

India's response to the Israel's operation protective edge in Gaza

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ABSTRACT

India has established her image as an international active power which is playing important role in regional politics as well as international politics. India has also her own diplomatic stand on any issue of each country such as Palestine-Israel conflict. Hamas-Israel conflict of 2014, which was emerged as a turning point for India's foreign policy. In this conflict, thousands of people were killed and injured most of them were Palestinian. BJP led NDA government was facing dilemma over its stand on the increasing violence between Israel and Palestine and it steadfastly refused the opposition's demand to discuss the issue in the Rajya Sabha. Indian government led by Hindu nationalist BJP has deferent point of views on Palestinian question because of national interest as well as ideological factor. Therefore, it is giving priority to Israel and trying to maintain good relation with Israel while the Indian government has traditionally supported the Palestine cause since 1948. In this research paper, we are making an attempt to find out leading factors of Palestinian-Israeli conflict and India's response to "the Israeli Operation Protective Edge" or Gaza Crisis of 2014.

Key Words : Palestine-Israel conflict, Hamas-Israel copnflct, Hindu nationalist

In 2014, The Crisis of 2014 was sub plot of Arab-Israeli conflict which is based on ancient history of Palestine because Jerusalem is a holy land of three religions namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Following the entire religious and political problem, Palestinian and Israeli have been fighting for their existence since creation of Jewish state of Israel on 14 May 1948. On 8 July 2014, Israel launched "Operation Protective Edge" against Palestinian people especially who are living in Gaza Strip. Israel was trying to punish them because they were supporting to Hamas's Islamic agenda in Palestinian politics against Israel. Subsequently, seven weeks of Israeli bombardment, Palestinian rocket attacked, and ground fighting killed 2,104.

Palestinian and 69 Israeli and 108,000 homes were destroyed and damaged.¹ According to media, the main target of the Israeli operation was to stop rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, which was launching by Hamas. Following an Israeli crackdown on Hamas in the West Bank after the kidnapping and assassination of 3 Israeli teenagers by two Hamas members² but Hamas refute this allegation later. During this conflict, Israeli has destroyed Gaza tunnel system. After several round ceasefires

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under mediation and pressure of international community, Israeli soldiers were withdrawn from the Gaza Strip and an open-ended ceasefire were announced on 26 August 2014.³ According to Gaza Health Ministry, UN and some human rights groups reported that 69–75% of the Palestinian casualties were civilians but on the other hand, Israel argued 50% were civilians. The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report also pointed out that 520,000 Gazans might have been displaced, of whom 485,000 needed emergency food assistance and 273,000 were taking shelter in 90 UN-run schools. In Israel, an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 citizens fled their homes due to the threat of rocket and mortar attacks of Hamas.⁴

Background of conflict :

After the stunning victory of Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on 26 January 2006, Fatah was out of power for the first time in its history. Winning 76 out of the 132 seats, Hamas, which had been designated a terrorist organization by the United States (US), European Union (EU) and Israel,⁵ prepared to lead the Palestinian parliament. The group had never entered the political realm prior to its 2006 victory, and it would have to thus politically accommodating to retain its governing authority. Immediately after the elections, the United States and the European Union indicated that assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) would continue if Hamas renounced violence, recognized Israel, and accepted previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements, which Hamas refused to do. Implicit in this policy approach was the Western attempt to thwart the political change in Palestine regardless of the popular mandate in favour of the Hamas. Worse still, the non-recognition of the Hamas-led PA helped deepen the schism between the two Palestinian factions, resulting in open hostility and the de facto partition of the already truncated entity.

