

India's Diplomatic Balancing Act: Exploring International Relations with Arab Countries in Light of Israel

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Introduction :

In the intricate landscape of international relations, the Indian subcontinent occupies a pivotal position, nestled amidst diverse geopolitical dynamics and regional complexities. Among the key factors shaping India's foreign policy calculus, its relationships with Arab countries and Israel stand out as significant arenas of diplomatic engagement, marked by a delicate balancing act fraught with historical, political, and strategic considerations. Against the backdrop of shifting alliances, religious sensitivities, and economic imperatives, India's approach towards the Arab-Israeli conflict assumes paramount importance, reflecting not only its pursuit of national interests but also its commitment to fostering stability and peace in the region.

This paper endeavours to unravel the complexities of India's diplomatic balancing act in its relations with Arab countries, while navigating the intricate dynamics of its engagement with Israel. Through a nuanced analysis of historical narratives, geopolitical alignments, and diplomatic maneuvers, this study seeks to elucidate the multifaceted nature of India's international relations in the Middle East, with a particular focus on the interplay between strategic interests, religious affiliations, and economic imperatives.

At the heart of India's diplomatic calculus lies the challenge of reconciling its historical solidarity with Arab nations, rooted in shared cultural affinities and geopolitical considerations, with its burgeoning strategic partnership with Israel, characterized by mutual interests in defense, technology, and counterterrorism. Against this backdrop, India's foreign policy towards the Middle East emerges as a delicate balancing act, where pragmatic considerations intertwine with principled stances, necessitating a nuanced understanding of regional dynamics and global geopolitics.

As India navigates the complexities of its relationships with Arab countries and Israel, it confronts a myriad of challenges and opportunities, from leveraging economic partnerships to promoting peace and stability in a volatile region. Through a systematic examination of diplomatic engagements, policy frameworks, and historical narratives, this paper aims to shed light on the underlying drivers, constraints, and implications of India's diplomatic balancing act, offering insights into the intricacies of international relations in the Middle East and their broader implications for global geopolitics.

Objectives :

1. To study India's cooperation with Arab countries in light of regional dynamics.
2. To study the India-Israel relationship considering economic factors.

India's Stance over Palestine:

1. Historical Support for Palestinian Cause: India has traditionally been supportive of the Palestinian cause for self-determination and statehood. Since gaining independence in 1947, India has consistently voiced its solidarity with the Palestinian people and their quest for an independent state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

2. Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Principles: India was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which advocates for principles such as national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Within the framework of NAM, India has supported the rights of Palestinians and other oppressed peoples around the world.

3. Multilateral Diplomacy: India's foreign policy emphasizes multilateralism and diplomacy. India engages with regional and international organizations, including the United Nations, to address security issues in the Middle East, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. India has consistently supported UN resolutions calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict based on the two-state solution.

4. Muslim Population and Domestic Considerations: India is home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations. The Indian government often considers the sentiments of its Muslim citizens when formulating foreign policy regarding issues affecting Muslim-majority countries, including Palestine. Support for Palestine resonates with many Indian Muslims, and the Indian government takes their views into account.

5. Strategic Interests: While India maintains friendly relations with Israel, it also seeks to maintain balanced ties in the Middle East to safeguard its strategic interests. India relies on the region for energy resources and has a significant diaspora there. By supporting Palestine, India seeks to maintain its credibility as a neutral actor in the region and avoid alienating Arab nations.

India's Co-operation with Arab Countries:

1. Economic Interests : India has been increasingly looking towards the Middle East, including Arab countries, as vital partner for economic cooperation. The Gulf region, in particular, is significant for India due to its energy resources, investment opportunities, and the presence of a large Indian expatriate community. Strengthening economic ties with Arab countries aligns with India's goals of diversifying its energy sources, boosting trade, and attracting investments.

2. Geopolitical Considerations :

India's cooperation with Arab countries is influenced by its broader geopolitical strategy, particularly in balancing relationships with various regional powers. The Middle East is a region of strategic importance due to its proximity to key sea lanes, geopolitical rivalries, and security concerns. India seeks to maintain cordial relations with Arab countries while also navigating complex dynamics involving other regional actors such as Iran, Israel, and Turkey.

3. Counterterrorism and Security Cooperation : India and Arab countries share concerns about terrorism and regional instability. Cooperation in counterterrorism efforts, intelligence sharing, and maritime security is essential for addressing common security challenges. India's cooperation with Arab countries in these areas helps enhance regional stability and counter extremist threats.

4. Diaspora Engagement : The large Indian diaspora in Arab countries serves as a bridge for fostering closer ties between India and the Arab world. The Indian expatriate community contributes significantly to the economies of Gulf countries through remittances, labor, and skilled expertise. India's engagement with Arab countries often includes efforts to protect the rights and welfare of its citizens abroad while leveraging the diaspora's influence for deeper economic and cultural exchanges.

