

Indias current relations and foreign policy politics essay



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Modern India's foreign policy came in to being with the independence in 1947. Till then, the nation, as a satellite of the British Empire, was bound by the identity and postulates of foreign policy dictated by the erstwhile Empire. Thereafter, India charted a course of its own independent foreign policy. The same being a subject of vast scope and not particularly relevant to this thesis is not discussed here. It would be worthwhile in scheme of things to discuss the basic determinants which steer India's policy in case of Middle East which is based on following five primary factors[7]:-

(a) Reliance on Middle East gas and oil, which makes it binding on India to maintain cordial relations with most of the major suppliers, including Iran, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. However, India does not want to face any temporary cut-off in its supplies or an increased price hike. Also, it does not want to be dependent on Pakistan in this regard.

(b) While being a secular democracy, India is also a major Muslim state, and relations with Iran, in particular, resonate in the northern Indian heartland, notably Uttar Pradesh. Also, India has a large group of Shi'a support groups. Thus, India has to balance between its foreign and economic policies on one hand, and domestic politics on the other. India's preferred strategy is to avoid, at all costs, any stark choice between the loss of domestic political support and achieving some foreign policy goal.

(c) India is hyper sensitive to criticism of its policies in Kashmir, and wants to keep the major Muslim nations from either intervening in Kashmir or supporting Pakistan. Thus, India conducts balance of power diplomacy,

aimed at countering Pakistani influence in Middle East and to keep Kashmir away from any discussions.

(d) India has initiated relations with Israel in field of technology, military benefits intelligence leading to increase in its influence in Washington. However, India has to carefully balance its equations with Israel and other Middle East nations.

(e) India also does not want to run afoul of US's non-proliferation policies in the Middle East, even though strategically speaking India has reservations about us non-proliferation goals and tactics. Conventionally India was instrumental in building a theoretical case against NPT. The same arguments are now been used by Iran and North Korea for advancing their cases.

14. The major players in Middle East region presently are Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq and Israel. The other smaller Gulf States like Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Yemen and few other states constitute the rest of Middle East region. Out of the said nations Iraq presently has ceased to be an important power in the region after the occupation by the UN forces backed mainly by US and NATO states.

15. India has traditionally pursued a pro-Arab policy towards Middle East nations and remained aligned against Israel until 1990's. This was basically aimed at countering Pakistan's influence in the region and to secure access to Middle East petroleum resources. In the late 1960's and 1970's, India successfully developed mutually beneficial economic exchanges with a number of Middle East countries particularly Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Persian states, thereby, improving bilateral relations with them. This <https://assignbuster.com/indias-current-relations-and-foreign-policy-politics-essay/>

strong relationship particularly with Iran and Iraq helped India weather the displeasure of Islamic nations during 1971 Indo-Pak war.[8]The relationship was further cemented by India's anti Israeli stance during 1967 and 1973 Arab Israel conflict. The situation continued until 1978 and 1979 when the establishing of Islamic regime under Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan supporting the Marxist regime in Kabul complicated India's relations with Middle East. This resulted in weakening of Iran as regional power and emergence of Pakistan as important player in balance of power in the region. The major powers like US, China and Arab world aligned themselves towards Pakistan to counter the rising Soviet influence in the region. For about a decade India did the act of fine balancing its stand and role in the region. However, in the 1990's India took a deviation from its staunch anti Israel stand and initiated relations with the Zionist state. This was dictated by practical economic and security considerations in the post Cold war era and the influence of Hindu nationalist sentiments. Thus, following the example of Soviet Union and China, India also established relations with Israel. Once again during the Persian Gulf War (1990-91) India's Middle East policy had to face a new test. It had to decide between adhering to its traditional Non Alignment policy sympathetic to Iraq or favour the coalition of Arab and Western countries which would have been beneficial to India's economic and security interests. After initial ambivalent approach India joined ranks with the later and supported the UN resolution authorising the use of force to expel Iraq from the Kuwaiti territory. The improvement of relations with most Middle East nations was pursued with renewed vigour by the Indian government in mid 1990's. The present

relations of India with Middle East nations are discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

