

## Analyzing the Revitalisation of India's 'Look West' Policy.

---

### Table Of Contents

<b>1. Abstract</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3. India's relation with West Asia</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.1. Ancient era</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.2. Medieval era</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.3. India after Independence</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.4. A decisive step</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. India's "Look West" policy After 2014</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.1. Economic relations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.2. Indian diaspora and Remittances</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.3. Political and defense relations</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4.4. Cultural relations</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.5. Connectivity</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. India's relation with major countries of West Asia</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5.1. Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5.2. United Arab Emirates</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5.3. Iran</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5.4. Israel</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6. Challenges faced by India in West Asia</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6.1. China's engagement</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6.2. Religious extremism</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.3. Terrorism</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.4. Political instability</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.5. Strained relations among west Asian countries</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.6. External forces</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7. Does India need to Revitalize its Look West Policy?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>8. Conclusion</b>	<b>14</b>

## 1. Abstract

This research paper tries to analyze the evolution of India's 'Look West' policy and its bilateral relations with the major West Asian countries. India and the West Asian region being the oldest civilisations, have known each other since ancient times, but after India's independence the relations between both these regions were not extensive, though cordial. Several factors have contributed to the changed policy of India for West Asia over a period of time which includes India's increasing interest in West Asian resources, connectivity, technological relations and also the changing geopolitics of the region, rise of other major economic powers in West Asia. The paper illustrates the bilateral relations and the increasing engagement of India in West Asia after 2014 and also focuses on the existing challenges of the region and issues related to India's approach towards these regions with some recommendations followed by it.

## 2. Introduction

India and many countries of West Asia have had a traditional and cordial relationship since ancient times. West Asia comprises the land between Afghanistan in the east, the Mediterranean Sea in the west, Arabian Sea in the south, and Europe in the north. It is also called Middle East Asia, the term coined by Britain in the 19th century.

Geographically, the West Asian region acts as a bridge between Europe, Central Asia, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent. Some of the important world trade routes, since ancient times, go through this part, which has contributed to and still plays a major role in the economy of the region. The discovery of oil in the deserts of West Asia has changed the course of history and international politics in the world.

India's relationship with the countries of West Asia initially was only limited to oil. Gradually, it became inclusive of various sectors like technology, space, tourism, education, etc. India has realized the importance of West Asian connectivity, geopolitics, and the potential this region has to expand trade. Accordingly, India has taken steps in its foreign policy to enhance its relations with West Asia.

### 3. India's relation with West Asia

#### 3.1. Ancient era

The Indus Valley civilization of India and the Mesopotamia civilization of West Asia flourished during the same period. There was an extensive maritime trade network operating over the bodies of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf.

#### 3.2. Medieval era

India got to know about the Islam in 7th century AD through the traders of West Asia. These traders used to act as a bridge between the Indian subcontinent and Europe. The Sufi saints and traders brought with them new ways of living which had a deeper impact on the culture of India, its food, clothing, arts and architecture, music, etc. At the same time, the economic relations between India and West Asia flourished. The socio-political changes brought in the medieval period have assimilated so much in our society that it has become an integral part.

#### 3.3. India after Independence

At the time of India's independence Middle East Asia was under tremendous influence and control of Western powers. The region was divided on the basis of belief as follows-

- a. Shia Muslims- Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon
- b. Sunni Muslims- Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait
- c. Judaism (Jews)- Israel

The foreign policy of India under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, from the beginning, was to remain non-aligned to any of the Cold War blocs. The 1948 war fought between India and Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir, got the support of the USA and some Arab countries in Pakistan because it was a Muslim nation.

The concern of India, then, was that the West Asian Arab countries might support Pakistan thoroughly and excessively. This was because in 1955 with the help of the USA and Great Britain, the Baghdad treaty was signed. The objective of this treaty was to control West Asia strategically and to withhold the influence of the USSR. India initiated bilateral relations with the significant nations of these regions such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, but at equidistant. The result of this can be stated with an example: in 1969, India was invited to the summit which took place in Rabat, Morocco, where the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) was formed. Pakistan became insecure about this invitation and threatened to call off its membership from the summit, which was taken into account by the other nations and India's invitation was revoked. Pakistan consistently tossed the 'Islam' coin against India's role in West

Asia, and in return, OIC, in the beginning, accepted the declaration and statements on the plight of Indian Muslims in Kashmir by Pakistan.

