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UNDERSTANDING OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS MIDDLE EAST



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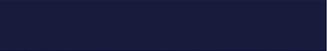
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ABSTRACT



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Over the last decades, especially under the administration of Narendra Modi, India has given a high level of importance to relations with the countries of the Middle East. Indian policymakers have systematically prioritized the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, where strategic petroleum reserves are the most significant commodity for the gigantic economy of India. In recent years, millions of Indian workers have been migrated to find a job in Middle-Eastern countries. And they have had a positive effect like a dynamo on India's foreign exchange reserves. The Middle East region plays a vital role in India's foreign policy in many subjects such as political, security, economic and energy fields. This analysis focuses on India's Middle Eastern foreign policy history and its bilateral relations with the region's countries in terms of opportunities and challenges.

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Introduction

Foreign policy is considered to be the wheel with which the international process is operationalized. Every state has to adopt a particular pattern of foreign policy to manage its external affairs towards the other states and simultaneously accommodate one's national interest by influencing or controlling the foreign behavior of other states. In modern times, no state can avoid involvement in the international sphere. This involvement must be systematic and based on some well-defined principles. The principles and the purposes of a state should be reflected in its foreign policy. Scholars have highlighted the importance of foreign policy in various ways. According to one scholar, a state without a foreign policy is like a ship without a radar that drifts aimlessly without direction by every storm and sweep of events. According to Prof Taylor, "Foreign policy of a sort will go on long as there are Sovereign states."¹ Thus, foreign policy is the total of the principles, interests, and objectives that a state formulates in its relations with other states.

In international affairs, a state's behavior is broadly governed by its foreign policy strategy. Therefore, the strategy becomes interchangeable with the foreign policy orientation of a country. During the Cold War, India pursued the strategy of non-alignment to achieve its foreign policy goals. The goals were to preserve and enhance national security, improve the international system, considerations such as status and independence in foreign relations, etc. The end of the Cold War led India to think about its foreign policy's orientations in a new scenario. Adopting a pragmatic approach, India made some new developments to adjust to the emerging geopolitical environment of global politics. India's foreign policy has been inspired by the ideals and vision of the leaders of its independence movement. It reflects the finest elements of its cultural and philosophical heritage. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Ram Manohar Lohia were principally responsible for providing philosophical and intellectual content to Indian foreign policy. However, Jawaharlal Nehru emerged as a chief architect of Indian foreign policy before

¹ George Modelski, *A Theory of Foreign Policy* (London, 1962): 3-4.

independence and after.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, world politics has been affected dramatically worldwide, particularly on communist regimes and quasi-socialist countries such as India. The end of the Cold War has elicited the imperativeness of establishing multilateral relations for surviving in the neo-liberal world order. In the new millennium, the Middle East has retrieved significance due to fulfilling the need for global world industry day by day, which is much more energy supplies. Middle East countries that have prosperous oil reservoirs dominated the energy market-shaping prices for many years.

Despite wealthy energy resources, the Middle East still strives for severe political turbulence, affecting calamitously regional security and stability. Power competitiveness and the struggle to become regional superpower challenges are always destructive in the field of political stability, and that brings security dilemmas. The biggest threat in the region is the rising chaos in care of arms race and proxy wars, which can be deadly consequences upon the future of the global world order. Besides, sectarian tension between Iran

and Saudi Arabia has provoked to choose of the sides among countries, which is another form of conflict cause. Under the circumstances, understanding India's foreign policy can complicated analysis of her bilateral relations and diplomatic contacts with the Middle Eastern countries.

Strategically, Middle East is a very significant region for attaining India's political and economic aims as a rising power. After the 1990s, India's relations with the major states of West Asia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel, have developed gradually and expanded intensely in economy and security. We can assert that Indian policymakers have recognized the region's importance for their national interests. One thing is certain that India has perfect relations with the pro-American Arab countries and Israel in many spaces. Moreover, Indo-Iran bilateral relations has been increasing and acquiring strategic dimension recent years as the most precious attempt for her foreign policy despite India's good relations with Israel and the pro-American Arab countries. As a result, this policy has been ensuring strategic autonomy of the decision-making process and reinforcing creativity of foreign affairs.

Ultimately, considering all of these, we can clearly say that India has deeply engaged with the Middle East through pragmatic, proactive and self-confident diplomacy in various fields. Despite all these positive developments, India has a serious threat from Pakistan, which is bothered by New Delhi and has been cramping her political and commercial activities, particularly in Muslim states.

