Israel - Palestine Conflict and India's Role

1 Introduction

- Few international disputes have generated as much emotion, passion, anguish, and diplomatic gridlock as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has its roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the birth of major nationalist movements among the Jews and among the Arabs, both geared towards attaining sovereignty for their people in the Middle East. The collision between those two forces in southern Levant and the emergence of Palestinian nationalism in the 1920s eventually escalated into the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in 1947, and expanded into the wider Arab-Israeli conflict later on.

2 Historical Background

1890-1914

- As part of the 19th-century Zionist movement, Jews had begun settling in Palestine as early as 1820.
- The Zionist movement was founded in response to the worsening persecution of European Jews and out of the desire to join the community of modern nation-states that defined Europe. Thousands of Jews began immigrating to Palestine, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire.
- During the period of World War I, Palestine was under Ottoman Empire.
- There was growth of a nascent Arab nationalism that drew inspiration from 19th-century Western ideas.

1914-1917

- As a result of a mutual defense treaty between Ottoman Empire and Germany, during World War I the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers opposed to Great Britain and France.
- The possibility of releasing Palestine from the control of the Ottoman Empire led the Jewish population and the Arab population in Palestine to support the alignment of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia during World War I.
- In an exchange of ten letters between Sir Henry McMahon, Britain’s high commissioner in Egypt, and Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Emir of Mecca and King of the Arabs (and great, great grandfather of King Abdullah of modern-day Jordan), Britain pledged to support Arab independence if Hussein’s forces revolted against the Ottomans. The exchange of letters became known as the Hussein-McMahon correspondence. Hussein envisioned a unified Arab state stretching from Aleppo (Syria) to Aden (Yemen).
- The British government, in the Balfour Declaration (signed by their Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour and drafter in part by U.S. President Wilson) stated its support for “the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people. Lord Rothschild, to whom the letter was addressed, was a leading British Zionist.
- Issuing of the statement was motivated by both sympathy for the Zionist cause and by British desire to rally Jews to the side of the Allies. The spirit of the time emphasized the “self determination of small
nations,” and the British thought that supporting Zionism was the easiest way of securing lasting British influence of the region east of the Suez Canal.

- In the aftermath of WWI, the Holocaust in which six million Jewish people were killed, more Jewish people wanted their own country.

**1918**

- As a result of World War I, Britain wins control over the area of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. The area becomes known as British-mandate Palestine. [A mandate is an authorization to govern over conquered territory].
- From 1918 to 1948, Britain governs over the Jews and Arabs living in this territory.

**1921**

- Britain gives the area of British-mandate Palestine east of the Jordan River to Emir Abdullah, to form the Hashemite Kingdom of TransJordan.
- This area is now known as the country of Jordan.
- The first major inter communal violence of the mandate period erupts along the Jaffa-Tel Aviv border on May Day, leaving scores of Jews and Arabs dead.
- Jews described the violence as a “pogrom” or “riots.”
- Palestinians term the violence a “revolt.

**1929**

- The second major inter communal violence erupts in Jerusalem, spreading throughout the country, particularly in Hebron, where sixty-seven Jews are killed.
- The primary cause of trouble was the increased influx of Jews. The number of Jews in the region had doubled in ten years.

**1936**

- The European powers awarded Britain the right to determine Palestine’s fate. In 1937, desperate to separate the feuding Jewish and Arab communities, Britain recommended partition of Palestine into two sovereign states, Arab and Jewish.
- The Arabs rejected this proposal, unwilling to cede what they felt was Arab land to yet another colonial power.

**1939 -1944**

- Following the Holocaust, Jewish refugees from Europe and Arab lands streamed into Palestine, and Jewish-Arab conflicts intensified.

