

A critical analysis of indias foreign policy history essay



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“ Foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities (nations) for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment. Within it two types of activities may be singled out for special attention: the inputs flowing into it and the output it produces. The foremost task of foreign policy analysis must be to throw light on the ways in which states attempt to change, and succeed in changing the behaviour of other states”

George Modelski[1]

1. The Middle Eastern region has been in centre of increased world attention during the past two decades on account of availability of world's largest retrievable fossil fuel reserves in the region besides, it being the scene of world's most dangerous conflicts. Conventionally, the region of Persian Gulf has been termed as Middle East; however, the term today covers a far wider area. Also, the term Middle East is considered Eurocentric by various organisations and countries including India and China who instead refer to the region as West Asia. The region has emerged as an important playground for world powers to exercise their influence since it is extremely important to all nations, especially, those deficient in terms of energy security, India being one of them. Thus, the region has great strategic and economic importance for India as a nation. Equally important is the fact that, in the years to come, India's international responsibilities and involvement are likely to grow by quantum proportions. This study of Indian foreign policy in relation to Middle East with particular reference to major players like Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia pursues the line of an analytical critique, in order to understand the present complexities and to deliberate whether the decisive

powers and policy makers are pursuing a defined and pragmatic path necessary to fulfil our strategic goals.

2. India's foreign policy, as her economic and defence policies have more often than not, not been based on realistic and pragmatic foundations. We have not been able to pursue a path of well articulated foreign policy aimed at achieving our defined national interests and aim. Further, in the nascent years after our independence in 1947, the Indian policy remained married (albeit only ostensibly) to the doctrine of nonalignment – a doctrine structured on nearly utopian concepts of idealism and self-righteousness, and served as convenient substitute for hard thinking and pragmatic decisions. Even in recent times India's handling of the 26/11 (Mumbai attack) and Kargil conflict left much to be desired in terms of a formidable foreign policy. In this regards, General K Sundarji, former Chief of Indian Army had opined by borrowing a quote from American strategist George Tander on the Indian track record on strategic thinking “ Indians have not been great strategic thinkers or developers of strategy although they have been profound thinkers in many other fields. (Their) view of life as...

Unpredictable, did not lead Indians to see the need for strategy and even if they had, they would have been unlikely to proceed because if the future is unknown and unknowable, why plan! “

3. Bound by the habit and legacy of pursuing a doggedly reactive foreign policy, Indian politicians and diplomatic advisors find it difficult to reorient their strategic vision to a more pro-active methodology based on in-depth analysis and perspective planning in foreign policy formulations. As a convention, our diplomatic overtures in real terms have been confined to <https://assignbuster.com/a-critical-analysis-of-indias-foreign-policy-history-essay/>

routine pronouncements of “ technically and politically correct” statements on insipid international issues and thereafter, trudging through one crisis to another in the absence of clear strategic foresight. The said viewpoint is amply highlighted in this extract from an essay published in the USI journal Apr-Jan 1992 entitled “ Indian Foreign Policy Options in the 1990s “ Ironically, while major changes in the worlds scenario call for alert, concrete, rapid and concerted foreign policy projection, Indian responses have been seemingly confused, dictated often by internal rhetoric. We are perhaps the only major country to have gone through the world wide turmoil of the Gulf War when even a full time cabinet minister for USA is bitter pills which the country has had to swallow”.[2]

4. The Indian subcontinent has always had close commercial and cultural relations with the Middle Eastern states for centuries and presently India maintains good working relations with most of the countries in Middle East including Israel. Traditionally, India had pursued a pro-Arab policy in Middle East and kept itself inclined with the Arabs during the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to counteract Pakistan’s influence in the region as well as to keep its supply base of oil intact to meet its energy requirements. Basically the Indian involvement in this region is restricted to economic interests besides, a limited military role.[3]

5. In the present circumstances besides US, the growing influence of China, Russia, Japan and South Korea in the Middle Eastern region merits particular attention from the perspective of India’s policy towards Middle East region.

