dec. 1973, reiterated

India's firm support to the Palestinians when he said: "The arrogance of Israel and the support she has received from her mighty friends ... had driven the Palestinians to measures of desperation".

He asserted that "The rights of the Palestinians must be restored and their homeland assured to them. Our attitude towards this situation in this conflict is based on firm and unalterable principles. These are principles not only of equity and justice and steadfast friendship and solidarity but also principles of international law and behaviour".²⁷

INDIA STRENGTHENS THE PLO'S DIPLOMATIC OPTION

Though India has always been in favour of a political and diplomatic solution to the Palestinian problem, it threw its entire weight behind the PLO's quest for diplomatic recognition in the post-1973 period primarily for three reasons. Firstly, India realised that the PLO itself was much more amenable to and appreciative of the need for and efficacy of a diplomatic offensive at this particular juncture. Secondly, India was also aware that such a course would strengthen the hands of Arafat and the Al Fatah within the PLO whose ideological moderation suited India's political preferences in the region admirably. Thirdly and lastly, India was worried that unless the momentum for peace and a negotiated settlement that the Yom Kippur war had generated

all round was carefully nurtured, there was always the possibility that it might lead to a new political stalemate in the Middle East in which Palestinians would be the worst sufferers. Consequently, India sought to help the PLO gain international political acceptance as a reasonable and moderate organization and live down its image as a terrorist outfit by canvassing its case in the U.N. and outside so that when the time for the final settlement came, the PLO would have gained sufficient respectability and credibility to participate in the negotiations as an independent organization genuinely representative of the Palestinian people.

ALGIERS DECLARATION, MARCH, 1974

The qualitative upgradation in the Third World's diplomatic support to the PLO came in March, 1974 when the Bureau of IV Conference of Non-aligned countries adopted a declaration²⁸ in Algiers on the Middle East and the question of Palestine. It emphasised that just and durable peace in the region could be obtained only on the basis of "two indispensable fundamental prerequisites".

"Restoration of the Palestine people's national rights, foremost among which is the right to return to its homeland and exercise its right to self-determination" and

"Ensuring global recognition of the Palestine Liberation Or-

ganization as the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people and its struggle, and considering it a fundamental party in all the efforts exerted to establish just peace".

The recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the acceptance of the PLO as the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people by the international community became the underlying theme of the Third World's diplomatic offensive from this point onwards. India played a key role in this process both in the U.N. and outside.

India's Foreign Minister Mr. Swaran Singh, making a statement²⁹ at the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 26, 1974 called for the implementation of the Security Council resolution 242 of 1967 as the basis of a "just and enduring peace" in the Middle East. He insisted that "The restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestine people is another corner-stone in the structure of a lasting peace". He further warned that "If the catastrophe of another war in the Middle East is to be avoided, Israel should end its aggression and the legitimate rights of the Palestine people should be restored to them".

INDIA'S DRAFT RESOLUTION, OCT. 8, 1974

On Oct. 8, 1974, India co-sponsored a draft resolution in

the U.N. General Assembly calling for the PLO's participation in the deliberations of the General Assembly on the Palestinian question. The draft resolution³⁰ was as follows:

The General Assembly,
Considering that the Palestinian people is the principal party to the question of Palestine,
Invites the Palestine Liberation Organization, the representative of the Palestinian people, to participate in the deliberations of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine, in plenary meetings.

Explaining and justifying India's sponsoring of the aforementioned draft resolution, India's Permanent Representative R. Jaipal made a statement³¹ in the U.N. General Assembly on Oct. 14, 1974. He contended that "The draft resolution ... seeks to invite the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in our deliberations because that organization represents the people of Palestine whether or not the PLO has been elected by the Palestinian people is neither material nor relevant at this stage. The fact is that the PLO is recognised by all the Arab states and many others as the political organization, representing the Palestine people".

"We cannot simply imagine a situation in which the PLO has

been denied a hearing by us. We are dealing with the future of some 3 million people of Palestine. They can no longer be treated simply as refugees to be maintained indefinitely on international charity nor can they be dismissed as terrorists".

Commending the adoption of the draft resolution, Mr. Jaipal was careful to point out that "in adopting it, we are not in any sense threatening the security or the existence of the state of Israel. We shall, in fact, only be granting the Palestinian people the right to be heard before their future is decided".

RESOLUTION OF THE RABAT ARAB SUMMIT, OCT. 28, 1974

In the meantime, the Seventh Arab Summit in Rabat in Oct. 1974 passed a resolution³² which formally recognised the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people which further reinforced and strengthened the diplomatic process set in motion by the Algiers Nonaligned Summit to confer legitimacy and acceptance on the PLO by the international community. The Rabat Arab resolution, inter alia, recognised the right of the Palestinian people

"to return to their homeland and to self-determination".

"to establish an independent national authority under the

leadership of the PLO in its capacity as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestine people, over all liberated territory".

and "to preserve Palestinian unity and not to interfere in Palestinian internal affairs".

ARAFAT ACKNOWLEDGES INDIA'S ROLE

Acknowledging India's positive and purposeful contribution to the Palestinian cause at the U.N., the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat conveyed his "deep gratitude" and "appreciation" for the attitude of the Indian delegation at the U.N. in calling for the participation of the PLO delegation in the General Assembly discussion of the Palestinian issue.³³

ARAFAT'S ADDRESS TO THE U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY, NOV. 13, 1974

As a consequence of the sustained and persistent diplomatic effort made by various Third World organizations and movements, the Chairman of the PLO Mr. Yasser Arafat was invited to address the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 13, 1974. In his historic address,³⁴ Mr. Arafat traced the origins of the Palestinian problem, the sufferings of the Palestinian people and the great injustice done to them over the years. Implicitly stressing the PLO's willingness and preference for a peaceful solution to the issue, Arafat warned the

world body, "Today, I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand".