**1947**

- November 1947 The General Assembly of the United Nations recommended the partition of British-mandate Palestine into two separate states, one for Jews and one for Arabs.
- The UN recommended giving away 55% of Palestine to a Jewish state—despite the fact that this group represented only about 30% of the total population, and owned fewer than 7% of the land.
Zionist leaders accepted the proposed partition for tactical and strategic reasons. Palestinians considered the proposal unrepresentative of the demographic distribution of Jews and Arabs living in Palestine at that time, and so rejected it.

1948

In May, Zionist leaders proclaimed the state of Israel. Jews, by now almost a third of its population, were prepared to defend their embryonic state.

Fighting breaks out between the newly declared state of Israel and its Arab neighbors as British troops are leaving the country.

The ensuing War of Independence saw more than 700,000 Arabs fleeing the territory, becoming refugees under Israeli, Egyptian, or Jordanian rule.

When it ended, Gaza was controlled by Egypt and another area, the West Bank, by Jordan. They contained thousands of Palestinians who fled what was now the new Jewish home, Israel.

On December 11, the UN General Assembly passes Resolution 194, stating that Palestinian refugees who wish to return to their homes should be permitted to do so and that those who do not wish to return should be compensated by the state of Israel.
1949–1967

Ongoing skirmishes between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

May, 1964

Following an Arab League decision, 422 Palestinian national figures meet in Jerusalem under the chairmanship of Ahmad Shuqeiri, who founded the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and laid down the structure of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO Executive Committee, the National Fund and the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA). The meeting also approved a Palestinian national covenant and basic law.

June 5, 1967

- In what Israelis call the “Six Day War,” Israel conducts a pre-emptive attack against Egypt and gains control over territory formerly controlled by Egypt, Syria and Jordan.
- Israel gains control over the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan.
- In six days, Israel roughly triples the size of the territory under its control. Israel begins establishing settlements in Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula, and the West Bank, which rightwing Israelis refer to by the biblical names “Judea and Samaria” and consider the biblical lands of the Jewish people.

In response to the war, the UN Security Council passes Resolution 242. This resolution, with its formula of “land for peace,” is the basis of for all subsequent peace negotiations between Israel, Palestinians, and the surrounding Arab states.

It called for:

- It called for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict
- termination of all claims or states of belligerency
- Respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area
- Acknowledgement of right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.

September 5, 1972

Palestinian gunmen kill 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.
October 6, 1973

Egypt and Syria organize a surprise attack on Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights on the day of the Jewish fast of Yom Kippur and the Muslim month of Ramadan, in which the annual fast is performed. The war lasted for 3 weeks, ending on October 22 on the Syrian front and October 26 on the Egyptian front. Israelis refer to the war as the Yom Kippur war. Israel saw the war as a military victory because it maintained possession of the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights.

October, 1973

The UN Security Council passes Resolution 338, which calls for an immediate cease-fire and the immediate commencement of negotiations toward the implementation of UNSCR 242 with the goal of “establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

1974

The Arab League declares the P.L.O. the sole spokesman for the Palestinian Arabs.

1978–1981

- President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel and President Jimmy Carter of the United States sign the Camp David accords.
- Israel agrees to hand back the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in return for peace and normalization. This was significant because it was the first time an Arab country signed a peace treaty with Israel and thus accepted the state’s existence.
- Signing the Camp David accord made Sadat unpopular among many Egyptians as well as Arabs living outside Egypt.
- Egypt is expelled from the Arab League as a reaction to the peace agreement with Israel. Yet in 1980, Egypt and Israel establish diplomatic relations. This led directly to the assassination of President of Egypt Anwar Sadat on October 6, 1981, by 3 soldiers of the Egyptian Army.
June 6, 1982

Israel invades Lebanon and establishes a “security zone” in Southern Lebanon in order to block Hezbollah (a Lebanese Shi’a Muslim group whose name means “Party of God” in Arabic) forces from staging attacks on Northern Israeli communities from Lebanon.

