# As PA Expresses ‘Shock’ at India’s UN Vote, Israel Voices Appreciation for Abstention

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The Palestinian Authority was “shocked” at India’s abstention on an anti-Israel resolution passed at the UN Human Right’s Council, the PA’s ambassador to India said Tuesday, recalling the days when Yasser Arafat used to call the country’s former premier Indira Gandhi “his sister.”

“We were shocked,” Adnan Abu Alhaija told *The Hindu*newspaper.

“The Palestinian people and the leaders, we were very happy with the UN resolution, but the voting of India has broken our happiness.

India is a very special country for us, and its abstention from voting can be seen as a departure from India’s traditional position on Palestine, which has remained unwavering over the last seven decades.”

Israel hailed India’s abstention, which was viewed in Jerusalem as “dramatic” and a sign of the very strong relations between the two countries, especially since the election last year of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Israel expressed its appreciation for the vote at a high-level Israeli- Indian political dialogue that took place in the Foreign Ministry on Monday.

Mark Sofer, a deputy director-general in the ministry and head of its Division for Asia and the Pacific, said the dialogue came at a particularly auspicious moment since the relationship, which has been steadily improving over the years, has taken a “qualitative” leap forward since Modi’s election. Now, he said, the relationship has transformed into a “completely normal relationship, without hangups.”

The dialogue, headed by Foreign Ministry director-general Dore Gold and his Indian counterpart Anil Wadhwa, covered the sphere of bilateral relations – economic, academic, cultural – as well as regional issues such as Iran and Islamic extremism.

“The qualitative change in the relationship is palpable in every single sphere, and that is important to note,” said Sofer, adding that India represents “a quarter of the world population and everyone is running to be there.”

Sofer, a former ambassador to India, attributed part of the improvement in ties to a “chemistry” that exists between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Modi. They met last September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting and – according to Sofer – speak quite a bit on the phone.

Friday’s UNHRC resolution, based on the findings of a UNHRC committee that investigated last summer’s war in Gaza, passed by a vote of 47 in favor, the US against, and five abstentions: India, Ethiopia, Kenya, Paraguay and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Following the vote, the Indian External Affairs Ministry issued a statement saying “there is no change in India’s long-standing position on support to the Palestinian cause,” and explained its vote as having to do with the fact that India is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court and which was referenced in the resolution.

The PA ambassador, however, didn’t buy that explanation, saying other countries that have not signed the Rome Statute – such as Russia and China – voted for the resolution at the UNHRC.

“In a scenario where European union members who were once considered steadfast supporters of Israel voted against it, India’s abstention stands out as a sore thumb and will send a confusing signal,” he said.

“We would still like to believe that this incident is merely an aberration and doesn’t reflect India’s diplomatic history and its desire to help the oppressed people of the world,” he said. “We would still like to believe that this was a one-off incident and not a trend.”

But it wasn’t. In fact, it was the second time in less than two months that India abstained on an Israel-related vote rather than voting against it.

The first time was last month, when India, along with two other countries, abstained in a vote on whether to grant observer status to a British based NGO – the Palestinian Return Center – which Israel said was linked to Hamas.

Twelve other countries voted in favor of the resolution, which passed, but India’s abstention then was a first.

Alhaija said the “burgeoning military relationship” between Israel and India has “affected” India’s “judgment,” despite assurances he claimed the Palestinians received from New Delhi that their relationship would not be impacted by the Israel-India security ties.

“India has shown a clean break from the ethos of non-alignment that have guided India’s foreign policy till now,” he complained.