India's Foreign Secretary Mr. Kewal Singh while making a statement³⁵ at the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 19, 1974, seized on the opportunity to emphasise and endorse the moderation and reasonableness that permeated Arafat's address to the U.N.. "We are glad that the President of the Palestine Liberation Organization Mr. Yasser Arafat was invited to address this Assembly and what we heard, was a voice of reason, a passionate appeal for justice. In Mr. Arafat's speech, we found echoes of the same values to which we are also dedicated i.e. democracy, secularism, human dignity and common nationhood for multi-racial, multi-religious groups".

He also tried to explain the desperation and frustration that prompted some Palestinians to violence and terrorism. "Why should we be surprised if a people who have been deprived of their homes and normal existence, were reduced to such frustrations that they did not look upon the international community to restore to them their legitimate rights to return and resettlement".

He emphasised that "India adheres to the resolution adopted by the fourth summit conference of Heads of State and Government of non-aligned countries and accepts the decision of the Arab summit of October, 1974 held in Rabat that the

Palestine Liberation Organization is the representative of the Palestine people".

INDIA'S DRAFT RESOLUTION, NOV. 21, 1974

Encouraged by the response and emboldened by the success of its labours at the U.N. in favour of the Palestinian cause, India introduced another draft resolution³⁶ on Nov. 21, 1974 in relation to the Palestinian issue. It, inter alia, reaffirmed "the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine"

"to self-determination without external interference"

"to national independence and sovereignty"

and recognised that "the Palestinian people is a principal party in the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East".

INDIA RECOGNISES THE PLO, JAN. 10, 1975

As a logical corollary to India's sustained effort to help the PLO gain diplomatic recognition in the comity of nations, India extended formal recognition to the PLO by granting diplomatic status to the PLO's representatives in New Delhi on Jan. 10, 1975. India was the first non-Arab

country to extend such recognition. Reacting to India's decision to extend diplomatic status to the PLO, its Chairman Yasser Arafat said that the move would give the struggle of the Palestinian people "a very big push forward".³⁷

The Annual Report (1974-75) of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India looked back with satisfaction on its efforts in relation to promoting the Palestinian cause in the year in question. The Report opined that "In the regional context, the decision of the Rabat Summit meeting of Arab leaders that the Palestine Liberation Organization is the sole representative of the Palestinian people highlighted the fact that no solution of the West Asian crisis would be possible without the Palestinian people being a party to that solution".³⁸

Displaying a mood of self-congratulation, the Report said that "The (Indian) Government ... sponsored/supported resolutions in the General Assembly of the United Nations which accepted the status of the Palestine Liberation Organization and accorded her an Observer Status".³⁹

Explaining India's decision to extend diplomatic recognition to the PLO, the Report said that "In view of the widening relationship and recognition achieved by the PLO in other parts of the world and in the U.N.O. ... the Government of India agreed to the request of the PLO to open a separate office in New Delhi".⁴⁰

Addressing the plenary session of the ministerial meeting of

the Coordinating Bureau of Nonaligned countries in Havana on March 18, 1975, the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Y.B. Chavan acknowledged with satisfaction the progress made by the PLO in its diplomatic endeavours. "The comprehensive consideration of the question of Palestine in the last General Assembly session in which the PLO participated enabled the adoption of a resolution reaffirming the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine. This was a significant landmark in the long struggle to secure the vindication of Palestinian rights, especially their right to national independence and their right to participate in the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East. We are gratified that today there is increasing recognition as well as support in the international community for the full restoration of these rights".⁴¹

AT THE U.N.

India's Permanent Representative Mr. R. Jaipal making a statement⁴² in the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 5, 1975 bemoaned that "For over 27 years the United Nations has stood by and done virtually nothing for the Palestinian Arabs except to treat them as refugees".

He made a pointed reference to the PLO's desire for a peaceful settlement of their problem and reminded the U.N.'s responsibility in arriving at an amicable settlement. "They

(the Palestinians) have now come to the United Nations with an olive branch, for the gun is out of place here".

"We consider this to be good and healthy development. It represents the desire to turn away from paths of violence to ways of non-violence and negotiation".

"It is vital that the United Nations should therefore adopt decisions that give hope to the Palestinian Arabs, because to do otherwise would be callous and cruel".

Mr. Jaipal, again making a statement⁴³ in the U.N. General Assembly on Dec. 4, 1975 on the situation in the Middle East, referred to the plight of the stateless Palestinians being at a disadvantage to pursue their interests in an effective way and the need for the U.N. to come to their rescue. "The sovereign Arab states, using the attributes of their sovereignty, are in a position to take care of themselves, but the Palestinian Arabs are not yet in a similar situation" he averred.

He also tried to allay Israeli fears in relation to its security. "We see no inherent contradiction between the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs and the right of the State of Israel to exist. A fallacy is being deliberately propagated that the rights of the Palestinian Arabs conflict with the right of Israel to exist. The purpose of this fallacy could only be to deny the Palestinian Arabs their inalienable rights. It is entirely absurd even to contemplate the extinction of the State of Israel, which has asserted

its right to exist in no uncertain manner. It is difficult, therefore, to comprehend Israel's fears for its safety, except in purely psychological terms".

As can be seen from the foregoing analysis, India, ever since the Yom Kippur war, sought to strengthen the diplomatic option of the PLO by canvassing its case in various international forums. In doing so, it sought to soften the PLO's image as a terrorist organization and tried to project its image as a moderate and reasonable organization which, in the past, was driven to violence and terrorism in desperation and frustration. Thus, the PLO's endeavours for international diplomatic recognition and legitimacy started bearing fruit in the mid 70s. After acquiring an Observer Status in the U.N. in 1974, the PLO's diplomatic march proceeded without a hitch. It became a member of the NAM in 1975 and that of the "Group of 77" in 1976.

India, at this stage, seemed to be urging moderation on the part of the PLO, a sense of urgency and purposefulness on the part of the U.N. and flexibility and reasonableness on the part of Israel as essential for a negotiated settlement.

