

India again fails in the UN to Condemn Terrorism: A Relapse into an Old Disease

Author: Rajesh Soami*

Date: 10 December 2018

In an imprudent move, India abstained from a United Nations resolution brought to the General Assembly by United States of America on 6th December. The harmless resolution condemned Hamas for firing rockets into Israel which endangered the lives of civilians. It called for the cessation of provocative and violent activities by all militant groups including *Islamic Jihad*. It also demanded "*full respect by all parties for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including in regard to the protection of the civilian population*".

The entire [text](#) of the resolution did not have a single word which India could possibly have disagreed with. It was clearly directed at violent terrorist activities targeting civilians. New Delhi itself has been expending significant diplomatic energy on convincing other countries to the dangers of terrorism. It ensures that terrorism is criticized in joint statements with other countries as far as possible. Moreover, Delhi's relations with both Israel and the United States have improved markedly in recent years. This makes the Indian abstention even more bizarre.

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations [was forthright](#) on why countries ought to support the resolution. He stated "*You can't sit on the fence. Tomorrow there will be a terrorist attack and you will come to the UN to seek a condemnation. No country is immune.*" For some unknown reason, the powers that be in the South Block failed to comprehend this simple logic. An unprecedented number of countries including the entire EU supported the resolution but India was conspicuous by its absence.

Resolutions condemning Israel, in contrast, are regularly passed at the General Assembly. The Islamic bloc votes en masse to ensure this. New Delhi has also often supported these resolutions in the past. India, which did not even recognise the state of Israel till 1992, has since moved to balance its hitherto pro-Arab policies. Currently, New

Delhi enjoys a healthy relationship with the Jewish state. However, this is not reflected in its diplomatic moves. In its zeal to maintain some imagined neutrality in Israel-Palestine relations, India continues to either vote against Tel-Aviv or abstains from voting at all in the UN General Assembly.

In July 2017, Prime Minister Modi had visited Israel, becoming the first Indian PM to do so. He along with the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had then condemned all forms of terrorism. The Indian foreign secretary had say "*the Israeli position is really very similar to ours, which is that there are no justifications for acts of terrors on any grounds whatsoever.*" The failure of India to support unequivocal condemnation of terrorist activities against Israel is in stark contrast to this policy. On the floor of the General Assembly, the government of India seemed unaware of either of the countries' positions on terror.

Not only this, the Trump administration in Washington DC has made extra efforts to support Israel. It has moved its embassy to Jerusalem and terminated the nuclear deal with Iran. At the same time, it has also made efforts to cater to India's sensitivities. When India bought the S-400 missile systems from Russia, the US made its displeasure known but refused to slap sanctions. It has also granted time-bound waiver to India after the recent re-imposition of sanctions on Iran. More importantly, the Trump administration has shown extra sensitivity to India's energy requirements.

It is common knowledge that Indian economic growth is inversely proportional to the cost of oil on the international market. Recently, when the Iran sanctions started to bite and oil crossed \$80 a barrel, economic experts in New Delhi began to sweat. United States [stated](#) that it didn't want "*friend*" India's economy to be negatively affected by these sanctions and was therefore exploring alternative sources of supply to it. The United States has since leaned heavily on Saudi Arabia as well as increased its own production of oil to bring down the price to \$60.

In contrast, Indian government's actions have been anything but friendly. Last December, it had voted against the US move to shift its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. While one could understand India opposing the change in status quo in West Asia, the current abstention is bewildering. The main argument against the resolution was that it would move the focus away from unilateral Israeli actions in West Asia. This is similar to the argument given by Pakistan when it opposes the Indian focus

on cross-border terrorism instead of the so called “territorial dispute” of Kashmir. Moreover, why should the US support Delhi against the terrorist organisations in Pakistan, like Lashkar-e-Toiba, which specifically target India, if India cannot do the same in West Asia?

India has been sitting on the fence for way too long and on way too many issues. The timidity shown in this particular instance reminds one of the days when Delhi kept seeking security in the imaginary benefits of non-alignment, ever mindful of its weak economy, difficult security situation and poor populace. Modi’s pitch for a strong India sounds rather hollow if the government cannot even bring itself up to condemn terrorism against civilians in unequivocal terms.

Last year, India and Israel had [agreed](#) that “*the fight against terrorism won’t work if it is very segmented and translated into narrow agendas*”. Now the Modi government has done just that. It has shot itself in the foot by failing to condemn terrorism against Israel. By doing so, it may have partially legitimised terrorism against India itself. A more foolish act could not be imagined, if one tried.

Neither pragmatic geopolitics nor any ethical reason makes sense of the Indian decision to abstain. The Ministry of External Affairs and Prime Minister’s Office need to pay more attention to taking the right diplomatic step on the floor of the General Assembly. Although the UN resolutions are not binding, they have sufficient political value not to be taken lightly. India should know better as it has been trying to deflect attention from the UN resolutions on Kashmir since 1950s. Moreover, India may end up alienating well-wishers and friends if it continues to let historical inertia negate recent foreign policy activism and advantages the country has accrued from it.

**Rajesh Soami is an Associate Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation. The views expressed here are his own, and do not reflect the official policy or position of the NMF. He can be reached at rajesh96_isg@jnu.ac.in or associatefellow4.nmf@gmail.com*