The victory for Hamas initially caught the Israeli Government off guard.⁶ Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on 29 January 2006 announced that Israel would not engage with a Palestinian Authority that included Hamas unless certain conditions were met. He declared, “We have made it clear that without giving up its ways of terror, recognizing Israel’s right to exist in peace and security, and honouring all the Palestinian National Authority accords towards Israel – including, of course, annulling the Hamas charter calling for the destruction of the State of Israel. And Israel will not hold any contact with the Palestinians.”⁷ In early February the Israeli government released \$54 million (£ 31 million) of customs and VAT revenue from the previous month, revenue that Israel collects and transfers to the Palestinian Authority. The formal announcement on 18 February that Hamas had been asked to form the next government, however, prompted the Israeli cabinet to impose a range of sanctions that included withholding future monthly transfers of tax revenue.⁸ At the same time, the cabinet resolved to support the approach of the international community to discontinue all financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, not including humanitarian assistance provided directly to the Palestinian population.⁹ Israeli government restricted the movement of Hamas members, including new MPs, through areas under Israeli control, to ban the transfer of equipment to Palestinian security forces and to strengthen security checks at crossing points from Gaza into Israel.¹⁰ In response, Hamas officials regretted the Israeli shift by asserting that Israel “should have responded differently to the democracy expressed by the Palestinian people”, adding that the Palestinians had lots of alternatives if Israel and the international community decided to withhold aid.¹¹ The Hamas legislative victory severely dampened any hopes that Prime Minister Olmert may have harbored for peace. The unilateral withdrawal from Gaza had backfired. According to an analyst, after the victory, Hamas became the representative of the Palestinian people through a free and fair election. Above all, Hamas rejected the existence of the State of Israel and refused to negotiate that point. If there had been any doubt about Hamas’s intentions, its leaders stated immediately after the elections that they had no plans to pursue peace talks or disarm the party’s armed wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.¹²

Israel was not the only state to impose sanctions, however. In March 2006, the major aid donors

to the Palestinian Authority like US and EU cut off aid as well. Their decision stemmed from the fact that Hamas refused to renounce violence, recognize Israel, or even acknowledge the previous agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinians. The legal basis for US sanctions stemmed from the fact that the US Treasury and State Department had officially labeled Hamas a terrorist organization.¹³ Therefore it was illegal for the US to provide financial assistance to the new Hamas led government in either the Gaza Strip or the West Bank.¹⁴ President Abbas was less confident, warning that the PA was in a real financial crisis: "The pressures have begun and the support and the aid started to decrease".¹⁵ It is believed that the 140,000 people employed by the PA (of which at least 58,000 are members of the security forces) are breadwinners for as much as one third of the Palestinian population, so financial restrictions could have a significant social impact in the Palestinian territories.¹⁶ The UN Special Coordinator for the 'West Asian Peace Process', Alvaro De Soto, argued that the revenues collected belong to the Palestinians and should not be suspended. He also pointed out, the formation of a new government and the approval of its programmes should be awaited and that actions prior to that would be premature.¹⁷ So did the former US president Jimmy Carter, who had led a team of international election observers, criticized the Israeli actions. He argued that they would present 'significant obstacles' to the effective governance of the Palestinian territories, adding that efforts by Israel or the US to undermine Hamas would only encourage its standing both domestically and internationally.¹⁸ According to Opinion polls of 2005, the Israeli public was more relaxed about establishing official relations with Hamas. Polls also suggested more than half of Israeli citizens would be willing to negotiate with Hamas in order to conclude a peace agreement.¹⁹

Amid the chaos, Hamas carried out a heroic raid on 25 June 2006 near the Kerem Shalom crossing on the Gaza border in response to the earlier Israeli attacks on Palestinian land.²⁰ Eight Hamas fighters reportedly utilized an underground tunnel to approach and ensnare an Israeli tank, resulting in the deaths of two Israeli soldiers as well as the capture of Corporal Gilad Shalit. Hamas had knowingly crossed an Israeli red line. But when its soldiers were kidnapped, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) responded with stronger force. Thus, two days after Shalit's abduction, the IDF launched "Operation Hot Winter" against several key Hamas targets, adding to the racket that plagued the Gaza Strip.²¹ Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared, "Our aim is not to mete out punishment but rather to apply pressure so that the abducted soldier will be freed. We want to create a new equation-freeing the abducted soldier in return for lessening the pressure on the Palestinians."²² Prior to the dawn raid, Israeli fighter planes attacked three bridges and the main power station in Gaza, in order to limit the mobility of Shalit's captors. If they had not taken out those targets, the Israelis feared that the captured soldier could be removed from Gaza or transferred to another location. In the end, however, Shalit was not recovered. Seeking retribution, Israel continued to target Hamas in the Gaza Strip, even as the Islamist group tangled with Fatah forces.²³