History of India's Foreign Policy towards West Asia

India's West Asia relation has been a subject of interest to many scholars. This relation date back to prehistoric times and is sustained by common traditions, struggles. Ideals and values. This relationship forged by commercial and cultural contacts over centuries is today a significant factor in their coming closer, lighted by the friendship of Jawaharlal Nehru and the Egyptian leader Gammal Abdul Nasser, mediated through their leading role in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM).

India's West Asia policy has been operating within a given international context during the Cold War and after that. Nehru's Cairo-centric policy, Indira Gandhi's activist Palestine policy and the decision to

establish a closer relationship with Iraq were the best available options for India during the Cold War when the primary thrust of the country's foreign policy was on political and ideological issues of the time like anti-imperialism, non-alignment, anticolonialism, etc.

During the post-Cold War, the thrust shifted to economic cooperation given the increasing sway of globalization, energy security, fighting terrorism, etc. Accordingly, the political leadership changed the country's priorities by focusing on Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia, which formed the core of India's West Asia policy. The policy towards the periphery has always been characterized by gradualism. Further, even though it has become fashionable to criticize Nehru and others for following a pro-Arab policy on account of "vote-bank policies", religious considerations never played any role in formulating the West Asia policy. As the Foreign Minister, under the Janata government with its Jan Sanghi mix, Vajpayee could not alter the so-called "pro-Muslim" orientation of India's West Asia policy during the Cold War.

Similarly, after the end of the Cold War, the Congress government, led by Narasimha Rao, decided to

establish full diplomatic relations with Israel. Furthermore, the National Domestic Alliance (NDA), a coalition government led by a rightist party (the BJP), has intensified its efforts to build bridges with many Islamic nations like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey more than its predecessors led by the Congress and the National Front. Hence it was as erroneous to accuse Nehru and others of being "pro-Muslim" as apprehending that the BJP-led NDA would neglect Muslim countries in West Asia. The invitation by the BJP-led NDA government to the head of an Islamic republic, President Khatami of Iran, to be the chief guest in the Republic Day parade provides a ringing endorsement to the fact that the dictates of national interest in foreign policy have over-shadowed the rhetoric's of religious solidarity and over-enthusiasm.²

Viewed from the other angle, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, all once very close to Pakistan based on the so-called Islamic solidarity, have now moved closer to India during the rule of a government whose pre-dominant partner is known for or being anti-

Muslim. On the Palestine issue too, the dilution of India's longstanding support has little to do with the nature of the government. It is more due to the fact that in the post-Cold War power equation, the Palestinians have been left to help themselves. In fact, the policy shift began right from the time of the Rao government, even though it reached a shallow point during Sharon's visit to India.

Enormous evidence from historical records showed that India had a close relationship with West Asia in various fields' culture, commerce, religion, medicines, and politics. This brings us to believe that Palestine would also be no exception. Palestine, in all probability, could not have kept aloof of all the ongoing flows of contact. Indian perceptions of Zionism, as opposed to the Jews during India's independence movement significantly shaped India's policy after independence. The most respected Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, who led the Indian masses against the colonial power since the beginning of the 20th century till the attainment of independence, had closed contact with the Jews when he was in South Africa.

² Nalinikant Jha and Subhash Shukla, India's Foreign Policy Emerging Challenges, Pentagon Press, 2012, p.5

India's West Asia policy before 1947 consisted primarily of emotional commitments to specific issues like religion (e.g., the Khilafat movement), anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, Arab nationalism, Arab unity, etc. Both India and West Asia were then passing through 'the critical phase of their struggle against foreign dominance. Since contacts at the level of the national parties of the two regions were sporadic, India's support for the Arabs was expressed in the form of reiteration of Indo-Arab solidarity, on an emotional level, against the common enemy. Though there was no conscious effort to evolve a joint struggle against imperialism and colonialism, the Arabs and the Indians sought to gain strength from each other's struggle against the common enemy. There were also some contacts at the level of important personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Nahas Pasha. These historical ties are essential because some of these variables-as, e.g., the emotional appeal to religion (pan-Islamism), anti-imperialism, Arab nationalism, Arab unity, etc. and the stress on personalities-continue to influence India's West Asia policy even today.