THE JANATA GOVERNMENT AND THE PLO

When the Janata Party came to power in March 1977 and particularly when a former Jana Sangh member and a vocal critic of the Congress Party's traditional policy of friendship to

Arab countries Mr. A.B. Vajpayee took over as the Foreign Minister, speculation became ripe that India's policy towards the Middle East might come under review and even revision. However, there was very little difference, in terms of substance, in the foreign policy approaches of the Janata Party and its predecessor. The Janata Government lost no time in reaffirming and reiterating India's strong support to the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular.

Addressing the Plenary Session of the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Coordinating Bureau of Nonaligned countries on April 7, 1977 in New Delhi, the Janata Foreign Minister Mr. A.B. Vajpayee made it a point to emphasise India's traditional position in relation to the Middle East. He asserted that "Israel must vacate occupied Arab territories. The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people should be recognised. It is our hope that ways and means will soon be found to implement the relevant Security Council Resolutions and that there will be an early resumption of Geneva Conference with the participation among others of the PLO".⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the Israeli Foreign Minister Mr. Moshe Dayan, visited India secretly on Aug. 14, 1977 at the invitation of the Janata Prime Minister Mr. Morarji Desai. In his talks with Mr. Dayan, Morarji exhorted that Israel must make peace with the Arabs. While he wanted the Arabs to guarantee the existence of Israel, the solution to the Palestinian problem

according to him was "to establish a Palestinian State in the Arab territories which you (Israel) will evacuate". He refused to accept Dayan's argument that a Palestinian State would endanger Israel and that the Palestinian refugees should be absorbed by the Arab countries in which they lived just as Israel absorbed almost a million Jews who came to Israel from various Arab countries. Nor did Morarji consent to exchange of Ambassadors between the two countries nor a visit by his foreign Minister to Israel even in secret.⁴⁵

However, the Janata Government reacted sharply to the regularization of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories in Aug. 1977. The Ministry of External Affairs, in an official release said on 27 Aug. 1977, "... India has always been against acquisition of territory by any country by the use of force. India is thus against continued occupation by Israel of territories that it has occupied since the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Moreover, India along with the vast majority of the members of the United Nations has strongly urged that no step should be taken which would further compound and complicate the fulfilment of United Nations Resolutions which include the one passed in December 1976. India, therefore, strongly deplores the action taken to regularise existing Israeli settlements in occupied areas and to authorize new ones. This is not only contrary to international opinion but goes against the efforts being made towards a search for a lasting solution of the Arab-Israeli

conflict and the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people".⁴⁶

Later, a member of the Indian delegation Mr. Ram Dhan, making a statement in the U.N. General Assembly on Nov. 23, 1977 urged the early resumption of the Geneva peace conference for a just solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute. He insisted that such a solution should be based on certain principles like territories occupied by conquest should be vacated, right of Palestinians to national self-determination and the right of all states in the region including Israel to exist within secure boundaries.⁴⁷

Again, a week later, Mr. A.C. George, a member of the Indian delegation, addressing the U.N. General Assembly urged that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including a national state of their own, should be recognised by the Security Council. It was also essential that the PLO should be invited to participate in any negotiations for a peaceful settlement.⁴⁸

The Annual Report (1976-77) of the Ministry of External Affairs reiterated the Janata Government's commitment to the Arab cause in general and that of the Palestinians in particular in no uncertain terms. "The Government of India continued its firm support for the Arab states in their efforts to obtain a just solution of the Arab-Israeli problem, based on Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967 and the realisation of the legitimate rights and

aspirations of the Palestinian people".49

THE JANATA AND THE CAMP DAVID ACCORD, SEPT. 17, 1978

Nevertheless, the Janata Government felt it necessary to reassure the Arab countries of the continued Indian support to the Arabs. Hence, the Annual Report (1977-78) of the Ministry of External Affairs was quick to point out that "The Minister of External Affairs (Mr. Vajpayee) lost no time in allaying the misapprehensions among Arab countries about India's support to the Arab cause".50 However, the report made no effort to conceal India's positive response to Sadat's bold initiative in the Middle East. "India has been watching developments taking place in West Asia since the visit of President Anwar Sadat to Israel which has resulted in a tremendous change in the West Asian scene".51

However, when the Camp David Accord was signed on Sept. 17, 1978, the Arab world including the PLO denounced Egypt for betraying the Arab cause. Sadat was accused of destroying Arab solidarity by signing a separate peace treaty with Israel. India had to take in to account the strong and negative reaction of the Arab world to the Camp David Accord. The Indian Foreign Minister Mr. Vajpayee said at a press conference that India did not welcome the Camp David Accord

because it suffered from three major shortcomings. 1) Palestine was the hard core of the Middle Eastern problem. There could be no lasting peace until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were restored. 2) The PLO has not been accepted as the representative body of the Palestinians and 3) The Camp David agreement is silent on the status of Jerusalem.⁵²

Nevertheless, when the Arab states made a concerted effort to expel Egypt from the NAM in 1979 for signing a peace treaty with Israel, India stood by Egypt and firmly opposed any such move. The Indian Prime Minister Mr. Desai told the hosts of the 6th Nonaligned Summit Cuba that he would not be able to attend the Summit if any attempt was made to expel Egypt from the NAM.⁵³

The Annual Report (1978-79) of the Ministry of External Affairs summed up India's response to the dramatic developments in the Middle East following Sadat's peace initiative. "India noted the dramatic changes that took place in the region as a result of the Camp David Agreements between Egypt and Israel. It was India's belief that a comprehensive solution of the West Asian problem could only be possible on the basis of a unified stand by the Arab states and that a durable peace could be achieved only with the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Arab territories occupied by it and by the restoration to the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination and to a State of their own".⁵⁴

The then Foreign Minister of India Mr. S.N. Mishra, leading the Indian delegation to the Havana Summit of the Nonaligned countries in Sept. 1979, expressed his misgivings about the Camp David Accords much more explicitly in his speech⁵⁵ at the Conference. He said that "The Egypt-Israeli treaties have caused fears and misgivings which have led to the exacerbation of the situation particularly by dividing the Arab world. It is for Egypt to remove these misgivings". He asserted that "Any solution which ignores the fact that Palestine is at the core of the issue, stands no chance of success". He was emphatic that "The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, whose sole representative is the PLO, including the right to their own state is central to a satisfactory settlement".