On 27 December 2008, Israel launched a major military campaign dubbed "Operation Cast Lead" against the Hamas in the Gaza Strip in order to counter Palestinian rocket fire and, more broadly, to significantly weaken all aspects of Hamas rule in Gaza. On 3 January 2009, Israel began a ground offensive into Gaza intended to eliminate Hamas's willingness or capability to launch rockets at Israeli towns and cities. As of 14 January Israeli bombings and ground forces had reportedly killed over 1,000 Palestinians, while 13 Israelis had been killed by Palestinian rockets and attempts to counter the ground invasion. Some Israeli observers have suggested that neither toppling the Hamas regime nor permanently ending all rocket attacks is a realistic goal. However, by temporarily disabling Hamas's military capacity and slowing its rearmament, Israel could ease the frequency and intensity of Hamas attacks in the months ahead as it prepares to deploy new, more sophisticated anti-rocket defense systems. One complicating factor for Israel is time: the longer "Operation Cast Lead" runs without a definitive outcome in Israel's favor, the more pressure will grow for a cessation of hostilities. The unraveling of the six-month *tahdiya* or temporary cease-fire between Israel and Hamas that led to the

December 2008 outbreak of violence in and around the Gaza Strip can be linked to several factors like some tactical and some more deeply-rooted. Some commentators have said that giving up on the cease-fire was in both sides' interests.²⁴

On 9 March 2012, again Israel launched "Operation Returning Echo" to targeted Zohair al-Qaisi, the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC). In this Israeli air strike on Gaza had killed approximate 12 Palestinian, including Zohair al-Qaisi. According to Israelis, al-Qaisi was planning for an attack therefore he was targeted by IDF. Another militant was also killed with him. The Islamic Jihad Palestinian group said that 10 members of its military wing, the al-Quds Brigades, were also killed. The Israeli military said dozens of rockets had been fired into Israel.²⁵ On 14 November 2012, Israel launched "Operation Pillar of Defense" with the assassination of the commander of Hamas's military wing, Ahmed Jabari, following hundreds of rocket attacks from Gaza.²⁶ After the ceasefire of 2012 between Hamas and Israel under mediation of Egypt, both sides have argued that the violation of the agreement is continued. In consequence of violation, several people of both sides were killed and injured most of them were Palestinian. According to the Shabak (Israel Security Agency), there was a sharp reduce in attacks from land of Gaza strip in 2013²⁷, despite everything 63 rockets were launched including some mortar attacks. From the Palestinian point of view, six Palestinian were killed and 91 were injured by monthly Israeli attacks. During the mid of 2013, suddenly Israeli attacks on Gaza gradually increased, while Hamas did not launch rockets into Israel. These efforts made by both sides were largely successful. In the march 2014, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu declared "The number of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip in the last year has been the lowest in a decade, but this is not enough for us," He again said, "We will continue acting to ensure the security of the people of Israel both in the south and across the country."²⁸ Despite all things the blockade of Gaza is continued violation of the ceasefire agreement.

Cause of operation protective edge :

On 23 April 2014, Hamas agreed to a reconciliation deal with its political rival Fatah. The Palestinian unity government was sworn on 2 June 2014. In the response to Palestinian unity deal, Israel announced it would not negotiate any peace deal with the new government and would push punitive measures.²⁹ Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "The international community must not embrace it."³⁰ Despite Israeli declaration, all international powers like the EU, US, China, India, Russia and Turkey were agreed to work with the Palestinian unity government. The unity deal was expected by international community to have a significant impact on the ongoing peace talks between PA and Israel. In a moment, Israel launched an airstrike in the northern part of the Gaza Strip that 2 Palestinian killed and 20 were injured. Israeli PM Netanyahu had warned that Abbas had to choose peace with Hamas either peace with Israel. When a unity deal was signed, Netanyahu imposed sanctions against the Palestinian Authority.³¹ On 4 June, the Israeli Housing and Construction Ministry passed tenders for 1,500 settlement units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.³² According to an analyst, Israel tried to disrupt the Palestinian national unity government between Hamas and Fatah by its operation. In a movement, three Israeli teenagers were abducted in the West Bank on 12 June 2014. Israeli government blamed on Hamas, and the IDF stated that the two Palestinian were involved in kidnapping of the teenagers. They were known members of Hamas.³³ But there was no evidence of Hamas involvement in kidnapping and their top leaders have initially denied the group had any involvement in the incident. Hamas's leader Khalid Mishal³⁴ blamed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the alleged kidnapping of the three Israeli settlers, saying that the latter had ignored the suffering of Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli jails. Hundreds of Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli jails were on hunger strike for more than 60 days. He said "If Netanyahu had listened to the suffering of the hunger strikers and had not objected to the Palestinian unity government, the Palestinian situation would have been less furious."³⁵ In an interview, Mishal reportedly said that he could neither confirm nor deny the