[4]Out of the said group India and China are on verge of transforming into greater players in the region on account of their fast increasing economic
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strength and might. However, until date India has not been able to demonstrate significant power or influence in the region. The same may adversely affect India's future energy needs and its global aspirations and ambitions. The present world order demands that India should establish itself more strongly in the region and play a more assertive role in the coming decades.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

6. India the world's largest democracy after six decades of independence has gradually started establishing its rightful place in the world order and politics. During the cold war era it was confined to the fringes of world order due to its policy of non alignment complemented by her indecisiveness and lack of strategic vision. In present times if India had to become a truly global player and earn its due status among the superpowers it will have to continue growing as a economic power rapidly. The Middle East region will play a important role in India's future growth due to its energy resources and strategic geographical disposition from Indian perspective. However, apparently India has not been able to follow a clearly defined policy for this region. To date India has not been able to demonstrate significant power or influence in the region.[5]In view of the above this dissertation aims to critically analyse the India's Foreign Policy in Middle East , the importance of Middle East for India, to bring out the shortcomings and suggest remedial measures for the same.

Justification for the Study

7. The Middle East region besides being important to the US and other western nations is also extremely important to the economic potential of India, China, Japan, and South Korea along with a host of Asian countries including Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand. Over the next thirty years, the economies of India and China are expected to surpass that of the United States in size (although as a result of population growth, their per capita GDP will remain relatively low), giving their governments increased regional and global clout.

8. The Indian subcontinent has had close commercial ties with the Gulf (Middle East region) for centuries, and India today has managed to cultivate good working with all the Middle East countries. The growing influence of India and other Asian powers is changing the power dynamics of the region which has been traditionally dominated by the United States. With the exception of Indian and Chinese purchases of military technology from Israel, and Asian arms sales to the countries of the Gulf, the big issues of war, peace, and security in the Middle East have largely remained outside domain of Asian nations. However, the same may not hold true for long. Presently, the Indian role in the region has been limited to economic relationships with all the countries in the Middle East and its military role has been very limited. Although, the Indian government has stated it does not want to become involved in military operations, India has been increasing its bilateral military ties with all of the small countries in the Gulf. India has not been able to demonstrate significant power or influence in the region but the stage is now <https://assignbuster.com/a-critical-analysis-of-indias-foreign-policy-history-essay/>

set for India to establish a stronger, more assertive presence in the Gulf over the coming decades. India's present policy towards Middle East nations contrasts sharply with powers like US and China which follow a foreign policy based on hard realism, with strong military backing and a long-term vision, whereas our policy still reflects remnants of the Nehruvian idealism and personality in India's foreign policy.[6]

Scope

13. Considering the vastness of the subject, it is proposed to restrict the scope of the study as under: –

Study the importance of Middle East region for India's energy security and strategic goals.

Study India's current relations and policy towards the Middle East nations.

Study the effect and influence of other major global players in the Middle East region and their effect on India's interests in the region.

To analyse whether India's present foreign policy meets the requirements of India's strategic goals in the region.

Methods of Data Collection

14. Most of the information for the study has been gathered from various books, newspaper articles and the Internet. A bibliography of the various sources is appended at the end.

Organisation of the Dissertation

15. It is proposed to study the subject under the following chapters: –

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(a) Chapter I – Introduction.

(b) Chapter II – Methodology.

(c) Chapter III –

(d) Chapter IV –

(e) Chapter V –

(f) Chapter VI –

(g) Chapter VII –

CHAPTER III

INDIA’S CURRENT RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY WITH MIDDLE EASTERN NATIONS

Background

16. 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. There are five primary factors which are as enumerated below[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.
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XX. 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 has ceased to be an important power in the region after the occupation by the UN forces backed mainly by US and NATO states.

xx. 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 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 ambivalence 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 relations with Middle East nations especially Iraq were further speeded up Indian government in mid 1990's. The present relations of India with Middle East nations are discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

xx. Saudi Arabia. Historically Indo- Saudi ties have been based on trade. In the old times it involved spice and in modern times it has become based on petroleum. Besides, the two nations also share a cultural tie 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 the relations between the two 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 supported the mujahideens followed by the Taliban, whereas, the Indian support was for 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 which is a wide ranging document including 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) Defense, Labour Relations and Education. India and Saudi Arabia are working towards an increased cooperation on defense 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.

xx. 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 Shiatic 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 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) Defense 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.

