

POLITICAL
REPORTS

4 JUNE 2018



المعهد المصري للدراسات
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

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While the historic town of Jerusalem was in a festive mood, and lanes and walls of the city were covered with the bright posters, sign boards, placards and multi-colored leaflets to celebrate the fulfillment of a promise by US President Donald Trump to shift the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the Palestinians on the other side in blockaded Gaza were trapped in one of the worst violence in recent years which killed around 60 Palestinians and injured around 3000 people.

In accordance with the election-time promises made during his campaign, the US President Donald Trump in a sudden move in December 2017 recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and promised to shift the US embassy there very soon. The transfer of US embassy and the subsequent bloodshed in Gaza were followed by large scale condemnation and protest across the Arab world. Nations like Lebanon and GCC countries expressed their deep anger and concerns over the killing of civilians. France condemned the killing, and the UK called Israel to exercise restraints. Germany asked Israel to respect the right to peaceful protest, and the EU shared the same feelings. There were major diplomatic spat too among different countries when Turkey called its ambassadors back both from Israel and the US; and in a similar move the Palestinian Authority, too, has called back its ambassador from the US, and President Abbas has already stated that Palestine does not trust the US as an honest mediator any more.

The unprecedented level of condemnation and denigration were not witnessed merely on the Arab streets, but similar protests and demonstrations were seen in other parts of the world. India was one of those nations where people in large numbers came on the street in different cities to protest the shifting of the US Embassy to Jerusalem which according to them has been done in gross violation of all legal and procedural norms. Large number of Muslims staged marches in different parts of the country carrying anti-US and anti-Israel banners which read "US and Israel are the occupiers and perpetrators of genocides. The Indian Muslim protestors were demanding immediate revocation of the US decision to shift the embassy to the Jerusalem. The majority of the protestors were representing the civil society, Islamist leaning political groups and Muslim NGOs and other Islamic student organizations. The protests were not only confined to demonstration on the road but large



number of people on social media expressed their anger, resentment and annoyance over the unjust move of the US. It is worth mentioning here that India has sizable numbers of Muslims who has historical, religious and political association with the land and the people of Palestine.

It is not merely Muslims who have never concealed their deep bond with the people of Palestine but India as a whole always stood by Palestine. India has always advocated for the liberation of the territory of Palestine. India's father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi was the strongest voice of the Palestinian people during the early days of Palestinian freedom struggle and even today his pro-Arab aphorism is the guiding principle for India's policy vis-à-vis the people there.

India-Palestine Bonds in the Past

When it comes to deciphering India's relationship with the people of Palestine, Indian is always reminded of statement of Mahatma Gandhi when he had said that "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English and France to the French". The Arab world, the notion of Muslim Ummah and moreover the Ottoman Caliphate have never been an alien entity to the imagination of the Indian Muslims and so is the case with the cause of Palestine. The city of Jerusalem for the Indian Muslims have always stood as the legacy of Islamic glorious past and has been close to the heart of Indian Muslims. The Indian Muslim allegiance to the Ottoman Caliphates became more pronounced after the British capture of the Jerusalem in 1917 at the hand of General Edmund Henry - which for thirteen centuries had remained under Muslim control except for short spell during the time of the Crusades.

Indian Muslims had always deep affection towards the Ottoman Caliphates because of their status as protectors of the holy places of Islam and the erstwhile Indian Muslims from across the political streams (both Muslim League and Indian National Congress) expressed their resentment against the Sharif Husain of Mecca who was supportive of the British power which had taken control of one of the Islamic holy places (Jerusalem).

In 1920, a Khilafat delegation including Gandhi met erstwhile viceroy Lord Chelmsford and urged the British government that Jerusalem must remain under the control of the Caliphate and not under the non-Muslims. The demands for freedom of Jerusalem were always framed within the Islamic context and M. A. Ansari, a leading member of the Muslim League said that non-Muslim should not rule over the smallest portion of the Islamic land because in this part of world are situated the cities



consecrated by religion, history and tradition of Muslims. To stress the point further, Indian Muslims had formed an association of the servant of Kabah to protect these places from the aggression.

The control of Palestine in 1922 by Britain under mandatory system infuriated the Indian Muslims and the anger was not confined to the leadership alone but it swept across the semi-illiterate populace, school teachers, artisans and shopkeepers, and series of Fatwas were issued to protect the pious land of Palestine. During the Khilafat movement (1919-24), the discourse on Palestine and religiosity of Jerusalem dominated the political discourse in the country, and Jerusalem was dealt with as an Islamic cause, and Islamic-centric construct of Jerusalem and Palestine sealed the fate of any sympathy for Zionism in India. Mahatma Gandhi in 1921 said that Muslims in the First World War had not shed their blood to hand over the sovereignty of holy land into the hand of non-Muslims. Renowned Indian political and religious figure of his time, Mohani, said that Palestine along with Hejaz should be free from the non-Muslim influence.