In the year 1981, a group called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The group promotes economic, political, cultural, and security cooperation among the six nations. India has traditional and friendly relations with all the six GCC members.

### **3.4. A decisive step**

After the end of the Cold War in 1991, India's relations with West Asian countries saw a positive shift. The reasons behind it were many: the disintegration of the USSR, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces, subsequent US intervention, and the normalization of relations between Egypt and Israel, which led to the overshadowing of the Palestinian issue undertaken by NAM. At this point in time India realized the new geopolitical realities, and for this India brought changes in its outlook and policy towards West Asia, which was following-

- a. India decoupled its West Asian policy from Pakistan.
- b. It abandoned the defensive reactionary policies and stopped condemning the policies of other countries.
- c. India began to approach West Asian countries on a mutually beneficial basis.

This changed approach of India was seen not only on paper but also in actions. In December 1991, India changed its earlier opinion in the United Nations, where it compared the policies of Jews to apartheid. One bold decision was taken in early 1992, when India's then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao established diplomatic relations with Israel, ignoring strong domestic criticism. In the same year, another decision was taken to visit Iran, risking possible protests from the opposition. India broadened its approach by accommodating the three pillars of West Asia - Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel.

On one hand, 1991 was the year when India opened up its economy by accepting globalization, which helped the Indian economy to grow tremendously. On the other hand, the world saw the rise of extremism in Pakistan and other Islamic countries, to which a large community of Indian Muslims remained aloof. This forced the West Asian countries to change their perspective towards India, positively. The prime example of this is the 1999 Kargil conflict, when Pakistan attacked India, the countries in West Asia refused to support Pakistan.

With the successful implementation of India's "Look East" policy with its eastern and southeastern countries, India thought of initiating a similar policy with its West Asian counterparts. Accordingly, in 2005 India's then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh adopted the "Look West" policy which reflected India's desire for long-term engagement with West Asia. The bilateral high-level visit was increased after 2005 and many MoUs were signed on terrorism, piracy, energy, cultural, educational, defense, science and technology, etc.

In 2011, the Arab countries witnessed a series of public uprisings starting from Tunisia and expanding to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Bahrain, etc, which was called the Arab Spring. This movement was primarily political as people were protesting against the authoritarian rule and demanding a democratic system, which shook the Arab world. As the protesters were pro-democratic the USA and its allies supported the revolution, expecting India as well to voice out against the existing rule in those countries. India reacted cautiously, following the non-interventionist policy, which was motivated to secure its economic and political interests and ensure the safety of the Indian diaspora in the Arab world.

#### **4. India's "Look West" policy After 2014**

India's "Look West" policy was emphasized under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which runs on two wheels: he has surpassed his predecessor by going beyond the trade and investment ties to exploring new and untapped areas like clean energy, technology, comprehensive economic partnership agreement, free trade agreements, etc; and he focused on adding strategic content to each and every dimension of the relations. The key component of India's interest in West Asia is economy, countering terrorism, and security, and a new element has been added by Mr Modi is to make India, a net security provider in these regions. In 2018 at London's Central Hall Mr Modi said "Yes, I will go to Israel and I will even go to Palestine. I will further cooperate with Saudi Arabia and for the energy needs of India I will also engage with Iran."<sup>1</sup> This shows that India under Prime Minister Modi is firm in increasing engagement with West Asia.

##### **4.1. Economic relations**

India's largest trading bloc in the world is the Gulf countries, which is around US\$250 billion in bilateral trade in 2022-2023.<sup>2</sup> Crude oil dominates the trade which also makes the trade imbalance creating a current account deficit for India. Of the total demand of India for oil, around 80% is supplied by the GCC, Iran, and Iraq, among which Iraq tops the list by

---

<sup>1</sup> [Ministry of External affairs](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Financial express](#)

becoming the largest exporter. Besides this India imports 41% of natural gas from Qatar, followed by UAE.