Indo-Israeli relations assumed a new dimension when the Vajpayee government built a strong strategic relationship with Israel. This encompassed three aspects: defense supplies, internal security and counterterrorism. Defense and military cooperation between the two countries has been a key component of the strategic relationship. But it has been marked by a certain degree of opacity; the level of cooperation is assumed to be much higher than each side is prepared to admit. Nevertheless, Israel has emerged as a major supplier of high-tech military equipment to India over the years. India constitutes Israel's third-largest export market for arms and defense equipment, after China and Turkey. Bilateral cooperation in other fields related to education, culture, science and technology, agriculture, environment, health, telecommunications, information technology, etc. Since establishing diplomatic ties, both countries have attached great importance to educational exchange programs through seminars, scholarships, study tours, etc. Cooperation in science and technology began with the signing of a bilateral agreement during the 1993 visit of

Peres.

Because of misperception, there are three dominating factors in India's West Asia policy during the post-Cold War period. These relate to the Palestine issue and the fight against Pakistani-sponsored cross-border militancy. First, the low priority for the Palestine cause seems to have flowed from a perception that a strategic relationship with Israel dictates this. This is not necessarily so. Given India's standing and stature, it can very well provide solid political support to the cause in unambiguous terms without causing any damage to the growing Indo-Israeli ties. Support for the Palestine cause is part of India's legacy of opposing the illegal occupation of someone else's territory in violation of international legality and morality. Apart from morality, a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in India's long-term interests from a realist perspective.

The continuation of the conflict due to Israeli intransigence is the fundamental source of instability in the West Asian region, where India has enormous stakes. Hence it would be in the interest of everyone to seek an end to it. Now that India has excellent

relations with Israel, it needs to impress upon its political leadership about the need to give the Palestinians their due sooner than later. India can very well become pro-PLO without being anti-Israel rather than pro-Israel without being anti-PLO; the difference is balancing the priority. The real challenge for Indian diplomacy lies in ending the occupation rather than providing mere economic and technological help to the Palestinians. The presence of vast amounts of oil and natural gas in West Asia is yet another factor that makes the region strategically very important for India.- It is a well-known fact that India imports a large quantity of oil and gas from West Asia. Due to the increase in domestic energy consumption and the consequent growing dependence on oil and natural gas, West Asia will continue to occupy a prominent place in India's overall energy security framework for the foreseeable future. Political considerations aside, India's energy needs proved to be an essential control on New Delhi's maneuverability in the region.

India and Iran's good relations are related to energy security. Both countries have a "complementarity of

interests in the energy sector", which they have identified to "develop as a strategic area" of their future relationship. Because "Iran with its abundant energy resources and India with its growing energy needs as a rapidly developing economy" are natural partners. India imports large quantities of petroleum crude from Iran both by the public and private sectors. This demand will grow in the coming years. Oil constitutes a substantial chunk of India's imports from Iran. India's market potential and its credibility as a good customer made it good economic sense for Iran to explore the possibility of exporting its natural gas through a pipeline. The highest-level discussions between India and Iran about the gas pipeline began as early as 1993 during Prime Minister Rao's visit to Tehran is in the concluding stage.

In the fight against terrorism, the US because of its strategic compulsions, cannot be expected to rein in Pakistan even though Indo-US relations in techno-economic spheres have shown great improvement. Thus, the so-called global war has been reduced to fight against those who challenge US interests. As of now, there is very little common ground between the US and

India's wars on terrorism. Therefore, the crux of the matter is that India cannot enlist US support in its war against terrorism; it has to fight it on its own. Israel tops the list of West Asian countries that India is seeking cooperation from in fighting terrorism. As has already been said, this forms part of the Vajpayee government's consistent efforts to build a strong strategic relationship with Israel.

Counter-terrorism cooperation has been on the agenda of high-level bilateral discussions since the September 1999 visit of Brajesh Mishra to Israel. The subsequent visits of L.K. Advani and Jaswant Singh laid a solid basis for this. In fact, a team of Israeli counter-terrorism experts visited the Kashmir valley in October 2000, which was deliberately kept less publicized. However, the 11 September and 13 December attacks brought India much closer to Israel, leading to the setting up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on counter-terrorism. India sought to elevate this bilateral cooperation to a broad conceptual framework through a strategic partnership with Israel. This idea was first mooted by Home Minister Advani in the aftermath of 11 September. Then, in May 2003,

National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra underlined the necessity of creating a viable alliance of democratic societies to combat international terrorism. He urged India, Israel and the U.S. being democratic societies and the common victims of terrorism-to join hands against the "ugly face of modern day terrorism". The place and forum in which Mishra was articulating these grand ideas lent credence to it; he was speaking at the American Jewish Committee's annual dinner in Washington, D.C. The issue of terrorism topped the agenda in all high-level discussions. The Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation between India and Israel considered both the countries "partners in the battle" against terrorism. It also called upon all countries to "take decisive action against this" and "condemn states and individuals who aid and abet terrorism across borders, harbor and provide sanctuary to terrorists and provide them with financial means, training or patronage". Thus, India has gone all out to seek Israeli cooperation in counter-terrorism.