Even Gandhi exhorted all Muslims not to accept any civil post under the British government which wanted to rule over the territory which is sacred to Islam and Muslims. Muslims along with Congress leader argued that Muslims claim to Palestine is based on Quranic injunction as well along with other political past and geography. Indian Muslims never claimed Jerusalem for Turks/ Ottoman as against the Arabs but they expressed their opposition to outside interference either on the part of migrant Jews or diplomatic, military and political power of the British government. During the heyday of freedom struggle, the issue of Palestine and status of Jerusalem became a pressing issue for both the Muslim League and the Congress to sway the Muslims in their own political fold given the centrality of Palestine/Jerusalem in the imagination of Indian Muslims. The Jerusalem and land of Palestine was so close to the heart of Indian Muslims that one of the leading Islamic and political figures of his time, Mohammad Ali Johar was buried in the courtyard of Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in 1931 in fulfillment of his last will.

Independent India and Cause of Palestine

The affection and attachment of Indian Muslims and the sympathy of Indian leaders did not end after the country achieved independence. But it continued like before for many decades and now the cause of Palestine was the part of third-world anti-imperialist struggle for a leader like Nehru and a true Islamic cause for the Muslims. India was among few nations in the world which had opposed the



UN partition plan of November 1947 and advocated the full sovereign right of Palestinians on their territories. India was among first few countries to recognize the PLO in 1975 and finally accorded it a diplomatic status in 2014. Late Mr. Arafat enjoyed personal rapport with later Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and always addressed her as “My sister” and even she had paid a visit to PLO headquarters in Tunisia in 1984. Moreover, India is also a votary to the 1975 UN resolution which determined that Zionism was a form of racism and represented racial discrimination. Today, India is one of the major contributors to the Palestinian Authority and members of donor’s team to the agency for Palestinian refugees. Moreover, the Indian government, for the last four decades, has been organizing a program to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the People of Palestine.

Though much has changed in last quarter of century since India established diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992 - as today, India is the largest importer of Israeli arms in the world - but India remained stuck to its principle stand on Palestine. It was its belief in the old dictum which could not deter it from voting in December 2017 in UN against the US unilateral decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of state of Israel.

Indian Muslims on their part never abandoned the Palestinian cause and always remained attached to the land due to the religiosity of the place and atrocities against the people of Palestine. They never hesitated in thronging the street to show their sympathy, and have always raised their voices against the brutality of Israel. Indian Muslims every year observe International Quds Day calling for an end to the occupation of Israel. Only last year, the protests and demonstrations were joined by many organizations like Students Islamic Organization, All India Ulema Organization and Jamaat Islami of India and other civil society groups. On the occasion, the Muslim organizations submitted a memorandum to President, Home Minister and External Affairs Minister seeking to intervene in the matter. Indian Muslims had staged a nationwide march and protest when in a first ever visit of Israeli Prime Minister to India, Mr. Ariel Sharon visited India in 2003, because they held him responsible for the killing of thousands of innocent Palestinians in Lebanon in 1982. Similarly protest marches were organized when Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu visited India in January 2018. The chairman of the Guardian Council of Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust had then said that the land of Mahatma cannot tolerate war criminal like Netanyahu. They also burned the effigy of Mr. Netanyahu, and they were carrying placard which read, Go back Netanyahu’. Similar level of anger and concerns were expressed

by Indian Muslims when Prime Minister Modi in first ever visit to Israel by any Indian Prime Minister touched the soil of Israel and made a billion dollar worth of defense deal with Israel.

Ceremony in Jerusalem and Anguish among Indian Muslims

Along with global Muslim community, Indian Muslims too swarmed the streets of all small and big towns in the country to express their anger over shifting US embassy to Jerusalem. Thousands of Muslims from the northern part of India (Kashmir) to the southern state of Kerala gathered to express their solidarity with the people of Palestine at the time when the holy town of Jerusalem was hosting the grand ceremony of transfer of US embassy to West Jerusalem. The story of killing innocent Palestinians was trending on Twitter and other social media posts like FB, and different blogs were swamped with the condemnation of US and Israeli policies in the region. Majority blamed the US for this while some held the current Arab politics accountable for the plight of the innocent Palestinians. A series of protest was organized in last December when US President Donald Trump had merely announced to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and shift the embassy to Jerusalem.

Almost every Muslim organization ranging from Jamiat Ulema Hind (Association of Indian Ulema) to Jamat Islami Hind (Indian Islamic Group), All Indian Muslims Personal Law Board, Muslim Majlis Mushawrat, Student Islamic Origination, Ahl-e-Hdith, All India Milli Council, Student Islamic Organization and Muslim Student Organization organized a huge protest march against the celebration in Jerusalem and the killing of people in Gaza.

The Jamiat Ulema Hind, a pre-independent nationalist Muslim body organized the protest both in small and big towns and one of its prominent members, Mr. Niyaz Farooqui said that the US move is nothing short of an act of terrorism and it will bring further instability and chaos in an already volatile Arab world. He further said that by shifting its Embassy to Jerusalem, the US has already destroyed any prospect for long term solution to the vexed issue of Palestine. He further asserted that no power lasts forever, and future belongs to the people of Palestine. The leader of Student Islamic Organization said that Jerusalem is not close to the heart of Palestinian Muslims alone but it is revered by Muslims across the globe and its fate cannot be determined by Israel or US.