The available data for 2021 shows that GCC members and Iran accounted for 15% of India's cumulative two-way trade of \$3.98 trillion over the period from 2017-2021.<sup>3</sup> In addition to this, the Gulf countries provide excellent market potential for India's manufactured goods and services.

#### **4.2. Indian diaspora and Remittances**

According to various data, eight to nine million people work as workers, professionals, and entrepreneurs in West Asian countries, and send remittances of around \$40 billion annually to India which contribute more than 55% of India's total remittance flow.

#### **4.3. Political and defense relations**

After coming to power in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the West Asian countries were a little worried about India taking a more pro-Israel policy and the cause of Palestine would suffer because of the friendship between Mr. Modi and Israel's Prime Minister B. Netanyahu, as both belong to right-wing ideology. However in the UNGA meeting, India's then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said, "I strongly believe that India's expanding relations in the region with all nations will only strengthen the Palestinian cause, which can never be undermined".<sup>4</sup> In 2015-16, Mr. Modi converted India's "Look West" policy to "Link and Act West".

Indian Army and Navy conduct joint exercises like Eastern Bridge, Desert Eagle, Al- Nagah, Naseem-al-Bahar, Zarb-e-Hadeed with Kuwait, UAE, Oman, and Saudi Arabia respectively. The Indian government has launched successful operations in the past like Operation Rahat, Dost, and ongoing Ajay with the help of its counterparts for rescuing and bringing back the Indian citizens stranded in the West Asian countries be it due to war or natural calamities. Along with this the other areas of interest and concerns like cyber security, piracy, counter-terrorism, and intelligence sharing, maritime security for both regions have made India and West Asia look beyond the traditional approach.

---

<sup>3</sup> [Dhyeya Ias](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Ministry of External Affairs](#)

#### **4.4. Cultural relations**

Indian people are considered soft-spoken, hard-working, tolerant, and peace-loving people in Gulf countries. In many countries like Qatar, Bahrain, UAE Indians are in the majority rather than Arabs, which shows that the cultural aspect of India has largely expanded. Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), is credited with opening cultural centers in many of the West Asian countries, which promotes cultural exchanges, tourism, people-to-people contacts, and closer regional ties. Also, the International Yoga Day is being celebrated in many of these countries.

#### **4.5. Connectivity**

- 4.5.1.** Ashgabat Agreement: The agreement was first signed in the year 2011, to establish an international multimodal transport and transit corridor between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. India joined the Ashgabat Agreement in 2018, which will make it easier for India to reach out to Central Asia, and also to develop various transport-related infrastructure projects in West Asia like the Chabahar port of Iran.
- 4.5.2.** INSTC: The International North-South Transport Corridor was initiated by Russia, India, and Iran in the year 2000. It is a multimodal connectivity project promoting economic relations among the involved regions. The project connects the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea to Europe.
- 4.5.3.** IMEC: The Indian- Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor was recently signed in 2023 during India's G20 presidency by 8 member countries. It will consist of railroad, ship-to-rail networks, and road routes connecting in two phases- one in the Eastern Corridor from India to the Gulf and another Northern Corridor from the Gulf to Europe.

### **5. India's relation with major countries of West Asia**

#### **5.1. Saudi Arabia**

India and Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations in 1948. During the Cold War relations between both countries did not mature to the next level. The historic visit of Saudi King Abdulla to India in 2006 resulted in the signing of 'The Delhi Declaration' which gave the framework for cooperation in all the fields of mutual interest, which was followed by the 'Riyadh Declaration'. These visits became a point of expanding the bilateral relations to strategic partnership. In the year 2016, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Saudi he was honored with the 'Sash of King Abdulaziz', the highest civilian decoration of the kingdom.

The Indian Prime Minister visited the Saudi Kingdom in 2019, during which the Strategic Partnership Council was instituted, which has two main pillars- one consisting of a political, security, and cultural committee, the other consisting of the committee on economy and investments. India is the fourth country with whom Saudi has formed such a partnership.