Later, elaborating India's position on the Camp David Accords at the U.N. on Nov. 28, 1979, India's Permanent Representative Mr. B.C. Mishra said that India did not dispute the sovereign right of any state to enter into treaties and agreements on bilateral matters. However, such agreements could not presume to settle matters affecting others who were not contracting parties. India could not agree that any agreement to which the PLO was not a party should seek to impose on the Palestinian people a pre-determined settlement.⁵⁶

OBSERVANCE OF PALESTINIAN DAY IN NEW DELHI, NOV. 29, 1979

A special function to observe the "International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People" jointly organised by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the PLO was held in New Delhi on Nov. 29, 1979. Presiding over the function, the Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. B. Barua said: "Today, when an increasing number of people, all over the world, are coming to see and understand the justice of Palestinian demands, we Indians not only feel a sense of gratification but also a sense of vindication for our own long standing and consistent policies".⁵⁷

Taking a dig at the Western nations which made a diplomatic volte face in relation to the Palestinian issue after the oil crisis in the mid 70s, he said: "The concern and solidarity shown in India to the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular, is not a phenomenon of the 70s nor has it ever been motivated by any considerations of economic expediency".⁵⁸

He promised that "The Indian people will always remain trusted friends of the Palestinian people and let me assure you that we will never waver in our support for their cause".⁵⁹

INDIA EXTENDS FULL DIPLOMATIC STATUS TO THE PLO, MARCH, 1980

The 1980s saw the intensification of India's efforts to further strengthen the PLO diplomatically and politically in order to wean it away from violence and terrorism and to build up its image as a responsible organization which was amenable to reason and negotiation. As a part of this ongoing process, the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao announced in the Parliament on March 26, 1980 that India had decided to accord full diplomatic recognition to the Office of the PLO in New Delhi. Describing the move as yet another "logical step", Mr. Rao announced that the Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi had invited Mr. Arafat "to pay us an official and friendly visit". He added that "Chairman Arafat's visit to this country (India) will symbolize not merely Indo-Palestinian friendship, but also Indo-Arab solidarity".⁶⁰

ARAFAT'S VISIT TO INDIA, MARCH, 1980

The Chairman of the PLO Mr. Yasser Arafat paid a three day official visit to India between 28th and 30th of March 1980. Mrs. Gandhi, speaking at a dinner given in his honour, described Arafat as "a valiant fighter against aggression

and oppression" and India's support to the Palestinian cause as "time-tested and consistent". She said that sympathy for the Palestinians "has been a part of independent India's foreign policy from its very inception". According to her, the PLO "has striven to provide its people a distinct and forceful identity". She described Mr. Arafat's visit as "another milestone in Indo-Palestinian and Indo-Arab friendship".⁶¹

Mr. Arafat, in his speech, described India as an "eternal friend". However, he strongly denounced the Camp David Accords as "a new conspiracy against our national liberation, against our national rights". He also expressed the PLO's determination to "continue the just struggle by all means, including armed struggle" which his hosts might have found a little uncomfortable to explain away. He emphasised that the "Indo-Palestinian relations ... is another new and important bridge between our two peoples as well as between India and the Arab peoples".⁶²

In a TV interview in New Delhi, Mr. Arafat said that with a "great country" like India steadfastly supporting the Palestinian cause, "I am sure of our success. We are approaching our success". He admitted that the "Camp David conspiracy" was a setback to the Palestinian cause but Palestinians have resisted conspiracies and emerged successful. They would continue to struggle for "sooner or later, success is ours. I have no doubt" he said.⁶³

The first ever India-PLO Joint Statement⁶⁴ issued in New Delhi on March 20, 1980 reflected the close political understanding that the two leaders were able to achieve in relation to issues which were of importance to them.

Mrs. Gandhi reiterated that "a just peace and a comprehensive solution to the Middle East crisis" can be found only with the "full participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization as an equal partner in any settlement". Such a settlement should be based on "complete withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem" and "the establishment of an independent state in Palestine".

Both leaders, in an implicit reference to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, agreed that "the deescalation of tensions could only be achieved through political and diplomatic measures and not by military confrontation through induction of arms".

Mr. Arafat expressed his "appreciation for India's balanced, constructive and measured response to the critical situation in the region".

Though India's full diplomatic recognition to the PLO was, in general, meant to strengthen the PLO's diplomatic option, there were, at least, three immediate considerations that weighed with the Indian Government in taking such a step. First, India considered it in her interest to strengthen the radical elements in the Arab world to "counterbalance the

resurgence of Islamic fundamentalists" who were trying to give a "religious twist" to what was essentially a political crusade against Israeli domination. Secondly, India was also impressed by the "refreshing moderation" that Arafat himself had been displaying in promoting the Palestinian cause.⁶⁵ Thirdly, India, also perhaps, thought it wise to clear the "misunderstanding" created in the Islamic world about the initial Indian posture with regard to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan by reaffirming her support to the Palestinian cause.⁶⁶

Addressing the Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly on Palestine on July 22, 1980, the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao reiterated India's stand that the Camp David Accords could not presume to have settled the Palestinian issue because they were not negotiated with the full participation of the PLO which represented the Palestinians.⁶⁷

The first ever Indian Parliamentary delegation, led by the then Lok Sabha Speaker Mr. Balaram Jakhar attended the 15th Session of the Palestine National Council (PNC) in Damascus in April, 1981. Addressing the PNC, Mr. Jhakar said: "I can assure you that every Indian is with you in your cause. For, this is not only a Palestinian cause, it is a cause of freedom loving people all over the world".⁶⁸

INDIA SUPPORTS THE FAHD PLAN, NOV. 20, 1981

The official spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs welcomed the Fahd Plan⁶⁹ as "a declaration of the basic principles of peace in West Asia".

He said that "The Saudi initiative has rightly included the recognition of the Palestinian issue as one of the important elements of any comprehensive and durable West Asian settlement".