16. Saudi Arabia. Historically Indo- Saudi ties have been based on trade. In the old times it involved spices and in modern times it has become based on petroleum. Besides, the two nations also share cultural ties due to the large number of Muslim population in India and 1.6 million Indian work force in Saudi.[9] India and Saudi Arabia initially established diplomatic relations in 1952 and their relationship progressed smoothly in the 1950's but suffered during the Cold war era due to India's inclination towards the Soviet block and Saudi's traditionally close relations with Pakistan. Thereafter, India's relations improved with Saudi Arabia in beginning of 1980's and increased cooperation was seen in economic, trade, science, technical and cultural fields. However, once again the relations felt the heat on account of different stands taken by both the nations during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The Saudi Arabia initially supported the mujahideens followed by the Taliban, whereas, the India supported the cause of the Northern Alliance. The relations between the two once again saw improvement in 1990's leading to increased visits, exchanges and economic and scientific cooperation. This was followed by the signing of Delhi Declaration in 2006, a wide ranging agreement which includes in its ambit mutual agreement to strengthen and broaden economic ties, cooperating in combating international crime and ensuring the stability of the oil trade.[10] The relations between both the nations are grounded on the following defining factors:-

(a) Economic. Although, based on energy exports the bilateral trade relationship between the two has grown significantly since mid 1990's. In FY 2007 India imported \$ 12. 4 billion of petroleum from Saudi Arabia (26% of India's overall petro import). The non-oil bilateral trade also increased from \$ 1. 3 billion in FY-2002 to \$ 3. 5 billion in FY-2007. In addition India also received remittances worth \$3 billion from the workers in Saudi Arabia. The predicted bilateral non-oil trade between the two nations is likely to cross \$7 billion in FY-2010.[11]

(b) Defence, Labour Relations and Education. India and Saudi Arabia are working towards an increased cooperation on defence and related technology. The sizable Indian diaspora in Saudi Arabia is also an important contributor to the required workforce so vital to its economy. Another focus area between the two nations is education and efforts are being made to enable increased number of Saudi Arabia students to pursue Post Graduate and Doctoral studies, especially in technical institutions of India.

17. Iran. The relations between Iran and India trace back to 3500 years ago, however, in much of the twentieth century they have shared a unstable relationship. Diplomatic ties between the two commenced in 1950 but immediately faced the first roadblock when Iran joined the Baghdad Pact. Thereafter, the relations improved in 1960's but again received a setback when Iran aided Pakistan in 1965 conflict against India. Subsequent to 1971's decisive victory over Pakistan the relation between the two slates improved considerably and led to number of agreements including that on nuclear cooperation in 1974.[12]However, the establishment of theocratic

Iran in 1979, subsequent to the Islamic Revolution once again upset the apple cart. The relationship between the two remained cold during the entire 1980's as Iran didn't show any inclination to improve the relationship and India remained wary that Iran will import Shiite terrorism to India. The relationship between the two improved in 1990 due to India's desire to secure energy supplies and economic opportunities in Central Asia and the opposition of both the countries to the Taliban in Afghanistan. The rise of Sunni Islamist forces in Afghan theatre, especially Pakistan based Taliban proved a great unifying force leading to deterioration of Iran- Pakistan relations. The Indo-Iran relations picked up further momentum as India opened towards it due to its energy requirements subsequent to loss of Iraqi sources after 1991 Gulf war. The main foundations of relations between India and Iran are discussed below:-

(a) Economics and Energy. India is world's sixth largest consumer of energy and Iran is the fourth largest supplier, obviously, energy is the most important pillar between them.[13]Both the nations have held regular bilateral meetings focusing primarily on the energy supply issues including the proposal for a Liquefied Gas Pipeline from Iran to India through Pakistan and alternatively, through tanker. However, the said scheme has not been fructified due to US pressure on India and Pakistan against the deal and the Indian fear that it will provide Pakistan too much leverage over Indian energy supplies. However, the plan has proved resilient and not yet died down. Meanwhile certain other bottlenecks to the scheme have emerged inform of increased pricing by Iran. On its part India is keen to commence procurement of LNG by sea, which will require establishing LNG terminals at Iran to allow

exports. This is not possible because it will require certain US components which will end up violating the US sanctions against Iran. The present state of the said scheme is in limbo.