India welcomed the Saudi Crown Prince in 2023 where Mr Modi highlighted that Saudi Arabia is one of the important strategic partners of India. Also, both leaders decided to set up a joint task force to expedite the West Coast refinery project. The refinery project will be the world's largest greenfield refinery at Raigad in Maharashtra by Saudi Aramco, Adnoc of UAE, and Indian PSUs.

Saudi Arabia is currently India's second-largest supplier of crude oil. Around 18% of crude oil and 22% of the Liquefied Petroleum Gas requirements of India come from Saudi. It is India's fourth largest trade partner, as the bilateral trade in the year 2021-2022 was valued at US\$ 42 billion. As of 2022, a total of 2783 Indian companies like Tata, Wipro, TCS, etc have registered as joint ventures in Saudi, which collectively amounts to around \$2 billion of investments. Similarly, Saudi investors in India have invested around \$3.15 billion as of March 2022. Around 2.6 million strong Indian communities live in Saudi Arabia, making Indians the most preferred working people.

In the defense sector both the countries have shown interest in joint design and development of the defense equipment. Both countries have bilateral naval exercises called Al Mohed al-Hind.

The abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, has not led any negativity in the relations of both the countries. Saudi Arabia saw the decision of India in a positive way. There was a time in the beginning of relations when Saudi supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue but now Saudi has been non-interventionist and declared that Kashmir is a bilateral issue and can be solved only by India and Pakistan.

## **5.2. United Arab Emirates**

Both countries established diplomatic relations in 1972. The greater push was achieved in the bilateral relations in 2015 when PM Modi visited the UAE, which was also the beginning of the new strategic partnership. In 2017 the crown prince of the UAE was our chief guest for the

Republic Day. In 2019, PM Modi was honored with the highest civilian award of the UAE called 'The order of Zayed'.

India's third largest trading partner in UAE, as the trade between them rose to US\$85 billion in 2022, and India's second-largest export destination.<sup>5</sup> UAE for the first time has signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India because of which trade has increased approximately 15%. For the year 2022-23, UAE became the fourth largest investor in India. The investment opportunities will further be facilitated once the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) is set up in Gujarat International Finance Tec- city (GIFT City).

The leaders of both countries acknowledged some areas such as green hydrogen, solar energy, food security, climate change, health sector, maritime security, connectivity, fighting terrorism, etc, in which joint actions and cooperation is needed. India and UAE agreed to link the Indian Unified Payments Interface with the Gulf country's Instant Payment Platform.

The estimated Indian community living in UAE is around 3.3 million accounting for the total remittances coming to India is around US\$ 17 billion. India has signed a MoU for setting up the IIT Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi which will become operational from January 2024.

India and UAE signed a cultural agreement in 1975 under which the Embassy organizes various cultural events. Abu Dhabi has also started the construction of the first Hindu temple. The Emirates has started issuing 'Golden Visas' which are residency permits for doctors, engineers, PhD scholars, specialists in technology, etc. Also, the UAE is a leading tourist destination for Indians.

### **5.3. Iran**

Before 1947 India also shared its boundary with Iran. Since the independence of India, the relations between both countries have remained cordial and peaceful. The Iranian revolution of 1979 proved to be fruitful for the relations between both countries. In the year 2000, a tripartite treaty was signed between India, Iran, and Russia for sending cargo through the North-South corridor. The most important phase between Iran and India started in 2001, when India's PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Iran, and the 'Tehran Declaration' was signed. At

---

<sup>5</sup> [PIB](#)

that time, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami recognized this as a 'dialogue among civilizations'.

Mr Khatami was India's chief guest in 2003 for Republic Day. Soon, the relations were put to a setback in 2005, when India voted against Iran in an IAEA resolution. The issue was related to a nuclear program conducted by Iran, where the US was suspicious that Iran's nuclear program was not exclusively for peaceful purposes. The US imposed several economic sanctions on Iran, still, Iran altogether rejected the supervision of their nuclear program by the IAEA. The relations were back to normal in 2008 when India promised an independent policy towards Iran without any pressure from the US. During the visit of PM Modi to Iran in 2016, a joint statement was released titled 'Civilizational Connect, Contemporary Context'.