The Muslims' anger was not confined to the capital town of Delhi or on the street in the other provinces, but many Urdu media outlet expressed the similar anguish over the move. One of the prominent Urdu Daily, Siasat (Politics) in its editorial said that Israel has scripted another bloody

history today by hosting the US embassy in Jerusalem and the world community can no longer be an onlooker to the slaughter of the Muslims in Gaza and the silence of world community is shameful. It further stated that the US has buried all future peace prospects and no country can trust US as an honest mediator any more.

Similarly, another Urdu Daily, Salar in its editorial commented that in the history of the Arab world, 14 May will be mourned as another day of catastrophe. The editor opined out that region is waiting for a new bloodshed and it was merely complicity of the Arab leaders that did not deter the US from implementing its malicious design. The paper also referred to the issue of South Sudan and East Timor which became independent, but what stopped Palestine from achieving its long cherished goal? While Munsif (another widely circulated Urdu Daily) in its observations said that the present act of US is reflective of its contempt towards the UN, and it is an attempt to impose the unilateral decision of the US and Israel on the global community; and UN has once again proved that it was merely a show piece.

The opinion page of another Urdu Daily, Inqalab (Revolution) lambasted the US for taking the embassy to Jerusalem and said that all world powers have become subservient to the dictate and will of the US, and moreover the UN itself has surrendered to the illegitimate power of Israel which has no respect for global norms and international laws. Most of the commentators and analysts blamed the US for the current atrocities of Israel against Palestinians and one political commentator, Mr. Tariq said that President Trump is working at the behest of Israel, and the Arab nations are merely paying lip services. According to him, the US has begun a new chapter of destruction in the Arab world and has made the mockery of international law and one day the US will have to pay a heavy price for that.

Other Muslim organizations, Muslim Majlis Mushawrat, which are committed to the advocacy for the protection of political right of Muslim minority in India, expressed their disapproval of the unfolding situation in the region. Its president Mr. Navid Hamid in a personal interview said that the US move is against international laws, and today the US has exposed itself before the global community and had endorsed the views of many that the US was the main hindrance to the past peace effort and the real culprit of what is happening in the region. He also lamented the fact that road ahead is full of obstacle after US unilateral decision on Jerusalem.



One of the strongest reactions to the US blatant posture was witnessed in the Muslim-dominated state of Kashmir, where students and small business men came in large numbers to protest against the US policies, and the participants accused the US President of hurting the sentiment of Muslim Ummah. The veteran of state politics and former Chief Minister of the state, Farooque Abdullah, said that the move has hurt the Muslims across the world and another state leader, Omar Abdullah, criticized the deafening silence of the government of India over the US move.

There were other religious bodies and groups which, in a number of press statement and personal interviews, slammed the decision of the US. A member of Jamat Islami Hind, Mr. Saleem Engineer, said that Indian Muslims were always convinced that whatever is happening in the Palestine is because of the US which has been able to impose its agenda. He also accused the Arab leaders and expressed pity that the Arab nations are still western pawn and have not been able to achieve their autonomy and have no power to oppose the US. He said that Indian Muslims should be applauded for their constant support to the cause of Palestine despite their own plight and other political and economic worries.

There were individual reactions too from across the section of clergy class. One of the prominent Shiite scholar and public figure, Mr. Kalb-e-Jawwad, in a statement directly blamed the GCC leaders for the present state of affairs in Palestine and said that the Muslim community cannot succumb to the US pressure to accept Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Mr. Mahmud Madani, former Member of Parliament and renowned religious figure, on his part termed the US move a humiliation of world sentiment and said that by its current move, the US has justified the occupation of Jerusalem and has proved that it was never interested in the Middle East Peace Process. Syed Javed Ali Nashbandi of Ahle Sunnat said that Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest place of worship in Islam and Indian Muslims cannot allow Israel to commit a crime against Palestinians and Islam. Members of the Muslim Women Organization termed the US decision as dangerous for the future of the Arab region. An activist of Muslim Organization, Eeman Usmani, said that today a new conspiracy has been hatched against Muslims by shifting the US embassy to Jerusalem. She further said that Quds has been historically the part of Muslim religious faith and no political power can alter its status.

In conclusion, it can be said that India Muslims have been historically attached to the land of Palestine and during India's freedom struggle, the issue of Palestine was dealt with both as a religious and imperialist issue; and even today Muslims have adhered to its commitment to preserve the

religious sanctity of the place. What is more praiseworthy is that Muslims in India have never abandoned the cause of Palestine despite their growing internal political and economic plight. The role of Indian Muslims becomes more important when one sees the changing political milieu of the country and altering temperament and priority of political dispensation towards the cause of Palestine.

