**Diplomatic Relations with Israel**

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March 12, 2022

A couple of years ago an important question that put Pakistan in a state of quandary, was and still is, whether, in the changed scenario of international politics, it would be feasible to recognize the state of Israel. It is essential to know the background of Pakistan-Israel relations in the past to answer this question. Pakistan and Israel almost simultaneously appeared on the map of the world based on their religious identity. Pakistan was based on two-nation theory, and Israel for a separate homeland for the Jewish people. Israel requested bilateral relations with Pakistan, but Quaid e Azam ignored that request, more probably because the new state of Pakistan was beset by major problems of mass cross emigration of Hindus and Muslims from the countries of their origin, and their subsequent settlement in their new homeland.

The Palestinians had lived for centuries on the bank of the Mediterranean, surrounded by Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, when the United Nations at the behest of the US, approved a plan to partition Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state in 1947, but the Arabs rejected it. From a small speck around the present Tel Aviv, the Jews fought internecine battles with the Muslim population with arms supplied by the US and other allies and pushed back the unarmed Palestinians towards Gaza and beyond, which is remembered in history as Zionism. Hence, the creation of Israel took place by their unlawful occupation of the Palestinian area and the subsequent declaration of a sovereign state of Israel.

Since Israel’s establishment in May 1948, Pakistan, being a Muslim country, has refused to establish diplomatic relations with it. The agreements that Israel signed with Egypt in 1978, the PLO in 1993, and Jordan in 1994 brought no change in Pakistan’s policy. However, Israeli and Pakistani officials maintained clandestine contacts over the years. Pakistan’s non-recognition of Israel was mainly due to keeping religious solidarity with the Arab-Muslim countries and the fear of reaction by radical Islamic groups. Pakistan’s political and military leaders always try hard to get along well with its radical clergy, however reactionary or ill-advised they may be. Our efforts to frame our policies guided by our religious leaders have many a time beguiled us from seeking to follow policies that have the potential to uplift our economy or strengthen our defence needs. In today’s world, a better and more prosperous economy is the only viable step that makes us known to the world community as a nation to be reckoned with. This gives us an enviable image of which we can be proud of as a nation. A rational and pragmatic approach to resolving the problems faced by humanity could earn us the respect of other nations. None of our decisions should be based on vacuous emotional grounds. Standing clear of these considerations will work to the betterment of our country both on internal and external fronts. The reason why we are passing through a crisis of our image is that we are guided by falsely religious propaganda and have failed to see things as they are. We don’t follow the pristine teachings of Islam and are led away by the herd instincts of so-called religious groups.

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The hostilities perpetrated on Palestinians were resented by the entire Muslims of the world. The US that had the main role to create Israel could not prevent the exodus of Palestinians from their motherland which made them shelterless. This was a gruesome tragedy wrought by the combined might of allied forces which now appears irreversible. Now recognizing or not recognizing Israel is unlikely to restore the rights and land of the Palestinians. There are quite a few countries that have not so far recognized Israel. If Pakistan being a nuclear power and a strategic partner of the US in this region leads the consortium of countries who have not so far recognized Israel and impress upon the US to guarantee better financial aid and housing facilities to the Palestinians in lieu of their recognition of Israel, I feel it will certainly achieve the desired results. The retrieval of the lost Palestinian territory to its rightful owners looks impossible.

Later Six Days War in 1967 caused further fissures in the unity of Palestinians and they were forcibly occupied by Egypt. Under the reign of Hosni Mobarak, they faced their economic blockade and further political repression. Today they have been rendered homeless and are subjected to extreme poverty. This detail was essential to know the truth of Israel’s expansion, at the cost of Palestinians’ Homeland. Noam Chomsky, the great American philosopher regarded it as “mass murder of Palestinians” with western armament. Thus, in the background of these hostilities and their unauthorized occupation of Palestinian lands, it was not easy to recognize a state built on human genocide. But since new realities had emerged after the 1967 war, a gradual recognition of Israel became a reality.

From 1980 onward, Pakistan engaged itself in covert diplomacy with Israel for which the Embassy of Washington was used. In 2020, Israel signed agreements establishing diplomatic relations with four Arab League countries, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan and Morocco.

As of December 2020, 164 out of 192 UN member states recognize Israel, only 13 countries do not recognize Israel.

There is no likelihood that Pakistan and Israel will go to war. They do not share borders and do not have a direct conflict. As nuclear powers, both Israel and Pakistan are aware of the need to manage any misunderstandings between them. Pakistan is in no way a less strong nation militarily. But for Pakistan to subjugate Israel is not possible because it is a satellite state of the western superpowers, which will not let Israel come to any harm. However, the recent accord between Israel and the UAE is not a happy sign for Pakistan.

In a prepared speech, Imran Khan said that it is in Pakistan’s interest to neither condemn nor commend, but stay clear of creating troubles for itself with the Gulf states, while still recovering from the diplomatic fiasco with Saudi Arabia. Recently Foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said that international relations are above religious sentiments. It was a bold statement.

And finally, the question that whether in the scenario discussed above, Pakistan should recognize Israel or not? Rationally speaking, we cannot possibly retrieve and restore the Palestinian territories to them on which Israel has made their large Jewish settlements. We have upheld their cause as our political stance, but have not been able to practically do anything about them. Mere emotional attachment with their cause will neither benefit them nor us. All our vital decisions have so far been made on petty religious considerations. Other Islamic countries have become wiser to take decisions on purely economic and defence considerations. The question is how long we will remain tied to the petard of our self-destruction? No decision, as I have already said, should be based on vacuous emotional grounds. If our Prime Minister, who is already engaged in many sensitive administrative matters, is afraid of the radical religious elements, the matter may be entrusted to the Parliament. If we have diplomatic relations with countries like India and Bangladesh with whom we had open wars, then what prevents us from recognizing Israel from whom we can benefit more than losing anything?

The latest situation is that 164 countries out of 192 have recognized Israel. 28 UN members do not recognize Israel, out of which 15 countries of the Arab League, and 10 members of OIC (including Pakistan and Iran) also do not recognize Israel. The blocks of all stronger Muslim nations have already recognized or have diplomatic relations with Israel.

In this background, the countries that have not so far recognised Israel should recognise Israel only under a strong pre-condition with the US support to compel Israel to make substantial concessions for the displaced Palestinians to release their land and make other economic concessions to let them peacefully enjoy their life on the land on which they deserve equal rights.

The Jews must realise that living in a perpetual state of egregious hatred, doubt and mistrust is worse than Hell.

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