The trade between Iran and India is mainly dominated by India's imports of crude oil. The bilateral trade between India and Iran has increased as Iran's exports to India stood at \$361 million during January-July 2022. India's exports also saw a 54 percent rise during the first seven months of 2022.<sup>6</sup> The Central Bank of both countries has signed a Currency Swap Agreement wherein India has been approved to pay in Indian currency for its oil import.

The geographic location of Iran is significant for India, it is the gateway to Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. Thus it provides an alternative connectivity bypassing Pakistan. For the same purpose, India has developed Chabahar port and Zaranj-Delaram road in Iran which gives access to Afghanistan as well.

#### **5.4. Israel**

The land of Israel today was a British mandate before 1948 and the UN proposed the theory of two states for the Jews and Palestinian Arabs in 1948. Arabs were of the opinion that this land belonged to Palestinian Arabs. Indian leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, in the beginning supported the cause of Palestine and rejected the two nations theory on the basis of religion, but had sympathy for Jews as well. India also voted against Israel when it applied for admission to the UN. However, in 1950, India recognized Israel after two Muslim countries, Turkey and Iran, did so. In 1953 Israel opened its consulate in Mumbai but still no diplomatic relations were established. With the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as a representative of Palestine under Yasser Arafat, India developed its engagement with them and later approved its independent office in New Delhi.

---

<sup>6</sup> [The diplomat](#)

Prior to that, Israel supported India with arms and ammunition in the 1962 and 1965 wars, still, no efforts were made from the Indian side to boost the relations. In 1968, when India formed the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) under PM Indira Gandhi, she wanted to have a dialogue between the two intelligence agencies, India's RAW and Israel's Mossad.

It was in 1992, that India established full diplomatic relations with Israel, that too, after China's diplomatic establishment with Israel. This establishment proved to be fruitful in 1999 during the Kargil war, when Indian counterparts asked Israel for the weapons and Israel shipped the same to India which was decisive in the hour of need. This incident was followed by some high-profile visits like Jaswant Singh in 2000, followed by L.K.Advani.

In 2017, PM Narendra Modi was the first to visit Israel by skipping the customary stop at Palestine. Later in 2018, he visited Palestine but didn't visit Israel which shows that India adopted a complete dehyphenation policy, which means India has separate relations with Israel and Palestine and is wholly based on merits and cooperation.

The bilateral merchandise trade, excluding defense, has risen to around US\$ 10 billion in 2022-23. However, Israel exports around 40% of its defense equipment to India. India's Phalcon AWACS, Harop, some Naval radar systems, and the Barack SAM system, to name a few, are all imported from Israel. Both countries are cooperating on security issues including the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.

Many MoUs have been signed between Israel and India in the fields of agriculture cooperation, water resources management, science and technology, energy, space technology, etc. Israel considers India as an ancient nation with a strong culture and a safe land for Jews, as thousands of Jews have been living in India since ancient times. Over 40- 50000 Indians visit Israel every year as pilgrims. India has been a preferred destination for young Israelis wanting to unwind after their compulsory military service.

## **6. Challenges faced by India in West Asia**

### **6.1. China's engagement**

China has made rapid inroads in Gulf countries to tap its vast resources, for its BRI project and most importantly to become a strategic leader in West Asia. The engagement of China is not limited to the trade of oil, it has expanded to investments in oil and gas fields, development of

infrastructure, credit facilities, and building assets. For example: China and Iran agreed in 2021 on a 25-year cooperation agreement worth around US\$ 400 billion. China has also expanded the Haifa port of Israel. Thus China is the leading trade, logistics, and investment partner of West Asia. The significant presence of China can influence the policy decisions of these countries with India. Economies like UAE and Saudi Arabia have come forward as premier partners for India but the challenge posed by China can shift their focus. This can also hamper the relationship of India with neighbors like Afghanistan and Central Asia.