5. Multilateral Forums : Both India and Arab countries participate in various multilateral forums, such as the Arab League, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association

(IORA). These platforms provide opportunities for diplomatic engagement, dialogue, and cooperation on regional and global issues of mutual interest.

6. Energy Cooperation : Arab countries are major suppliers of oil and gas to India, meeting a significant portion of its energy needs. India's energy security depends on stable relations with oil-producing Arab nations. Energy cooperation agreements, investments in oil and gas infrastructure, and joint ventures in renewable energy projects are key areas of collaboration between India and Arab countries.

India-Israel relations: After formally accepting Israel as a separate state, Jawaharlal Nehru expressed his opinion that **“We would have recognized Israel long ago because Israel is a fact. We refrained because of our desire not to offend the sentiments of our friends in the Arab countries.”** After taking the side of Palestine India started its talks to Israel formally after Independence.

1. Trade and Investment : Economic ties between India and Israel have expanded rapidly, with bilateral trade reaching billions of dollars annually. Both countries have diversified trade portfolios, encompassing sectors such as agriculture, technology, defence, pharmaceuticals, and water management. Investments from Israeli companies in India and vice versa have also been increasing, contributing to economic growth and job creation in both countries.

2. Technology and Innovation :

Israel is renowned for its innovation ecosystem, with a thriving startup culture and cutting-edge technologies in various sectors. India has sought to leverage Israel's expertise in areas such as agriculture, water conservation, cybersecurity, and renewable energy. Collaborative initiatives, joint research projects, and technology transfer agreements have been established to foster innovation and entrepreneurship in both countries.

3. Defense Cooperation : Defense cooperation is a significant aspect of India-Israel relations, driven by mutual security concerns and technological capabilities. India is one of the largest buyers of Israeli defense equipment, including drones, missiles, surveillance systems, and aircraft. Defense deals between the two countries have not only strengthened their defense capabilities but have also led to technology transfer and co-development projects, enhancing India's indigenous defense manufacturing capabilities.

4. Agricultural Cooperation : India faces numerous challenges in agriculture, including water scarcity, soil degradation, and low productivity. Israel, with its expertise in agricultural technology and practices, has been collaborating with India to address these challenges. Cooperation in areas such as drip irrigation, greenhouse cultivation, precision farming, and crop diversification has led to increased agricultural productivity and sustainability in India.

5. Water Management : Both India and Israel face water scarcity and management challenges due to growing populations, urbanization, and climate change. Israel's expertise in water management, including desalination, wastewater recycling, and water conservation technologies, has been instrumental in addressing India's water-related issues. Collaborative projects and knowledge sharing have contributed to the development of innovative solutions for water resource management in India.

6. Tourism and Cultural Exchanges:

Economic cooperation between India and Israel extends to tourism and cultural exchanges, with growing numbers of tourists travelling between the two countries. Promoting tourism and

facilitating people-to-people contacts contribute to strengthening bilateral ties and fostering mutual understanding.

India: Bilateral Agreements

India has distinct bilateral agreements with both Arab countries and Israel, reflecting the unique dynamics and priorities in its relations with each region. Here's a differentiation between India's bilateral agreements with Arab countries and Israel:

- **India-Arab Countries:** Bilateral agreements between India and Arab countries often focus on areas such as energy cooperation, trade, investment, and cultural exchanges. Given India's significant energy imports from the Middle East, agreements related to **oil and gas exploration, refining,** and supply are common. Trade and investment agreements aim to enhance economic ties and promote collaboration in sectors like infrastructure, construction, and information technology. Cultural agreements foster people-to-people exchanges, including in education, tourism, and arts.
- **India-Israel:** Bilateral agreements with Israel typically emphasize cooperation in areas such as agriculture, technology, defence, and innovation. Agriculture agreements focus on sharing expertise in areas like drip irrigation, water management, and agricultural research. Technology agreements promote collaboration in fields like **cybersecurity, information technology, and biotechnology.** Defense agreements involve defense procurement, joint exercises, and technology transfer.

Conclusion : India's cooperation with Arab countries is multifaceted and influenced by economic, geopolitical, security, and cultural factors. Strengthening ties with Arab nations is essential for India's strategic interests in the Middle East and broader Asian regional dynamics.

India's support for Palestine and its engagement in regional security issues in the Middle East is guided by a combination of historical, ideological, domestic, and strategic factors. India aims to uphold principles of justice, sovereignty, and peace while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics in the region.

Economic factors have played a pivotal role in enhancing India-Israel relations, contributing to bilateral trade, technology transfer, defence cooperation, agricultural development, water management, and cultural exchanges. As both countries continue to prioritize economic growth and innovation, their partnership is expected to deepen further in the coming years.

Overall Non-Aligned Movement, Multilateral Economic Diplomacy, Regional Security, Defence, Science and Research and National Integration are these factors influencing the Indian foreign policy regarding Arab Countries and Israel.

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