

India's Policy of Middle East Region

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Abstract

The Middle East region has always been the most important region in world geography because of its oil-gas and geo-strategic factors. India has always pursued a consistent policy regarding the Middle East region. It is called the equally-distance and equally-balance policy. The Middle East region has three regional powers. These regional powers are Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. India has been maintained their close relationship with Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Although, Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia have not been sharing cordial relationship with each others. India started its diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 and bilateral relations are strengthening in defence and strategic field. India has always been a second largest importer of Iran oil and Chabhar port provides chance to both countries to strengthening close relationship. Currently, India-Saudi Arabia relations are moving ahead with the oil trade and both countries have also come closer on economic and strategic level. It is the need of the hour that there should be a strong partnership between the two countries so that both countries can fulfil their common interests. This study tries to explore the rationale behind the India's policy of Middle East region.

Key Words: Policy, Balance, Oil, Defence. Relationship.

Introduction

India has huge stakes involved in the region such as energy, trade and safety of Indian community in the region. India has been saying so far in its Middle East or West Asia policy that India is capable of building independent bilateral relations and does not depend on anyone for this. There are three pillars of India's foreign policy for this region - first is Arab countries of the Gulf, second is Iran and third is Israel and India has good relations with all three. India has always been mainly dependent on imports for energy. India imports 70 percent of its energy needs. At the same time, along with economic development in the future, India's energy requirement is also going to increase continuously. This situation will persist until renewable energy plays a major role in India's energy needs. It is noteworthy that West Asia is rich in terms of petroleum products. Also, its geographical proximity provides India with a viable option to meet its energy requirements.

India has been purchasing the most oil from Iran and Iraq for the last few years, but Iran, which is facing unstable Iraq and diplomatic and economic sanctions, is creating problems for India. In such a situation, Saudi Arabia located in South-West Asia provides a better option for India. It is important not only in terms of oil but also in terms of Indian workers in West Asia. The Indian diaspora is present in large numbers in the United Arab Emirates as well as in Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that India receives the highest remittances in the world, the main role being played by people living in West Asia. With this view, not only India wants to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia but also the countries of the entire West Asia, but also wishes for peace in the region.

From 2015, the real story of the changed relationship between India and Israel became public. India remained non-existent at the United Nations during the vote resolution on human rights rights abuses in Israel. Only after this the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister took place in Israel in 2017 and PM Narendra Modi visited Israel for 3 days. In 2018 Benjamin Netanyahu made a 6-day extensive tour of India. However, in the United Nations, India voted against a resolution recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

India's Relations with Israel

Both India and Israel gained Independence from Britain within a span of few months. But for almost four decades, both of them kept moving in opposite direction of each other. On the one hand, India as a leader of the NAM developed good relations with the Arab world and the Soviet Union, on the other hand Israel established close relations with the countries of America and Western Europe. After Russia and America, Israel is the third largest country to supply arms to India. Important defense technologies are imported by Israel from India. There is regular contact between the armed forces and defense personnel of the two countries. Now India's relations with Israel will be independent in India's relations with the Palestinians and will develop on its own basis. This will strengthen opportunities for diversified access to new markets and technologies to effectively address India's national interests.

Bilateral relations between India and Israel will operate on the basis of rapidly evolving geopolitical realities in Asia and the Middle East. In such a situation, Israel will have to consider its reaction to the Asian plank. Despite this, the breadth and depth of the India-Israel relationship is not the same as the Sino-Israeli relations, which are mainly governed by trade and commerce. India should keep in mind the fact that the influence of China will increase in the coming years. Therefore, economic and trade relations should be given priority in India-Israel relations.

India's Relations with Iran

The history of social, economic and trade cooperation between India and Iran is quite old. The annual bilateral trade of the two countries is about 20 billion dollars. While Iran meets a large part of India's energy needs, India exports pharmaceuticals, heavy machinery, components and grain to Iran. Strategically, both countries are old partners of each other. The two countries also have common strategic interests in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East. India relies heavily on imports for its energy needs. In such a situation, after the US ban on the

purchase of oil from Iran, India's supply is likely to be affected significantly. India imports 80 percent of its oil requirement. A major part of this great need is imported from Iran.

India's Relations with Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's Pakistan policy has always affected Saudi relations with India. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, so naturally it considers Pakistan closer to itself. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has been supporting Pakistan on Kashmir issue. But Saudi policy has changed for some time, when the Central Government abolished the status of special state of Jammu and Kashmir, and then Saudi Arabia described it as an internal matter of India. At the same time, despite the strong opposition from Pakistan, he supported the invitation of India to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Thus, it represents Saudi Arabia's changing policy towards India.

Conclusion

India's interests and capabilities expand well beyond the subcontinent. This series explores the geopolitical scope, economic ties, transnational networks, and other aspects of India's relations with the Middle East (West Asia) -- an area that plays a critical position in India's economy and its future. In the history, India has managed a unbeaten balancing act in a tripolar West Asia. Now, the reorganization of West Asia's geopolitical backdrop has allowed India to engage with West Asian states with even less political strategy. Such an assertion of strategic autonomy reflects India's present foreign policy towards West Asia. India's policy is stimulated by its energetic pursuit of economic opportunities in West Asia, whether it is vis-a-vis energy security or greater connectivity and trade through the expansion of Chabahar Port in the Iranian case. In a time when global powers are shifting inwards, India has taken up a significant position as one of the few nations willing to stand behind the assure of globalisation.

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