## **6.2. Religious extremism**

As West Asia is a source of various religions the conflict among them has occurred since ancient times to prove their religious superiority. The constant war between Arab-Israel, and Israel-Palestine destabilizes the whole region. This can become a threat to religious nationalism for Indians who are working in West Asia and form religious minorities, which can ultimately hamper India's remittances. In addition to this, the foremost challenge for India is to secure Indian citizens working in Gulf countries by getting influenced by Wahhabism, an extremist sect.

## **6.3. Terrorism**

The invasion of the USSR in Afghanistan and the creation of mujahideen by the USA from among the Afghan citizens to fight the USSR, ultimately gave rise to the terrorist organization of Al-Qaeda, which is an open secret. Similarly, the rise of ISIS has emerged as the biggest security threat to the region. The menace of this terrorist organization to India and its Muslim population will be there, for instance, the incident of some students from Kerala joining ISIS in the recent past. The Pakistan factor can also play a major role in this by influencing the terrorist organizations to look into the sensitive area of Jammu and Kashmir on the fake claims of Muslims in Kashmir are getting exploited, and that can be a challenge to the Indian government.

## **6.4. Political instability**

The Arab Spring of 2011 and its after impact, the Syrian civil war, the Kurdish demand for an independent nation, question of who will rule Iraq- Shia or Sunni political group, war between Hadis and Houthis in Yemen, this has resulted in political instability, which also leads to the instability in its economic policies which can ultimately affect India's economic engagement as India has initiated many infrastructure and assistant projects like the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) in Iraq, IMEC.

### **6.5. Strained relations among West Asian countries**

The Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi rivalry for becoming the supreme power in West Asia is world famous. Although they have started bilateral talks, its sustainability is still doubtful. Also, the Kurdish problem has created a rift between Turkey and Syria. If the region remains unstable the prices of oil and natural gas go high and that can become the biggest economic challenge externally as well as internally, which India has faced in the past in 1973, and 1990. The increase in the prices of fossil fuels leads to disruption in oil supply, inflation in the economy, and a balance of payment crisis which no government in India can afford.

### **6.6. External forces**

The USA, Britain, and Russia have intervened in these regions according to their interest by creating conflicts between the nations, the sects, and people which majorly led to instability and uncertainty. These powers had used many countries like Pakistan, and Afghanistan in the past to pursue their objectives and this a challenge that in the future India can be used as a client state by these economies for their national interest.

## **7. Does India need to Revitalize its Look West Policy? A Way Forward**

To an extent, yes India's Look West policy has brought several positive changes in the relationship with West Asia, still there is a lot to do to bridge the gap. India's negligence towards West Asia has created a huge gap between the relations, which has been seen in India's uncertain economic policies. Thus it is recommended that India may conclude as soon as possible the pending Free Trade Agreements with the Gulf countries like Israel, and UAE.

- 7.1. Iran has huge reservoirs of oil and gas which can solve India's current account deficit problem. Iran being geographically close to India can cut short the cost of crude oil and natural gas. The proposed Iran- Oman- India undersea natural gas pipeline can help India to move towards clean energy, as Iran in 2023 has said that it is committed to meeting the energy needs of India.
- 7.2. The most important sector and also untapped till now, is maritime security with West Asian countries. Saudi Arabia can play a vital role as it has the longest coastline in the Gulf. It is recommended that India can expand defense dialogues, regular high-level defense visits, and increase joint military exercises like Al-Mohed with Saudi Arabia. Adding to this India can share maritime security information to gulf countries as the presence of the Indian navy in the Indian Ocean is powerful. In 2015, India unveiled its SAGAR policy to strengthen maritime

cooperation. Thus, in strategic concern, India can give priority to the Indian Ocean, just like the Indo-Pacific region.