"The Saudi initiative is in line with India's general position, consistently stated in various national and international forums. India, therefore, welcomes the Fahd Plan...".⁷⁰

India's support for the Fahd Plan was primarily because it was in line with India's general position on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Nevertheless, there were, at least, two other important considerations which must have weighed with the Indian government in supporting the Fahd Plan. Firstly, the post-1973 period saw the emergence of Saudi Arabia as an important actor in the Middle Eastern politics because of its oil reserves and subsequent petro-dollar wealth. The PLO itself became quite dependent on the Saudis for financial as well as diplomatic assistance. Given Saudi Arabia's political preferences in the region, it was likely to use its

newly acquired leverage with the PLO only to moderate its stance vis-a-vis Israel. Hence, India thought it wise to extend its support to the Fahd Plan. Secondly, the move was , at least, partly aimed at improving India's bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia which were, at this stage, not as good as they might have been, given Saudis' misgivings about India's initial response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the Indian attitude to Pakistan. By supporting the Fahd Plan, India was not only acknowledging the importance of the Saudi role in the region but also emphasising the similarity of views of India and Saudi Arabia in regard to the Palestinian issue.

ARAFAT'S VISIT TO INDIA, MAY, 1982

The Chairman of the PLO Mr. Yasser Arafat made his second visit to India as a Head of State in exile in May 1982. The visit was important for it took place against the background of 1) Israeli threats to invade Lebanon and 2) the resurgence of Islamic fervour in the region as a consequence of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Mrs. Gandhi speaking at a dinner, given in honour of Mr. Arafat described him as "the symbol of a people affire with the spirit of freedom". She also assured him that "Support to Palestine was a plank of our foreign policy".⁷¹

Mr. Arafat, in his reply, expressed his gratitude for "the strong and very important support which you extend to our just cause and national struggle".⁷²

The Indo-PLO Joint Communiqué⁷³ issued on May 23, 1982 reflected the close understanding and similarity of views that existed between the Indian government and the PLO leadership.

Mrs. Gandhi stressed that Mr. Arafat's visit provided "an extremely valuable opportunity for carrying forward the on-going dialogue between India and the PLO and has highlighted the two sides' deep interest in closer and regular contacts at all levels".

The two leaders expressed their concern over the "Israeli acts of violence and aggression against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and their continuous aggressive acts and threats of invasion of South Lebanon aided by the regular flow of highly sophisticated imported weapons".

They also expressed their "full support for the gallant uprising of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories".

The statement implicitly criticised the U.S. for supplying sophisticated arms to Israel. It also seemed to betray a sense of frustration and helplessness in view of the strong American support to the Jewish state.

ISRAELI INVASION OF LEBANON, JUNE 6, 1982

India reacted very harshly to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June, 1982. The Indian Foreign Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao speaking at a function in New Delhi on June 19, referred to the "enactment of a savage drama involving the butchery of our Palestinian brothers and sisters".

He described it as "an attempt to exterminate a people whose hearths and homes Israel has occupied illegally for well over three decades, a people who have been forced to find shelter and sustenance elsewhere and who have resolved to win back their territory, their rights and their dignity".

"We will stand firm in our support for freedom and statehood for the Palestinians, under the leadership of the PLO. Their losses are our losses, their victories are our victories" he added.⁷⁴

India also rushed medicines, medical equipment and food stuffs to Lebanon.

The Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi, making a statement in the Lok Sabha on July 25, 1982 came out strongly in favour of the Palestinian people. She asserted that "Israeli attempts to wipe out the Palestinian Movement cannot succeed in the long run. A popular movement, based on the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, cannot be put down by

the use of arms. History is replete with instances of the failure of military force to crush such popular movements".

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Later, speaking at a public reception in Calcutta in Aug. 1982, the PLO Ambassador to New Delhi Mr. Faisal Ahudaha acknowledged the support extended by India at a critical stage to the PLO. He said: "I can say that India has come to our aid even more than some of our closer neighbours".⁷⁶

The Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi sent a message to the PLO Chairman Mr. Yasser Arafat in Sept. 1982 in which she praised the PLO's spirited resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.⁷⁷

The Annual Report (1982-83) of the Ministry of External Affairs opined that "the situation in West Asia held the dangerous possibility of a wider conflagration, due to the wanton and unabashed Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the PLO".⁷⁸

The Indians seemed to be particularly appalled by the savagery of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the innumerable civilian casualties that accompanied it. In a broader context, the timing of the Israeli invasion raised doubts in the Indian mind whether Israel was really serious about a negotiated settlement with the PLO or whether it entertained any secret hope of settling the issue militarily with the willing support of the U.S.. India was also worried that the Israeli invasion might also bring the extremist

elements in the PLO to the forefront and reverse the process of moderation and accommodation that the PLO had been pursuing under Arafat's leadership.

THE 7th NONALIGNED SUMMIT AND THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

The 7th Nonaligned Summit held in New Delhi in March, 1983 took special interest in the Palestinian issue and India, as the Chairperson of the NAM, played no mean role in it. "The New Delhi Message"⁷⁹ issued by the Nonaligned countries on the occasion expressed customary support the Palestinian cause. They also sent a message of solidarity with the Palestinian people which, inter alia, strongly condemned the Israeli "attempt to quell legitimate opposition by the Palestinians in the occupied territories".

"These brutal and illegal acts by the occupying power in its policy of establishing new settlements continue to pose grave threats and constitute serious obstacles to a peaceful settlement".

"The Heads of State or Government join in sympathy and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle and assure them of unstinting support".⁸⁰

NAM COMMITTEE ON PALESTINE

The 7th Nonaligned Summit held in New Delhi also resolved to

set up a NAM Committee on Palestine in order to closely monitor the developments in relation to the Palestine issue and initiate "some action" in the face of rapidly deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PALESTINE, AUG. 1983

The Indian Foreign Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao read out a message⁸¹ on behalf of the Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi at the International Conference on the question of Palestine at Geneva on Aug. 29, 1983. He argued that various resolutions and pronouncements that were made in relation to the Palestinian issue were derived from "basic and well-established norms, premises and principles which the international community has accepted, upheld and urged in several other situations and circumstances". He bemoaned that "it is only in the case of the Palestinians that double-standards are being deliberately applied".