December 9, 1987

- Then in 1987, the Palestinian population collectively rose up against Israel's repressive policies.
- The uprising, which became known as the first Intifada, was characterized by mass civil disobedience, general strikes, boycotts, refusals to pay taxes, and Palestinian youths throwing stones at Israeli tanks and soldiers.
- The word intifada means ‘shaking off,’ and this was the Palestinians' first attempt to assert their own national identity rather than waiting for Arab armies or the UN to do it for them. More than 1,100 Palestinians and 150 Israelis were killed in the ensuing five years, and tens of thousands more Palestinians were injured or arrested.
- What made the Intifada stand out from earlier forms of protests was its duration and its wide public support, including women.
- The Intifada also marked the first time that Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza became significantly involved in the movement against Israeli occupation. Until then, most of the opposition was organized from outside the occupied territories by the PLO.
- The Intifada also worried Yasser Arafat, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a coalition of Palestinian nationalist resistance groups with Fatah at its center. Founded in 1964, it was admitted to the UN with observer status in 1974 and was regarded as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It initially operated out of Jordan and Lebanon, engaging in guerrilla tactics in an attempt to regain Palestine by force of arms. It was expelled from Jordan in 1971 by King Hussein, then expelled from Lebanon in 1982 by Israel, at which point it fled to Tunisia. By the time the Intifada broke out, the PLO was largely out of touch with life in the Palestinian territories. It had played no part in leading or organizing the Intifada.

December 14, 1988

- Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat condemns all forms of terrorism and recognizes the state of Israel. U.S. President Ronald Reagan authorizes the U.S. to enter into a “substantive dialogue” with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- The next day, in a clear show of support for the PLO, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 53/196, which “reaffirmed the inalienable rights of” Palestinians and Syrians in the Golan, called on Israel not to exploit natural resources in the occupied territories.

October 1991

- The Madrid Peace Conference takes place in Madrid, Spain.
- The conference includes delegations from Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Palestinians.
- The Madrid conference marks the first time most of the Arab parties (except for Egypt) and Israel sat down at a table together. The conference is organized along bi-lateral lines as well as multilateral lines.

January–September 1993

- Oslo Accord signed between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.
- Israel recognized the PLO and gave them limited autonomy (in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza) in return for peace.
- The PLO in turn gave up its claims to Israel’s territory as defined by its borders before the 1967 war. The Palestinians also agreed to end the Intifada and establish security in the West Bank and Gaza.
- The trade-offs made became known as “land for peace.” Because they could not resolve all the issues right away, the two sides agreed to make gradual steps towards a final settlement of the conflict.
1994

- In May, Israel and the PLO reach the “Cairo Agreement,” which included an Israeli military withdrawal from about 60% of the Gaza Strip (Jewish settlements and their environs are excluded) and the West Bank town of Jericho.
- On July 1, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat makes a triumphal return to Gaza to take up his new position as head of the new Palestinian self-rule Authority (PA), after nearly 12 years of running the PLO from Tunisia. On October 26, a comprehensive peace treaty between Israel and Jordan is signed.
- The peace treaty ended the conflict between the two countries that dated back to the war of 1967, when Israel gained control of Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan.

1995

- On September 28, Arafat and Rabin sign the Taba agreement (known as Oslo II) in Washington to expand Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza and allow Palestinian elections (held on January 20, 1996).
- However, on November 4, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated by Yigal Amir, an orthodox Jewish student opposed to Israeli withdrawals from the occupied West Bank. Shimon Peres becomes Prime Minister of Israel.
- February–March 1996 A series of Hamas suicide bomb attacks kills 57 Israelis. Shimon Peres suspends negotiations with Syria.
- Hamas is an Islamist political group founded in 1988 that opposes Israel and rejects the Oslo peace process and other negotiations. Hamas is not an abbreviation but a nickname, and comes from the Arabic for “zeal.” The full name is Harakatu Mujawamati Islamiya, or Islamic Resistance Movement.