- 7.3. India can initiate 'Cricket diplomacy' with all of West Asia, as countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran are taking an interest in sports. Recently cricket has been added to the Olympic Games and India's BCCI is a leading cricket board all over the world and can help to build 'Cricket relations' with the Gulf. This can help India to increase the people-to-people contact with West Asia, which itself can be an alternative to economic relations.
- 7.4. The per capita income-to-GDP ratio is greater in gulf countries. New Delhi can tap these resources for investments in the Indian startup community. Today, Indian startups get much of their investment from China. This can be shifted to Gulf countries by creating task forces, high-level business summits by ASSOCHAM, FICCI, etc. The important task for India in this will be to continue with its economic policies like easing FDI regulations in various sectors and increasing the limit on FPI.
- 7.5. Many West Asian countries initiated the policy of "Look East", where they found India as a strong economic player compared to Pakistan. Also, the presence of China in West Asia is more of an economic interest for China rather than developing West Asian countries. Thus it is recommended that Indian policymakers invest more in Human Resource Development like providing humanitarian assistance, tele-medicines, tele- education, which is quite successful in Africa.
- 7.6. The most important weapon India has is its soft power. The historical ties can be brought to the forefront in various ways. Indian Bollywood movies are dubbed in Persian and Arabic. Indian cuisine is finding its place in West Asia. The Celebration of International Yoga Day has started in these regions as well. The huge Indian diaspora living in gulf countries can promote cultural ties to the next level. Education, medical, cultural, sports, and ecotourism can play an equally important role in increasing people to people contact.
- 7.7. Many of the Gulf countries like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait, to diversify their economies are promoting research and innovation. The development of India in space exploration, and successful missions like Mangalyan, and Chandrayaan have attracted many countries to work closely with ISRO on a low budget. One such example is UAE's Red Planet Mission where two countries will work closely. Similarly, such space diplomacy can play a major role for India in gaining a pre-eminent position in the world and also for commercial gains.
- 7.8. Other than this, India has started its engagement in the areas of cyber security, solar energy (ISA), climate change, food security, etc with many of the West Asian countries. It is suggested that India can make these countries realize the upcoming challenges the world is going to face

in the above sectors and the solution lies in the cooperation. For instance the pandemic of covid-19.

- 7.9. Israel, UAE, and Bahrain signed a treaty called the Abraham Accord in 2020 which is the first of its kind Arab- Israeli peace deal. It shows that Arab countries are moving ahead from the Palestine question. However, the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine has left West Asia into two groups. Some of the nations are blaming Israel for war while others have only shown concern. India condemned the attack of Hamas on Israel and at the same time advocated the resumption of direct negotiations towards establishing a sovereign, independent, and viable state of Palestine, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel. This shows India following the policy of equal alignment, which shall be continued in the future as well.

## 8. Conclusion

The rising economic power of India is acting as a dividend to establish close ties with the world. In the new millennium with the new policy towards the West i.e 'Look West' policy India is engaging more in every aspect than ever it has done with the West Asian region. The US, France, Japan, and Australia are looking at India as a major player to counter China in the West Asian region. Various groups like I2U2, ITNSC, and QUAD have India as their founding member and India is also investing in it a lot of its resources. Looking at the foreign policy of the country since independence, India has always given priority to peaceful coexistence, equality, and mutual benefits of developing as well as least developed countries. It has always supported a multipolar world order where countries will respect sovereignty and territorial integrity with a stable global economic system.

## 9. References

1. Chandra, S. (2007). *History of medieval India: 800-1700* (2014 ed.). Orient Blackswan Private Limited.
2. MEA | *Statements: Press releases*. (n.d.). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
3. MEA | *Bilateral/Multilateral documents*. (n.d.). Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
4. *Press information bureau*. (n.d.). Press Information Bureau. <https://www.pib.gov.in/allRel.aspx>
5. [IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute]. *Distinguished lecture | Amb Talmiz Ahmad | Recent developments in West Asia & India | HQ video*. (2021, August 23). YouTube. [https://youtu.be/\\_k4WD19GfMM?si=PSadVjz7R4gy4pCg](https://youtu.be/_k4WD19GfMM?si=PSadVjz7R4gy4pCg)

6. Shubhojit Roy. (2023, September 16). The Importance of Saudi Arabia to India. *Indian Express*, p. 1.  
<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/the-importance-of-saudi-arabia-to-india-8940521/>