He was also critical of the exaggerated importance that was being accorded to the security concerns of Israel to the negligence of of the other aspects of the problem. "It is obvious that security is equally vital and important to all the states in the region and there is no logic in treating the security of only one of them as pre-eminent over all others".

He expressed the suspicion that Israel's belligerency was

"being encouraged in an attempt to bring about permanent geo-political and demographic changes in the region at the expense of the Palestinians".

NAM COMMITTEE MEETING ON PALESTINE, OCT. 1983

Inaugurating the first meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine on Oct. 30, 1983, the Indian Foreign Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao said that "The pre-occupation of the Non-aligned Movement with West Asia is a fundamental one". He also emphasised "the need for a comprehensive rather than a piecemeal approach to the question".⁸²

The first meeting⁸³ of the Committee was held in New Delhi on 30-31 Oct. 1983. The meeting was attended by Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, India, the PLO, Senegal, Yugoslavia and Zambia. The Committee urged that a process of negotiation should be launched without delay. However, for any such process to succeed, "two fundamental considerations must be accepted".

- 1) Recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination
- 2) The PLO must be represented on an equal footing with equal rights in all efforts, deliberations, conferences and negotiations on the question.

At the request of the PLO, the Committee discussed the question of securing a separate seat for the Palestine Arab

State at the U.N. to be occupied temporarily by the PLO with the status of Observer.

FACTIONAL FIGHTS WITHIN THE PLO, NOV. 1983

Reacting to the internal squabbles within the various factions of the PLO, a spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs urged the Palestinians to remain united and to devote all their efforts and energies towards the attainment of their common goal. "Any divisions among the ranks of the valiant Palestinian people will only give comfort to their enemies" he said.

Meanwhile, the Charge de' affairs of the PLO in New Delhi, Mr. Jamil Hajaj appealed to Mrs. Gandhi to intervene in the PLO crisis in her capacity as the Chairperson of the NAM. He accused the Syrian President Assad of masterminding the conflict within the various PLO factions in Tripoli. Mr. Jamil said that Assad was trying to convert the PLO into a "Syrian puppet organization and use it as a bargaining chip to wrest the Golan Heights from Israel".⁸⁴

However, India's capacity to intervene in the dispute was limited and it was no surprise that India chose not to get too actively involved in any mediation effort.

INDIA THROWS ITS WEIGHT BEHIND ARAFAT, NOV. 1984

The serious differences within the various factions of the PLO over Arafat's responses to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent evacuation of the PLO fighters from Lebanon threatened the continuation of Arafat's leadership of the PLO. However, both India and the NAM were in favour of Arafat continuing at the helm of the PLO and strengthen the PLO as a united body of the Palestinians. Arafat's moderation and the need for unity within the ranks of the PLO were the reasons behind India's support to Arafat's leadership. The new Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi sent Mr. S.L. Yadav, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha (the upper House of the Indian Parliament) to attend the crucial 17th Session of the PNC in Amman in Nov. 1984 which was to decide the fate of Arafat's leadership of the PLO. It was a matter of satisfaction to India when Arafat's leadership of the PLO was confirmed by the PNC.⁸⁵

NAM COMMITTEE MEETING ON PALESTINE, APRIL, 1985

India was "instrumental" in the convening of a meeting of the Nonaligned Committee on Palestine in New Delhi in April, 1985. The Committee recommended the convening of an "international conference under the aegis of the United Nations" in order to obtain "a comprehensive, just and durable peace in West Asia".⁸⁶

India also strongly condemned the Israeli bombing of the PLO

Headquarters in Tunis in Oct. 1985. The Indian Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi sent messages of solidarity and support to the PLO Chairman Mr. Arafat and the Prime Minister of Tunisia.⁸⁷

EVALUATION OF INDIA'S SUPPORT TO THE PLO

At this stage, it is essential to take a critical look at India's support to the PLO over the years, its nature, content and its efficacy in promoting the Palestinian cause. India vehemently opposed the partition of Palestine and the creation of the Jewish state till the very end. However, once the partition became an accomplished fact, India recognised the state of Israel despite its earlier reservations. Concomitantly, India never subscribed to the maximalist demands of the PLO calling for the liquidation of the state of Israel. Nor did India accept the PLO's view that armed struggle was the only way to liberate Palestine. India, from the beginning, urged a negotiated settlement as both possible and desirable. In consonance with this position, India extended strong diplomatic support to the PLO in order to wean it away from terrorism and strengthen its diplomatic option. Hence, India urged ideological and methodological moderation on the part of the PLO and stressed the importance of unity within PLO ranks in order to present a united front to Israel.

Though India treated the Palestinians as "refugees" till 1967 and supported their cause in the U.N., it recognised the Palestinians as a "people" thereafter and extended its support to their right to self-determination and a state of their own.

Over the years, India extended consistent diplomatic, moral and material support to the Palestinians. Though there were reports of India's military assistance to the PLO,⁸⁸ the former India Foreign Secretary Mr. A.P. Venkateswaran was quite emphatic that India's support to the PLO was strictly "humanitarian".⁸⁹

If one were to prepare a balance sheet on India's support to the PLO, it appears to a mixed blessing. On the credit side, India's support to the PLO enabled it to encourage and nurture secular forces in the region. It helped prevent the Arab-Israeli dispute from degenerating into a religious conflict between the Arabs and the Jews and enabled the majority of Arabs to see it as a political struggle between Arab nationalism and Israeli domination. This, in turn, kept in check, any tendencies towards Islamic resurgence in the region which Pakistan could have taken advantage of to the detriment of India.