(b) Defence Cooperation. Defense cooperation has been another important part of the Indo-Iranian relationship. In the 1990s, India assisted Iran with upgrading its Russian-built military equipment, including adapting batteries for its Kilo-class diesel submarines avionics upgrades for its MiG-29 fighters. Since 2000, India has conducted joint patrols or exercises with the majority of the navies of the Indian Ocean littoral. The 2003 meeting between Khatami and Vajpayee on India's Republic Day produced the Road Map to Strategic Cooperation, which presents goals for fulfilling the cooperation envisioned in the New Delhi Declaration. A number of reports have mentioned more direct Indo-Iranian cooperation in the realm of defense, such as Tehran's acquiescence to Iran-based Indian intelligence operations and even potential Indian military bases in Iran. India's assistance in upgrading the Iranian port of Chahbahar has led many to infer that Indian warships would be based there in order to outflank Pakistan's China-assisted Gwadar port, seemingly pitting rising power against rising power.

18. Israel. Indo-Israeli ties remained at a low level throughout the cold war for both ideological and practical reasons. India's large Muslim population was, of course, a factor. Furthermore, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's prime minister until 1964 was a close friend of Egypt's Nasser, who was an implacable foe of Israel. While India and Israel periodically cooperated on mutual interests, such as Israeli aid to India during the 1962 war with China or proposed plans to destroy the Pakistani reactor at Kahuta in the 1980s, <https://assignbuster.com/indias-current-relations-and-foreign-policy-politics-essay/>

[14]their public relationship often was acrimonious, especially after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, which put India's allies in direct conflict with Israel. In fact, in 1975 India publicly supported and funded the Palestine Liberation Organization and voted for the UN resolution to equate Zionism with racism. The decline of the Soviet Union forced India to re-evaluate its foreign policy resulting in opening of the Indian economy and a desire to trade with high-tech states, including Israel. The new approach to foreign policy, combined with the new initiatives to end the Arab-Israeli conflict in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and the push by the opposition led to India initiating close ties with Israel and the two countries established full diplomatic relations in 1992. For nearly a decade afterward, commercial trade in arms and other goods thrived and ties were quietly strengthened. Indo-Israeli military exercises and agreements in the fields of the environment, health, illicit traffic in drugs, visa waivers for diplomatic service personnel, and an educational cultural exchange program. In the same year, India and Israel issued the Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation, in which they agreed to cooperate closely on counterterrorism and called on the international community to take "decisive action" against cross-border terrorism and money-laundering operations to finance terrorism.

19. Defense collaboration and arms sales with Israel picked up in January 1999 when the United States withdrew the sanctions that it had imposed on India in the wake of New Delhi's 1998 nuclear test. In the late 1990s India purchased unmanned aerial vehicles, artillery, and radar systems from Israel. The emerging Indo-Israeli relationship was codified in 2001 with the creation of the Joint Defense Cooperation Group, which meets annually to solidify

defense deals and military ties and coordinate the security relationship. India has become Israel's largest arms market, overtaking Russia in 2009. India has purchased a wide range of technically advanced equipment and weapons from Israel, including antimissile radar and electronic warfare components for the Indian navy and air force, for a total of more than \$5 billion since 2002.

20. India's Relations with The Small Gulf States. India's ties with the geographically small but economically important Gulf states of Oman, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait have been historically good due to trade and migration and their current economic relationship is booming. India's trade with the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (excluding oil) totaled \$86.9 billion in FY 2008-09, surpassing India's trade with the European Union (\$80.6 billion), the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries (\$44.6 billion), and the United States (\$40.6 billion).[15] Looking to the future, Indian leaders have expressed a desire to continue the rapid expansion of trade, attract Gulf investment for major infrastructure projects, and broaden their Gulf state relationships beyond economics. In a May 2008 speech in Abu Dhabi, India's external affairs minister, Pranab Mukherjee, called for a "transformation" of India's relations with the Gulf states beyond that of a buyer-seller relationship to a more "substantial and enduring partnership". With India's thriving economic relationship with the Gulf, continuing demographic ties and nascent defense cooperation, such an evolution may already be under way.