1996-1988

- In May, Likud candidate Binyamin Netanyahu wins the election for prime minister, defeating incumbent Shimon Peres, of the Labor party. Netanyahu had campaigned against the Labor party’s approach to the peace process, promising that he would provide “Peace with Security.”
- January 17, 1997 Under the leadership of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel hands over 80% of the West Bank town of Hebron to Palestinian rule, but holds on to the remainder, where several hundred Jewish settlers live among 20,000 Palestinians.
- October 23, 1998 Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu signs the Wye River Memorandum outlining further Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank.
- The Wye River Memorandum resulted from meetings between President Bill Clinton and Netanyahu at the Wye Plantation in Maryland. The U.S. had been pressuring Israel to end 18 months of stagnation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

1999

- On May 19, Labor Party leader Ehud Barak is elected Prime Minister of Israel, defeating Likud party incumbent Binyamin Netanyahu. Barak campaigned on a platform of bringing an end to all of Israel’s conflicts with all its neighbors, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians.
- On September 5, 1999, Israel and the Palestinian Authority sign a revised deal based on the stalled Wye River accord, aimed at reviving the Middle East peace process. On November 8, 1999 final status talks resume between Israel and the Palestinians.

2000

- In February a summit between Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat breaks up over a disagreement on a promised Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank under the revised Wye accord.
- In March, Israel hands over part of the West Bank to Palestinians as part of a land transfer agreed to at the Wye River conferences of 1998.
- The land amounted to 6.1% of the total of the West Bank.
- On May 23, 2000, Israel unilaterally withdraws from the area of Lebanon it was occupying since 1982.
2000

- **Second Intifada**
  A planned renewal of another wave of bloody violent Intifada was in place, an opportunity to "let it out" was when Sharon visited the Jewish temple mount, Muslims seized the opportunity to "protest" Sharon's visit in "their holy place."
- Arafat now had a "perfect" title, in order to galvanize global Islamic support, his people named it the "Al Aqsa Intifada." The Al-Aqsa is of course the mosque, where Muslims build on top of the historic Jewish temple.

2005

- Israel gives away Gaza to the Arab Palestinians.
- The patron of Hamas & Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic of Iran's president M. Ahmadinejad calls for Israel to be wiped off map.

2006

Hezbollah attacks Israel, it "improves" Palestinian tactics of using civilians, by firing rockets upon Israeli civilians (inside major Israeli cities/towns) from among populated density locations, then, cowardly escaping the area, causing Israelis to fire back.

2007

- Mainstream Arabs in Gaza vote for Islamic party Hamas to become their democratically elected government.
- A major gathering follows, where thousands of Arab-Palestinians (with a Hamas spokesman) declare they want an Islamic Caliphate.

2008

Israel kicks off operation ‘Cast lead’.

On November 25, 2009

- Israel imposed a 10-month construction freeze on all of its settlements in the West Bank.
- Israel's decision was widely seen as due to pressure from the Obama administration, which urged the sides to seize the opportunity to resume talks.

September 2011

- The Palestinian Authority led a diplomatic campaign aimed at getting recognition of the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, by the Sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly.
- On September 23 President Mahmoud Abbas submitted a request to recognize the State of Palestine as the 194th UN member to the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

November 14, 2012

- Israel began Operation Pillar of Defense in the Gaza Strip with the stated aims being to halt the indiscriminate rocket attacks originating from the Gaza Strip.
- In 2012, the Palestinian Authority applied for admission as a United Nations non-member state, which requires only a vote by the United Nations General Assembly.
- Hamas also backed the motion.
- The draft resolution was passed on November 29, 2012 by a vote of 138 to 9, with 41 abstentions.
- Regardless of the UN recognition, as of this writing, no Palestinian state exists except on a symbolic level.
• Israel indicated that an actual, real-world Palestinian state can only come into existence if Palestinians succeed in negotiating peace with Israel.