India's strategic relationship with Israel in-fighting terrorism has been a highly sensitive and debatable issue.

There is little consensus in this regard both within the political establishment as well as in the wider opinion-making circles. The main opposition party, Congress, for instance, opposes this. The party has been cautioning the Vajpayee government not to break the national consensus on foreign policy.' The claims about the gains of Indo-Israeli cooperation against terrorism are overstated for the following reasons. First, at the conceptual level, there are fundamental differences between the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and the Palestine issue. In simple terms, Pakistan is encouraging secessionism in Jammu and Kashmir. Israel, on the contrary, is in occupation of Palestinian land, and the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza are resisting that illegal occupation. India is a victim of cross-border terrorism, whereas Israel is an occupying authority, suppressing the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinians. This is not to deny that in recent years, certain Palestinian factions have resorted to methods like suicide bombings, killing Israeli civilians, which cannot be justified on any ground; the Palestinian leadership has accepted this. But to equate the whole Palestinian resistance movement with

terrorism is erroneous. Further, Israel cannot do anything that harms US interest and taking on Pakistan would go against the US war on terrorism.

Moreover, it is a question of time when Pakistan and Israel would establish full diplomatic relations. There are indications that Pakistan wants to balance the growing Indo-Israeli ties, especially in the defense sector, by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. It will be as difficult for Israel to openly declare Pakistan a sponsor of militancy as it is for India to accept that the whole Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation is another manifestation of global terrorism. Thus, there can be no common ground between India and Israel in fighting terrorism. The dynamics are highly complex, even though some high-ranking Indian officials try to simplify them by using opaque language and abstract ideas such as the solidarity of democracies and free societies. Equating Indian democracy with that of Israel is to draw a false parallel. India is a tolerant, pluralist, secular democracy, while Israel is an exclusivist Jewish state even though it practices democracy in other aspects. Moving beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

Israel considers Iran (as also Syria) as the "epicenter of terrorism", whereas for India, it is Pakistan.³

Finally, at the policy level, India's so-called common cause with Israel in fighting terrorism may send a wrong message to other important allies in the region. Iran is such a country that is concerned with the growing Indo-Israeli strategic cooperation. The West Asian countries closely watched Sharon's high-profile visit to India. Pakistan is sure to exploit the developing anti-terrorism front between India and Israel by giving it a religious color. What is more disquieting is that "certain political constituencies in India have distorted the perspective" to project the two countries "as allies in a war against a third civilization". Whether one likes it or not, a common front will be viewed through the angle of religion by most Arab/Islamic countries in the region, at least until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved.⁴

Islamic countries in the region have given priority to cooperation with

³ The Hindu, 6 February 2002, p. 9; Amit Baruah, "Making New Friends," The Hindu, 9 September 2003, p. 10; Editorials of The Hindu, 9 September, 11 September 2003 and 5 April 2002.

⁴ Anisur Rahman, India and West Asia: Imperatives of a Close Partnership, India's Foreign Policy, p.239-257

Turkey. Being pluralistic, secular and democratic countries, India and Turkey broadly share the concern about terrorism posing threats to their societies. The projected areas of cooperation are wide-ranging from cross-border militancy to religious fanaticism to obscurantisms to drug trafficking. This has been the food of bilateral discussions during all the high-level visits from both sides that have already been discussed.

During Vajpayee's visit to Turkey, when the two countries signed an agreement to combat terrorism, Erdogan underlined the dangers involved in a selective approach to terrorism. This was an indication that Turkey, unlike Israel, shared India's views about the double standards being adopted by certain dominant actors in international politics while dealing with the issue of terrorism.