India also tried to use its support to the Palestinian cause as an instrument to improve its bilateral relations with a number of Arab countries. To cite just one instance, the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat "is generally believed to have played

a not unimportant role in bringing New Delhi and Riyadh closer together... ".90 It goes without saying that India's firm support to the PLO enhanced India's general standing in the region and was a positive factor in improving India's bilateral relations with the Arab states.

As a consequence of India's consistent support to the PLO, India, probably was, spared of terrorist attacks and threats which seriously affected many Western and even Arab states. Given the presence of a substantial number of Muslim minority in India, the Indian support to the Palestinians also acted as a sop to the domestic Muslim constituency which all political parties in India were only too eager to exploit.

On the debit side, in the absence of diplomatic relations and consequent lack of leverage with Israel, India could not play a positive and purposeful role in bridging the gap between the two adversaries and pave the way for an eventual settlement. India's support to the Palestinians was seen as one-sided in Israel and hence Israel paid no heed to what India had to say on the subject. This impression need to be dissipated if India were to be taken seriously by Israel.

India's total and unqualified support to Yasser Arafat and the Al Fatah made it difficult for India to see the Palestinian issue in its entirety and true complexity. "For years, New Delhi has gone headlong into a policy of support for Mr. Yasser Arafat, without comprehending the constantly

shifting sands in the region. Indications are that New Delhi's policy may be under review, to take in the nuances of developments in West Asia".⁹¹ India's total identification with Arafat and Al Fatah left it with no leverage whatsoever with other major factions of the PLO. More importantly, Jordan remains a crucial link in any possible solution of the Palestinian issue both on account of the history and geography of the region.⁹² And India's relations with Jordan over the years have been rather cold and distant. Consequently, India has to overcome these impediments if it were to play any sort of role in relation to the Palestinian issue, let alone solving it.

India's attempt to use its support to the PLO to improve its bilateral relations with the Arab countries, though successful to some extent, has its limitations in the long run. The PLO's relations with Arab countries are uneven and variable. Many Arab governments are suspicious and even scared of the PLO and its radical rhetoric. Therefore, India would be well-advised to base its relations with the Arab states on mutuality of interests which are more enduring and solid in the long run.

India's vociferous support to the PLO also put it on a diplomatic spot whenever there were terrorist attacks on soft targets. Hence, India adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards the PLO's terrorist methods. It opposed terrorism in principle and condemned specific acts of ter-

rorism. But in the same breath, it tried to explain away the PLO's terror tactics as acts of desperation and frustration caused by Israeli intransigence and oppression.

It goes without saying that India's firm and consistent support to the Palestinian cause has been just and can be justified on moral as well as practical grounds. India's stand in relation to the Palestinian issue has been in consonance with the norms that governed India's foreign policy endeavours and objectives in general. As such, there was no way India could have taken a different stand on the Palestinian issue without jeopardising its general standing in the international community. The critics of Indian policy towards the Middle East often made the mistake of questioning India's support to the Palestinians as an example thereby undermining the credibility of such criticism. Instead, they should have taken a critical look at India's bilateral relations with the Arab states independent of the Palestinian issue. It would have been cynical and extremely shortsighted of India to have used the Palestinian issue as a bargaining chip. The issue was never whether or not India should have supported the Palestinian cause but whether there were alternative strategies which India could have adopted and utilised to serve the just cause of the Palestinians much more effectively and successfully than it actually did.

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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

It is no exaggeration to say that the Middle East constitutes the most important region for India in political, security and economic terms beyond the Indian subcontinent. At this juncture, it is not inappropriate, to examine in some detail, the circumstances and personalities that went into the making of India's Middle Eastern policy at the time of India's independence if only to show that it was not as if such a policy was axiomatic and that it could have been considerably different in a different political context and under different political personalities.

Independent India's foreign policy, for one thing, could not have and did not begin on a clean slate. The ideological and emotional baggage of the pre-independence days did have an impact on free India's foreign policy orientation. It was in this context that one need to have a second look at Nehru's role as the formulator of India's foreign policy. Nehru, like many other leaders of his generation, was essentially a product of India's freedom struggle and was Gandhi's personal choice to lead the newly independent India. It was Gandhi's intervention, time and again, that prevented others in the Congress party like Patel from successfully challenging Nehru's dominance. However, Nehru's

position as the principal spokesman of the Congress on foreign affairs was firmly established even before independence primarily because other prominent leaders in the Congress hardly evinced any interest in the subject. As Michael Brecher points out, "No one in the Congress or the Government, not even Sardar Patel, ever challenged his control in this sphere".¹⁰ Besides, Nehru remained his own Foreign Minister until his death.

Another possible reason for Nehru's near total control over foreign policy could have been that at the time of independence, there was no established foreign policy bureaucracy nor institutional memory to serve the new political elite who were novices in the art of conducting foreign affairs in the modern age. This was so primarily because Indian foreign policy was completely subordinated to that of the British, to subserve the latter's colonial interests under the colonial dispensation. It was run from London for all intents and purposes and remained so to the very end of British rule in India. With no established traditions and practices to act as precedents, it was not surprising that Nehru had a field day in conducting India's external affairs immediately after independence.

Nehru himself disclaimed any personal credit for formulating India's foreign policy and said that it was "completely incorrect" to call it "Nehru's policy". In his own words, "Looking back, India's policy has not been some sudden

bright inspiration of an individual, but a gradual growth evolving from even before independence. The inevitable line that we took subsequently has followed that thinking as a matter of course".¹¹ Nevertheless, while India's foreign policy stance, in a broad sense, would have remained very much the same even under a different leader, it is quite possible that some nuances and details in its orientation could have been a lot different.

At this juncture, it is worth pondering over the question as to how Sardar Patel would have handled India's foreign relations even within the broad parameters that India's immediate historical experience and geography had determined at the time of India's independence. The value of such an exercise, of necessity, would remain academic and even speculative but it could throw some light on the fallacies and weaknesses that crept into India's foreign relations under Nehru particularly in relation to the Middle East. For instance, Patel seemed to have made a very realistic and clinical assessment of the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1950 and appeared to have had a better appreciation of its implications for India and the measures and steps that India needed to take to meet the changed situation on India's north-eastern borders than Nehru.¹² Nehru's policy to China was, at least, partly influenced by considerations of anti-imperialism, Asian solidarity and empathy with socialist line of thinking which precluded him from exercis-

ing the sort of cold and ruthless logic of realism that permeated Patel's outlook.