2014

• **2014 Israel–Gaza conflict**, also known as **Operation Protective Edge** was a military operation launched by Israel on 8 July 2014 in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip.
• Hamas started rocket attacks, targeting Israeli cities and infrastructure, resulting in seven weeks of Israeli operations.
• The Israeli strikes, the Palestinian rocket attacks and the ground fighting resulted in the death of thousands of people, the vast majority of them Gaza.

3 India-Palestine relations:

Political:

• India’s solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was given voice through our freedom struggle by Mahatma Gandhi.
• India’s empathy with the Palestinian cause and its friendship with the people of Palestine have become an integral part of its time-tested foreign policy.
• In 1947, India voted against the partition of Palestine at the United Nations General Assembly. India was the first Non-Arab State to recognize PLO as sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974.
• India was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the Palestine Authority in Gaza, which later was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.
• India always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora.
• India co-sponsored the draft resolution on “the right of Palestinians to self-determination” during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly and voted in favour of it.
• India also voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the security wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard. India voted in favour of accepting Palestine as a full member of UNESCO.
• At the United Nations General Assembly on November 29, 2012 the status of Palestine was upgraded to a non-member state. India co-sponsored this resolution and voted in favour of it.
Economic:

- Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at international and bilateral levels, India has been contributing, since long time, material and technical assistance to the Palestinian people.
- With the Government of India’s aid, two projects were completed in the field of higher education i.e. Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip.
- Under India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Forum’s assistance, an Indoor Multi-purpose Sports Complex has been constructed in Ramallah.
- Al Quds hospital in Gaza is in the process of reconstruction and the process of building a rehabilitation centre in Nablus has started.
- In 1997, an MoU between India and Palestine was signed, which provides for promoting scientific, technical and industrial cooperation including provision of training facilities in specialized areas and undertaking of mutually agreed projects.
- Trade between India and Palestine has shown steady improvement. Products imported from India include fabrics, yarns, readymade garments, household appliances, stationery products, leather products, industrial tools and accessories, basmati rice, spices, vaccines and pharmaceutical products, sanitary wares, marble and granites.
- During the visit of President Mahmoud Abbas to India in 2005, a commitment for assistance of US $15 million was made by the Government of India. In pursuance to the commitment, several projects were undertaken; prominent among them is the construction of Palestinian Embassy in Delhi which has been completed.
- Further, in the Paris Donors’ Conference in December 2007, India announced a fresh commitment of US $ 5 million.
- India has granted budgetary support to the Palestine National Authority in the last few years.(US dollar 10 mn in 2008, 2010 and 2012)

Recent Developments:

In a recent visit of Minister of External Affairs to Palestine in January 2016, India has reaffirmed it's support for the Palestinian cause. It has emphasised that there has been absolutely no change in its policy in this regard.

She outlined three core tenets of India’s approach to Palestine:

1. Solidarity with Palestinian people
2. Support to the Palestinian cause and support to nation-building
3. Capacity-building efforts.

4 India-Israel relations:

Abandoning ideology for pragmatism and zero-sum calculations for a more fair balanced approach, India finally extended full diplomatic recognition to Israel in 1992.

Factors which held back India–Israel ties for the first forty years after independence?

- Legacy of freedom struggle and Mahatma Gandhi who opposed the creation of a Jewish state.
- A fear of alienating its large Muslim population
- Cold War politics
- A desire to counter Pakistan’s influence in the Muslim world
- A need to garner Arab support for its position over the Kashmir issue compelled New Delhi to pursue an exclusively pro-Arab and thus pro-Palestinian foreign policy for more than forty years.

Over the years, the Indian government has toned down its reactions to Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. India has also begun denouncing Palestinian suicide bombings and other terrorist acts in Israel, something that was seen earlier as rather justified in light of the Israeli policies against the Palestinians. India is no longer initiating anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations and has made serious attempts to moderate the Non-Aligned Movement’s (NAM) anti-Israel resolutions.
Why shift in India’s Israel Policy?