India's Economic Relations with Middle East

Energy trade with the Middle East is critical to India's economic rise. In addition to India's diplomatic relations, the issue of strengthening economic ties with the Middle East is of great importance. According to International Energy Agency (IEA)

data, in 1990, oil comprised 20% of India's total energy mix, and natural gas 3.5%. By 2016, when India's overall energy needs were much higher, oil made up 25% of the energy mix and natural gas 5.5%. The IEA estimates that India will remain similarly dependent with oil and gas accounting for roughly 30% of its energy mix until 2040. India is expected to have the fastest growth in energy consumption over the next two decades, meaning that Middle Eastern energy will be essential to India's long-term economic viability. India's rise in energy demand between 2016 and 2040 is expected to outpace growth in various parts of the world as well as in China. The economic interdependence between India and the Middle East is here to stay. An important factor in the growing economic relations between India and the Gulf is the vast Indian diaspora in the region.⁵

Today, policymakers in New Delhi are trying to broaden the economic lens that their predecessors saw in the Middle East with a focus on

⁵ Sanjay Pulipaka and Mohit Musaddi, Power shifts and re-calibrations: India and the Gulf, The Economic Times, 14 February 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/e-t-commentary/power-shifts-and-re-calibrations-india-and-the-gulf/>

energy and remittances and refocus on the Gulf states and Israel as critical partners that can play an active role in India's economic development. However, energy trade remains the anchor of India-Middle East economic relations. As India's commercial ties to the region expand, its greedy appetite for energy leaves the country heavily dependent on the Middle East. About a quarter of India's total imports are from the Middle East, of which about 80% are crude oil and petroleum products.

India's dependence on the Middle East has increased as the volume of its total oil imports has snowballed over the past two decades. Oil imported from the Middle East, which accounted for around 40% of India's total imports in 1990, increased in absolute and relative terms as India became the world's third-largest importer of crude oil. By 2005, India was getting almost half of its oil imports from the Middle East; In 2017, approximately 64% of oil imports were obtained from the region. During this period, India's total oil imports nearly doubled. Saudi Arabia has been the most stable source of oil over time, while India is diversifying its suppliers from the region and beyond (Russia and

Mexico). In 2017, Iraq was India's largest oil supplier, followed by Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait. India is also heavily dependent on natural gas from the Middle East. Until recently, Qatar provided the vast majority of India's long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply, but India has recently begun to diversify its sources. In 2017, Qatar accounted for 52% of India's LNG imports, with the US, Russia and Australia accounting for most of the rest. However, Qatar's relative share of India's imports decreased, while imports from Qatar increased in absolute terms.

Energy trade has made the Middle East an important regional trading partner for India, while several attempts have been made to expand and diversify commercial ties with the region. In 2006, more than 70% of India's imports from the Middle East consisted of oil. Until 2016, this number was close to 55%. India's exports to the region also increased significantly. India's major exports include chemical products, refined petroleum, gems and minerals, and herbal products. The UAE is India's largest market in the region, absorbing more than half of India's exports to the Middle East and about a

tenth of its global exports, which mainly consist of refined petroleum, gems and metals. Almost all of India's gold exports (worth \$2.27 billion in 2017) go to the UAE, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC). Interestingly, some of this gold is initially smuggled into India from the Middle East.

India's Exports by Country

Country	Last	Previous		
United States	476.15	504.78	INR Billion	Aug/21
United Arab Emirates	152.11	176.35	INR Billion	Aug/21
China	131.41	159.68	INR Billion	Aug/21
Hong Kong	72.94	74.04	INR Billion	Aug/21
Saudi Arabia	69.10	55.73	INR Billion	Aug/21

Source: Trading Economics

India's Imports by Country

Country	Value	Year	
China	58.80B	2020	\$
United States	26.62B	2020	\$
United Arab Emirates	23.90B	2020	\$
Saudi Arabia	17.72B	2020	\$
Iraq	16.17B	2020	\$

Source: Trading Economics

Although India's trade, especially with the Gulf, skyrocketed from \$5 billion in 2000 to \$138 billion in 2015, there is no formal trade agreement with countries in the Middle East. Over the past decade, attempts to negotiate trade deals with the Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC), Israel, and Iran have come to nought. In addition, some frictions have beset the energy trade. In recent years, Asian countries, which import more than 40% of global crude oil and have an increasingly large share of the Gulf's energy market, have objected to what they call the "Asian premium." India claimed to pay two to three dollars more per barrel than countries in the West. In 2018, India stepped up discussions with China, Japan and South Korea to set up a buyers forum to negotiate lower prices from the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). These tensions reveal just how transitional he is at the moment. Asian economies such as India are rapidly replacing Western economies as the primary markets for Middle Eastern energy. In doing so, they are also demanding more say and flexing their newfound political power. Given the scale of the energy trade, oil prices will continue to have a significant impact on the tenor and power dynamics of these relationships.