kidnapping of the three Israelis. "In any case, I congratulate the abductors because our prisoners must be freed from the prisons of the occupation."³⁶ In response, Israeli army launched Operation Brother's Keeper, a large-scale attack of what it called Hamas's terrorist infrastructure especially in the West Bank.

India's response :

Indian government has been playing diplomatic role on the Palestinian question since 1948 because it was members of UN partition plan resolution 181 which was passed in 1947. India has been pursuing balance foreign policy towards Palestine-Israel conflict. But the Gaza crisis of 2014 was turning point for India's foreign policy. BJP got success to form powerful National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under leadership of Narendra Modi after 10 years of congress led UPA government because the former government had lost its creditability among Indian. But government has to face many challenges regarding Palestinian issue because government want to maintain good relation with Israel like former Vajpayee government and trying to focus only national interests while the Indian government has traditionally supported the Palestine cause since 1948

The dilemma faced by Indian government over its stand on the increasing violence between Palestine and Israel came to the forefront when it steadfastly refused the Opposition's demand to discuss on the Gaza crisis in Rajya Sabha and said it could impact upon India's diplomatic ties with Israel and Palestine but in other side government want to handle this matter in the Lok Sabha where it enjoys a massive majority.³⁷ The BJP was clearly uncomfortable when short duration discussions on the exceptional erupted violence in Palestine cause death of thousands of civilians from both side but most of them were Palestinian. A visibly troubled External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, however, maintained that such a discussion was not possible as it could hurt India's diplomatic relations with both Israel and Palestine. "There is absolutely no change in India's policy towards Palestine, which is that we fully support the Palestinian cause while maintaining good relations with Israel," External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said in Rajya Sabha and emphasized that this policy has been in vogue through various governments including those of Congress, BJP and coalition governments headed by Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral.³⁸ Again she also stated, "We have diplomatic ties with both nations. Any discourteous reference to any friendly country can impact our relations with them."³⁹ Indian government's position on Hamas, she argued that a ceasefire proposal negotiated by Egypt following escalation of violence was rejected by Hamas while Israel had accepted it. She again pointed out "The ceasefire proposal is still alive ...If the military wing of Hamas would have agreed to this ceasefire, then peace would have prevailed by now."⁴⁰ The confrontation was continued through the session. The House witnessed hilarious scenes and was finally adjourned without transacting any business. Having tasted blood, the Opposition is adamant that they will not allow the House to function if their demand for a discussion is not conceded. Parliamentary Affairs minister M Venkaiah Naidu was caught off-guard as he was not aware that his junior colleague Prakash Javadekar had agreed to this discussion. While Naidu said he was in the dark, Swaraj insisted that she was not consulted on this issue.⁴¹ According to the official reaction to the Gaza crisis on 10 July 2014:

India is deeply concerned at the steep escalation of violence between Israel and Palestine, particularly, heavy air strikes in Gaza, resulting in tragic loss of civilian lives and heavy damage to property. At the same time, India is alarmed at the cross-border provocations resulting from rocket attacks against targets in parts of Israel. India calls upon both sides to exercise maximum restraint and avoid taking actions that may further exacerbate the situation, and threaten the peace and security of the region. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable option that can effectively address the issues confronting the region and its people. We call upon both sides to resume direct talks at the earliest, in adherence to the obligations assumed by them under the peace process, for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.⁴²