- This re-evaluation has been based on a realization that India’s largely pro-Arab stance in the Middle East has not been adequately reciprocated and rewarded by the Arab world.
- India has received no worthwhile backing from Arab countries in the resolution of problems it faces in its neighbourhood, especially Kashmir.
- There have been no serious attempts by the Arab world to put pressure on Pakistan to reign in the cross-border insurgency in Kashmir.
- On the contrary, Arab nations have firmly stood by Pakistan, using the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to build support for Islamabad and jihadi groups in Kashmir.
- If Arab nations, such as Jordan, have been able to keep their traditional ties with Palestine intact while building a new relationship with Israel, there is no reason for India not to take a similar route, which might give it more room for diplomatic maneuvering in the region.
- Additionally, the 1991 Madrid Peace Process prompted India to conclude that if the Arab world and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were now willing to negotiate with Israel, New Delhi had no reason to maintain the status quo.
- They face common challenges such as the terrorism that both India and Israel face comes not only from disaffected groups within their territories; it is also aided and abetted by neighbouring states, increasingly capable of transferring weapons of mass destruction to terrorist organizations.

Ties between the two countries have flourished since then with India and Israel sharing a congruence of interests in several areas and embarking on a multidimensional “strategic partnership” as a result.

Recent Developments:

- India was one of five countries – the others being Kenya, Ethiopia, Paraguay, and Macedonia – to abstain on a UN Human Rights Council (HRC) vote on adopting the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict.
- The report largely condemns Israel’s actions during last year’s Operation Protective Edge, a seven-week-long military operation by Israel into the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.
- The Indian vote is being seen as emblematic of the ongoing rapprochement between the governments of India and Israel.
- Israel has climbed its way up New Delhi’s diplomatic agenda since the new government came to office in May 2014.

The bilateral relations between India and Israel hinge on three pegs – economic, defence and technological cooperation.

Defence Cooperation:

- The two natural allies have made counterterrorism and military cooperation the centerpiece of their bilateral relations, which is unsurprising considering both countries share similar strategic outlooks and face constant assault from Islamic terrorism.
- New Delhi has benefited from Israel’s expertise in counterterrorism training and border security, while Israel has emerged as one of India’s most important sources of sophisticated military equipment and weapons systems.
- Israel and India collaborate closely in combating terrorism with ‘Mossad’ and other agencies working with the Indian Intelligence agencies on a regular basis.
- Israel has sold radar and surveillance systems for military aircraft and has provided India with training in counter-terrorism.
- In November 2011, India’s élite Cobra Commando unit bought more than 1,000 Israeli X-95 assault rifles for counter-insurgency operations.
- India has placed orders for four advanced Israeli Phalcon planes equipped with airborne warning and control systems (AWACS).
- Further orders for advanced counter-terrorism military hardware followed, backed by a joint intelligence-sharing agreement between the two nations aimed at fighting radical Islamic extremism.
India and Israel have ramped up their cooperation on security and defense matters. In late 2014, the Indian Navy opted to purchase the Barak-1 missile, manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries. Later that year, India opted for Israel’s Spike anti-tank guided missiles over the United States’ competing Javelin offering.

India is Israel’s largest defense equipment customer and Israel is the second largest arms supplier to India after Russia.

In addition to the Spike missiles, India has purchased other military technology from Israel recently.

The Northern Command of the Indian Army recently purchased 49 Israeli miniature unmanned aerial vehicles to assist in monitoring and patrolling India’s borders with Pakistan and China. These surveillance drones will be used to monitor terrorist infiltration from Pakistan and Chinese troop incursions.

In 2015 Israel Aerospace Industries successfully tested a jointly developed Indian-Israeli Barak 8 air and naval defense missile system – “an important milestone in the cooperation between India and Israel”.

In 2015 Israel Aerospace Industries and the Indian state-owned Defense Research and Development Organization began collaborating on a jointly developed surface-to-air missile system for the Indian Army.