When we look at India's top 5 trade partners in recent years, we see that the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq are on the list. This is extremely important as it reminds us

how big a share the Middle East region has in India's trade and economic relations. Anticipating its increasing energy needs and being aware of its dependence on foreign oil, India made proactive investments in developing its local energy sector. Today, India has the second-largest refinery capacity in Asia (after China) and the fourth largest globally. India has developed this capacity to meet domestic demand and has also become a major exporter of refined oil. India doubled its refined oil exports between 2007 and 2017, making it the world's sixth-largest exporter of refined oil and Asia's third-largest exporter. It announced that it plans to further increase its refining capacity by 77% by 2030. Singapore and the UAE are the largest buyers of refined oil from India, and India was the largest supplier of oil to the UAE in 2017. India is also one of the largest oil suppliers. Israel and Saudi Arabia India see the Middle East as a critical market for the growing refinery industry and is increasingly encouraging countries in the Middle East to invest in the sector. The energy relationship between India and the Middle East is growing and becoming increasingly multifaceted.

Conclusion

The fundamentals of India's foreign policy had traditionally been based on anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism; therefore, the attitude tilted their policy towards the Arabs. Though, they expressed sympathy to the Jews. India's policy towards Israel is somewhat unique. It has at times generated controversy, whipped up heated debates, eluded unanimity and was shrouded in secrecy. India's recognition of Israel moved a new trend. The establishment of full diplomatic relations is a logical result of recognition. While India felt concerned about the Arab character of Palestine and the injustice was done to the Palestinians, it remained unconcerned about the Jewish dimension of the problem. The imperialist connections of the Zionists were sufficient to negate their nationalist credentials. Iran, Iraq and Kuwait have been the most powerful and stable countries in the Gulf region. The region's power realities shape India's policy towards Iraq and Iran.⁶

Given the above, it would not be

⁶ Nalinikant Jha and Subhash Shukla, India's Foreign Policy Emerging Challenges, Pentagon Press, 2012, p.5

wrong to assume that the US played a significant role in influencing India's foreign policy orientation in the post-cold war era. This was nowhere more evident than in India's West Asia policy which witnessed a fundamental shift in more than one way, especially about Israel. As a result, during the post-cold war era, one saw the focus shifting away from Egypt, Palestine and Iraq that had formed the core during the major part of the Cold War period. Instead, India remained focused on Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia, which constituted the core of India's West Asia policy during the post-cold war era. Thus all through, there have been changes in India's relations with West Asia, but on the whole, it has been pro-West Asia.

Another much-awaited initiative taken by the Rao's government was to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Because till the cold war, the Indian foreign policy had been pro-Arab policy. This ground reality can't deny that some internal ideological reasons were responsible for this change, mainly 'Pakistan had been a compelling factor in making pro-Arab policy. The other reason was also that India did not favour separatism. However, the

seismic developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s fundamentally altered the status quo. The prevailed circumstances changed over time, and India evolved the policy of bilateralism with Israel. No doubt, Israel policy of India has been the most controversial contentions and argued issue in its foreign policy. At first, the normalization of relations did not receive a positive reaction, but gradually, India had successfully managed evolving resemblance of a consensus on this issue. This is noticeable that after normalization, Israel has been the exception in this context that it has evoked enormous interest in India. In other fields, relations of both countries have been cordial and progressive. Due to emotional admiration, religious animosity, or ideological bandwagoning, many Indians have keenly followed the development's surroundings Israel and, by extension, bilateral relations. This trend has proved fruitful to India.

In the end, India's "Look West" diplomacy is targeted beyond achieving India's interests and enhancing regional interests. Prominent among these are human security, counterterrorism and

regional security. India will have to carve out a well thought out strategy towards the region. India must maintain a calibrated approach towards all the critical players in the area - such as Iran, GCC states and Israel - as India has enormous interests. India should approach emerging West Asia as providing opportunities to play a more influential role in shaping the new architecture in the region. If India misses out, its political, economic, and security interests will be affected. India cannot deal with West Asia alone. It should coordinate its policies with the countries in West Asia as well as external players like the USA, China, Japan, the EU.

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