



West Asia Peace Conference

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Why in News

Recently, **Russia** backed a Palestinian proposal for a **West Asia Peace Conference**. The Conference is intended to **focus on a two-state solution**, under which Israel and a future Palestinian state would coexist.

Key Points

- **Background:**

The support for the Conference came as the USA, which had sided with Israel under the administration of Donald Trump, intends to “restore credible USA engagement with Palestinians as well as Israelis.”
- **Participants in the Conference:**

The 10 participants would include **Israel, the Palestinians**, the four **members of the West Asia diplomatic quartet** (Russia, the **United Nation**, the USA and the **European Union**), along with four Arab states — **Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE**.
- **Russia’s Suggestion:**

Russia suggested that the **West Asia Peace Conference** could be held at the **ministerial level**.
- **Other Related Developments:**
 - The **Abraham Accord** between Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain is mediated by the USA. It was the first Arab-Israeli peace deal in 26 years.
 - Palestinians are worried about the impact of the Accords.

Israel-Palestine Conflict

• Background:



○ **British Phase:**

- Britain took control of the area known as Palestine after the ruler of that part of the Middle East, the **Ottoman Empire**, was defeated in **World War I**.

- The land was inhabited by a Jewish minority and Arab majority.
- Tensions between the two peoples grew when the **international community gave Britain the task of establishing a "national home" in Palestine for Jewish people.**

For Jews, it was their ancestral home, but Palestinian Arabs also claimed the land and opposed the move.

- In **1948**, unable to solve the problem, British rulers left and **Jewish leaders declared the creation of the state of Israel.**

○ **Post British Phase:**

- In another war in **1967**, Israel occupied **East Jerusalem** and the **West Bank**, as well as most of the **Syrian Golan Heights**, and **Gaza** and the Egyptian Sinai peninsula.

- Most Palestinian refugees and their descendants live in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in neighbouring Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Neither they nor their descendants have been allowed by Israel to return to their homes - Israel says this would overwhelm the country and threaten its existence as a Jewish state.

- Israel still occupies the West Bank, and although it pulled out of Gaza the **United Nations** (UN) still regards that piece of land as part of occupied territory.
- Israel claims the whole of Jerusalem as its capital, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.
- In the past 50 years Israel has built settlements in these areas, where more than 6,00,000 Jews now live.
- Palestinians say these are illegal under international law and are obstacles to peace, but **Israel denies this.**

- **Shift in the Stand of the USA:**

- The USA has played a partisan role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- In the last few years, developments in the USA mark a clear shift from the **Oslo Accords in favor of support for Israeli plans** to annex a large fraction of the West Bank and design a new settlement of the conflict according to its interests.
 - USA's peace plan (**Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People**) would have guaranteed that Israel would control a unified Jerusalem as its capital and not require it to uproot any of the settlements in the West Bank.

The plan was drawn without any meaningful Palestinian participation and was loaded in Israel's favour.
 - In **1993** under the Oslo Accords, **Israel** and the **Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)** agreed to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence.
 - The Oslo Accords also **established the Palestinian Authority**, which received limited autonomy in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.
- However, recently after the **change in administration**, the USA said it would **move towards renewing ties with the Palestinians**.

- **India's Stand:**

- India was one of the few countries to **oppose the UN's partition plan in November 1947**, echoing its own experience during independence a few months earlier. In the decades that followed, the Indian political leadership actively supported the Palestinian cause and withheld full diplomatic relations with Israel.
- India **recognised Israel in 1950** but **it is also the first non-Arab country to recognise PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian**.

India is also one of the first countries to recognise the statehood of Palestine in 1988.
- In 2014, India favored the **United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC)** resolution to probe Israel's human rights violations in Gaza. Despite supporting the probe, India abstained from voting against Israel in UNHRC IN 2015.
- As a part of Link West Policy, India has **de-hyphenated its relationship with Israel and Palestine in 2018** to treat both the countries mutually independent and exclusive.
- In June 2019, India voted in favor of a decision introduced by Israel in the **UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** that objected to granting consultative status to a Palestinian non-governmental organization.
- So far **India has tried to maintain the image of its historical moral supporter for Palestinian self-determination, and at the same time to engage in the military, economic, and other strategic relations with Israel**.

Way Forward

The **world at large needs to come together for a peaceful solution** but the reluctance of the Israeli government and other involved parties have aggravated the issue more. Thus a **balanced approach towards the Israel-Palestine issue** would help to maintain favorable relations with Arab countries as well as Israel.