**Economic Cooperation:**

- **Bilateral trade** between the two countries has had a healthy growth from US$ 200 million in 1992 (comprising primarily trade in diamonds), bilateral merchandise trade has diversified and reached US$ 5.19 billion in 2011. However, the past few years have seen a decline in total trade due to the global economic recession.
- In 2014, the bilateral trade stood at US$ 4.52 billion.
- The free trade agreement is under negotiation.

**Technological Cooperation:**

- Agriculture is one of the main pillars of Israel-India relations
- Israel is cooperating with India to help it diversify and raise the yield of its fruit and vegetable crops.
- Israel’s expertise in water resource management and cultivation of arid land can be crucial in helping India ensure food security for more than 1.2 billion people. India has not only adopted Israeli technologies like drip-irrigation but successfully introduced new crops with the help of Israeli experts to the region, such as an olive plantation in Rajasthan.
- 29 Centers of Excellence are operating throughout India, offering free training sessions for farmers in efficient agricultural techniques using Israeli technology and know-how, including vertical farming, drip irrigation and soil solarisation.

Whether India can sustain the success it has achieved is yet to be seen, but so far, India's new foreign policy calculus towards the Middle East is a welcome departure from decades past.

5 **India’s balancing Act:**

- India’s balancing act between its Israeli and Palestinian friends is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of its pre and post-independence history, New Delhi viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through an ideological lens and in zero-sum terms, pursuing a foreign policy antagonistic towards the Jewish state.
- New Delhi has continued to deepen its relations with Israel while simultaneously showcasing its ties to the Palestinians, deftly pursuing both bilateral relationships in tandem. That neither side sees any inconsistency in India doing so is a testament to New Delhi’s newfound diplomatic dexterity.
- India has outlined that it’s bilateral relations with Israel are independent of it’s relations with Palestine. The driver is India’s tradition of neutrality - being a "friend-to-all" and keeping individual relationships free from entangling alliances.
• This is clear from Mr. Abbas applause for New Delhi’s consistent support for the Palestinian cause during the visit of Minister of External Affairs to Palestine in 2016. He described India as “not just a friend but a brother”.

• Benjamin Netanyahu has more than once in recent times emphasised that the "sky is the limit" for relations between the two countries.

• India is seeking permanent UN Security Council membership, requiring support from the Arab world and developing countries more broadly. India’s strategic interests in ties with Gulf Arab states and Iran are also expanding with growing foreign energy dependence and the increasing multipolarity of the Middle East resulting in competition with China.

• Geostrategic shifts in the region also mean Israel will be desperate for stronger ties with India largely regardless of how much diplomatic support India gives to the Palestinians. The latest developments have seen Israel’s strategic advantage in the region fall slightly with the economic unshackling of Iran following the nuclear deal and with Russia making clear it will intervene to buttress its allies like Assad, providing relief for Hezbollah and Iran.

• There is also a longer-term trend that will further Israel's need for new Great Power partners. This is the reduction of US interest and relative influence in the region, combined with greater assertiveness of China and Russia in supporting current and potential future clients. Ties with India will also draw less concern from Washington, than building ties with say China or Russia. A case in point was Washington vetoing Tel Aviv’s transfer of certain defence technology to Beijing.

• Expanding strategic and economic stakes mean that Delhi will find it increasingly difficult to always be a "friend to all". But the evolving reality in the region ensures that India has greater leverage than before. The optimal balance of the competing drivers of India’s Middle East policy may indeed result in continuing a somewhat neutral stand. We’ve seen some of this recently with India’s call for the UN Security Council to take steps to resolve the current violence.

• Neutrality makes Delhi a more valuable diplomatic partner, giving India more leverage with Israel, Palestine, Arab states and Iran.

• India’s skillful balancing act between its Israeli and Palestinian counterparts is an enlightening illustration of the transformation Indian foreign policy has experienced since the end of the Cold War. Although India has not entirely jettisoned some of its outdated instincts that previously shaped its approach to the region, it is no longer guided by zero-sum calculations or held hostage by outdated ideologies.