The Palestine-Israel issue is particularly thorny for the Modi-led BJP government. While the BJP has been known to empathize with the Jewish battle to protect their homeland, Modi personally has invested heavily in building friendly ties with Israel as Gujarat chief minister. He had also paid several visits to Israel. After formation of government, he paid official visit Brazil to attending 6th BRICS summit in July 2014. During his visit has pitched for zero tolerance towards terrorism and called for efforts to curb it. When Indian Prime Minister addressing the BRICS leaders, he said, "Terrorism is a threat that has assumed war-like proportions. It is in fact a proxy war aimed at innocent civilians. Due to different yardsticks the international community has not been able to combat terror effectively." Regarding to Palestine- Israeli conflict he said "We support a negotiated solution. This would inspire hope and confidence around the world."⁴³ In addition, Indian Prime Minister Modi met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 28 September 2014 in New York to discuss nuclear developments in Iran and expanding bilateral ties between Jerusalem and Delhi.⁴⁴ In the series of diplomatic talk with Israel, Indian Home Minister also paid an official visit Israel for maintaining good relation. During his visit, he met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and held discussions to strengthen India's "very warm" relations with the Jewish state.⁴⁵

Conclusion :

To conclude, India and Israel both have democracy and have survived in a maritime of hostility, surrounded by implacable adversaries and a heavily militarized security environment. Both nations have fought wars in nearly every decade of their existence. Both countries also have been facing external and internal security threats in the form of Islamic terrorism and sabotage, despite the fact that only few countries recognized to Palestinian struggle as terrorism particularly US, Israel and EU. BJP argued that, it should have been therefore natural for India to reach out to Israel in terms of establishment of meaningful strategic cooperation. India accorded formal recognition to Israel in 1950 but continued to resist establishment of formal diplomatic relations till 1992. Following the establishment of formal diplomatic relations during Indian National Congress government under the leadership of former Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao in 1991 and since that time, India and Israel have signed a number of agreements.

After the formation of Modi government, India has changed its policy towards Palestine-Israel conflict because of India's national interests but in other hand some analyst argued that it is results of its Hindu nationalist ideology. Indian Prime Minister steadfastly declares that India will not support to Palestine at UN unlike UPA. Despite the all facts, it is good for Indian strong foreign policy and bad for Palestinian cause. BJP's passion for Israel is almost legendary. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who coined the term Hindutva, famously hailed the creation of Israel as a blissful moment and publicly clashed with Mahatma Gandhi and other mainstream nationalist leaders for opposing the forced displacement of Palestinians to carve out a Jewish homeland. Consequently, it is not surprising that BJP led NDA government has been supporting to Israel since its formulation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi have cleared that he wants to "deepen and develop" closer relations with Israel in the meeting with Benjamin Netanyahu in New York and he argues that it is nothing wrong in the period of globalization. But other hand Indian government should not forget that Israel is also discovering powerful ally in international politics because the British and French Parliament has adopted an action demanding that the government "recognizes the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel ". They argued that it is essential condition to establish peace in the West Asian region. This initiative have taken by the British Parliament after Sweden announced that it planned to recognize the Palestinian state on grounds that a meaningful dialogue between Israel and Palestine would be possible only when both sides will be equal partner. Several European states, including Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, have already recognized Palestine as a state.

Lastly we can say that Modi government will not support to Hamas because of its Islamic

agenda in Palestinian politics. BJP believes in Hindu nationalist ideology while Hamas is trying to create an Islamic state in Palestine. After World War II, foundation of Pakistan and Israel was based on ideology. Pakistan became Islamic republic after partition of 1947 and other side Israel became a Jews state in 1948, despite the facts that both countries have deferent political situations. Since that time Palestinian and Israeli are fighting with one another like India- Pakistan. Therefore, if Indian government recognizes to Hamas legitimacy in Gaza then world community will also recognize to Pakistani terrorism which India is still facing. If Hamas put down its Islamic agenda in Palestinian politics and renounce violence against Israeli citizens then Indian government will support to Hamas led Palestinian struggle like Arafat led PLO.

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