



US Restores Aid to Palestinians

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Why in News

The United States, in a significant reversal to the earlier policy, has announced the restoration of at least USD 235 million in **financial assistance to the Palestinians**.

The US administration had **already announced USD 15 million in coronavirus relief to the Palestinians**.

Key Points

- **Financial Aid:**

- The financial aid includes USD 75 million economic help for the **West Bank & Gaza**, USD 10 million for **'peacebuilding' programmes** of the **US Agency for International Development (USAID)** and USD 150 million in humanitarian assistance to the **UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)**.
 - The UNRWA funds would include educational assistance for at least 5,00,000 Palestinian children living in West Asia.
 - The **Trump administration (former administration) had almost ended all funding** to the organisation in 2018.
- The **UN welcomed the move**, hoping it would attract more funds to the body. There were a number of countries that had greatly reduced or halted contributions to UNRWA after the US stopped the aid.
- The **Prime Minister of Palestine welcomed the move** and called it a new political path that meets the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people based on international law and UN resolutions.

However, **Israel**, which has **accused UNRWA of anti-Semitism** (hostility to, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews), **objected to the funding plans**.

- **Israel - Palestine Issues:**

- The decades-long conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is rooted in **competing claims to the Holy Land**, and includes **disputes over borders, Jerusalem, security, and Palestinian refugees**.
 - The **Israel-Palestine Conflict** can be traced back to 1917.
 - Holy Land is a Middle Eastern region with great religious and historical significance to Christians, Jews, and Muslims.
- **Mideast War, 1967** was a major turning point. It is also known as the **six-day war** or **Third Arab-Israeli war**.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in the war. In the decades since, Israel has built settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem that now house a million Israelis.

- **US Recent Policy:**

- US President Donald Trump's decision in 2017, to **relocate the US Embassy to Jerusalem**, was criticized for being heavily tilted towards Israel.
- **Mideast Plan or Middle East Peace Plan:** It was unveiled by the then US government in January, 2020.
 - Under it, the Palestinians would have a limited statehood contingent on a list of stringent requirements while **Israel would annex some 30% of the West Bank**.
 - The Palestinians rejected the plan and threatened to withdraw from key provisions of the **Oslo Peace Accords**, which are a series of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians signed in the 1990s.
- Present US President Joe Biden has reaffirmed the United States' commitment to a **two-state solution**.

- **India's Stand:**

- India **recognised Israel in 1950** but it is also the **first non-Arab country to recognise Palestine Liberation Organisation (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 **UNHRC's** 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.

The Territorial Puzzle

- **West Bank:** The West Bank is **sandwiched between Israel and Jordan**. One of its major cities is Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine.

Israel took control of it in the 1967 war and has over the years established settlements there.
- **Gaza:** The Gaza Strip located **between Israel and Egypt**. Israel occupied the strip after 1967, but relinquished control of Gaza City and day-to-day administration in most of the territory during the **Oslo peace process**.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally removed Jewish settlements from the territory, though it continues to control international access to it.
- **Golan Heights:** The Golan Heights is a **strategic plateau that Israel captured from Syria** in the 1967 war. Israel effectively annexed the territory in 1981.

The US has officially recognized Jerusalem and Golan Heights as part of Israel.
- **Fatah:** Founded by the late Yasir Arafat in the 1950s, Fatah is the largest Palestinian political faction.

Unlike Hamas, Fatah is a secular movement, has nominally recognized Israel, and has actively participated in the peace process.
- **Hamas:** Hamas is regarded as a terrorist organization by the US government. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Authority's legislative elections.

It ejected Fatah from Gaza in 2007, splitting the Palestinian movement geographically, as well.



Way Forward

- **Balanced Approach Towards the Israel-Palestine:** 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 would help to maintain favorable relations with Arab countries as well as Israel.
- **Abraham Accords, a Positive Step:** The recent normalization agreements between **Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco**, known as the **Abraham Accords**, are the steps in the right direction.
All regional powers should envisage peace between the two countries on line of Abraham Accords.

Source: TH