? The issue of Kashmir has been one of the principal pre-occupations of India's foreign policy and had implications for India's Middle Eastern policy as well. A thoroughgoing realist like Patel "would probably have dealt with the Kashmir question rather differently from the very beginning".

13It is unlikely that he would have made the sort of unilateral declaration that Nehru made in relation to holding a plebiscite in Kashmir regarding its final accession to India. Patel, who kept away from the Kashmir issue by agreement with Nehru, reported to have once remarked, "If only Jawaharlal would let me handle Kashmir, I could settle it quickly. Instead, he is fumbling all over the place".¹⁴

It goes without saying that India's Middle Eastern policy, in addition to the objective conditions that existed at that time bore the imprint of Nehru's ideological predilections and intellectual preferences which did not necessarily serve India's longterm interests in the region. It is quite possible that a realist and an ideologically less fussy person like Patel would have avoided these pitfalls and defined India's interests in the region with much more clarity and precision and pursued them with vigour. Nehru failed to give a modest but clear-cut and concrete definition of India's interests in the region and as such India's policy towards the Middle East remained rather incoherent and

vague.

It is very clear, at least in retrospect, that Nehru entertained exaggerated fears about the emergence of an Islamic bloc which could have posed a threat to India's security and secularism. Consequently, the Pakistani-factor was given much more weight than it should have been in India's dealings with the Middle East. As a result, India expended most of her time and energies trying to counter a threat which was almost non-existent. "While Pakistan could, at times, gain some marginal advantage over India on relatively unimportant issues by playing its 'Islamic' card, these instances were so few and far between that they did not require the expenditure of Indian diplomatic and political energies far disproportionate to the actual threat they posed to Indian interests".¹⁵

Nehru's penchant for Nonalignment was also a factor in India's rather rigid and doctrinaire approach to the region. While a country of India's size, location and population was justified in adopting a Nonaligned policy, Nehru's prescription of it for all the third world countries was unrealistic and uncalled for. While India's Nonaligned stance was primarily in relation to the super powers in the context of cold war, it still had to cultivate individual countries which were of importance to her on a bilateral basis. This was so because the projection of Nonalignment was not an adequate basis to evolve bilateral relations with individual

states in the Middle East. Nehru's "self-righteous" stance against aligned countries in the region precluded any such possibility. Nehru also made a somewhat artificial and unnecessary distinction between conservative and radical states in the region which prompted him to adopt a Cairo-centric policy which needlessly alienated some Middle Eastern states which were opposed to Nasser but otherwise well-disposed to India.

India's policy to the region, more or less, reduced Middle Eastern politics to the Arab-Israeli dispute thereby pushing India into a political and diplomatic straitjacket. India sought to win the support of the Middle Eastern states or at least neutralise their support to Pakistan by extending vociferous support to the Arab and Palestinian causes and by ignoring Israel after formally recognising the Jewish state in 1950. However, neither support to the Arab causes nor a reflexive anti-Israeli stance are a reliable and realistic basis in the longrun to promote India's interests in the region.

In view of the changing Arab perspective in relation to Israel in the late 70s and 80s and the moderation and accommodation displayed by the PLO, India needs to take a fresh look at the problem instead of sticking to its traditional and somewhat outworn stand on the issue. India's changing defence perspective in relation to the Middle East in the context of Pakistan's "Islamic bomb" and its closely evolv-

ing security relationship with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states does not permit it to persist with its customary policy of totally ignoring Israel.

India's rather timid and diffident approach to the Middle East also led to a serious distortion in India's domestic policy in relation to India's emergence as a modern and secular state. Though Nehru set store by secularism, the fear of a conservative Muslim bloc ganging up against India externally and obscurantist Mullahs inciting the Indian Muslims with the slogan that Islam was in danger internally dissuaded Nehru from attempting basic reforms in relation to the Indian Muslim community.

As such, India lost a golden opportunity to project herself as a modern, progressive and secular country by clearly identifying herself with and promoting such forces both in the domestic and international context. This would have created a positive interaction between the domestic milieu and international environment, and established a creative link between foreign and domestic policies. However, Nehru faltered because of his unfounded fears and left a hiatus between India's foreign and domestic policies. The resultant impression was that the Government was trying to appease the Muslims in India and not integrate them.

Such a policy did not serve the long-term interests of the Indian Muslims either. As one writer commented on India's banning of Salman Rushdie's controversial book The Satanic

Verses, "Pre-emptive measures such as the ban on 'The Satanic Verses' serve the limited purpose of satisfying sectional interests, but in the longrun a policy of appeasement does not help even those who are sought to be appeased. For there is always the danger that those who benefit from such a policy today can also get hurt the next time around when other sectional interests assert themselves".¹⁶

In fact, it was "our failure to make our secular policy work internally that made us support the Arabs more and more",¹⁷ a hangover of pre-independence days.

India, it seems, has failed to develop a coherent and integrated policy towards the Middle East and her policy responses to the region smack of ad hocism. It seems to abound in inconsistencies, contradictions and angularities which appear to be largely self-inflicted. As a result, it became rather rigid and self-conscious and tended to be reactive than active, passive rather than positive. The most serious indictment of India's Middle Eastern interaction came from the former Foreign Secretary of India, Mr. A.P. Venkateswaran. "It is a relationship without a quid pro quo. Any relationship that does not involve a quid pro quo is indicative of bad diplomacy since the first principle of diplomacy is reciprocity".¹⁸

Consistency of policy in a rapidly changing region ceases to be a virtue beyond a point. The Indian political leadership and the foreign policy bureaucracy need to cultivate more

finnesse, sophistication and sensitivity in dealing with the Middle East in order that India is not caught napping or overtaken by new developments there in the troubled days ahead.

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