XX. 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).(reference) 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." (reference) With India's thriving economic relationship with the Gulf, continuing demographic ties and nascent defense cooperation, such an evolution may already be under way.

INDIA AND ISRAEL

1. 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 <https://assignbuster.com/a-critical-analysis-of-indias-foreign-policy-history-essay/>

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,[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.'

XX. 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.

CHAPTER VI

EFFECT AND INFLUENCE OF OTHER GLOBAL POWERS IN THE MIDDLE EASTERN REGION AND IMPACT ON INDIA'S INTERESTS

CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN MIDDLE EAST

1. Unlike India, which historically has had a comfortable relationship with the Middle East, especially the Gulf, China is considered a relative outsider in the region. Despite that, China has productive and deepening relationships with many states in the Greater Middle East, including Pakistan, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states. Although during the 1980s arms sales to Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia were Beijing's primary link to the Middle East, more recently China has become a major importer of goods from the region, most notably petroleum, as well as military technology from Israel. One of the

sources of China's current popularity in the region is that China is a good customer-the country needs what Middle Eastern countries are seeking to export. Its voracious appetite for resources and its other economic needs match the economic profiles of the countries in the region. China also maintains a strictly business approach to its relationships with its trading partners-refraining, for example, from public comment on their domestic policies-which greatly appeals to states like Saudi Arabia.' That approach also has allowed China to maintain good relations with states in the region that are nominally opposed to each other.

2. China's early efforts at direct engagement in the Middle East through arms sales raised a lot of eyebrows and garnered a lot of attention, they did not serve long-term Chinese interests. 2 Once it became clear that China's ideological conflict with the West was less important to its leaders than its need to build the nation's economy and engage in international trade with the rest of the world, a new pattern of engagement emerged.. Since the beginning of this century, China has embarked on a " soft power" approach in its efforts to engage with and gain political influence in various regions of the world. A cornerstone of the new approach is China's assurance that it is not seeking ideological domination

and that it has no territorial ambitions or desire to nurture client states.

CHINA AND THE ARAB COUNTRIES

China has developed close bilateral ties with key Arab countries, especially in the Gulf and the Horn of Africa, and it also has established formal ties with all Arab states belonging to the Arab League. In January 2004, during President

Hu Jintao's meeting with the Arab League in Cairo, the SinoArab Cooperation Forum was founded to promote Sino-Arab economic ties and cultural understanding and to maintain " mutual respect." 72 While the creation of the forum attracted a great deal of attention from the Arab and Chinese media, the West seems to have seen little significance in the high-level meetings between China and the Arab League.

Since the inaugural meeting, China and the Arab League have met five more times, in the Middle East and China. 73 The forum is used primarily to deepen economic ties, particularly in energy. 74 In 2005, more than 1, t investment in areas such as finance, energy, and machinery." The forum resulted in more than \$400 million in trade agreements and a Chinese pledge to build a power station in Sudan. 76 In 2006, Arab and Chinese representatives pledged to increase bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2010.

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SUMMARY

China is securing a foothold in the greater Middle East, especially in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the countries of Central Asia. China, like India, has been ccessful in expanding its political and economic ties with key Middle Eastern countries without having to " take sides" in the various unresolved regional conflicts or openly challenge the dominant, but highly controversial, role of the United States as hegemon. However, as its presence in Sudan demonstrates, China runs the risk of becoming deeply embroiled in regional issues, and it is the object of much international criticism for its seemingly hardheaded mercantile approach to local politics.

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Like India, China has been cautiously evenhanded in dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict and balancing the competing overtures of the key Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran. It sold arms to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, and it has been