



Abraham Accords and the Changing Geo-political Scenario in West Asia: It's Impact on India

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ABSTRACT

The signing of the Abraham Accords will provide India with a new opportunity to seize the situation and enhance its influence in the region, as well as help India check China's growing influence in the region. India will be able to break free from its historic position as a result of the shifting situation. India has been a reluctant power in this region until recently, but with the US's significant detachment and the development of China's presence, India can no longer afford to be isolated. For its own security and geopolitical interests, New Delhi must align its options and techniques with Gulf partners and Israel. This paper explains how India's position in the area will alter. Previously, India had to strike a balance, but now that the Accord has been signed, India has stronger, more varied, and increasing socioeconomic ties with Israel and the Gulf countries than ever before.

Introduction

Since millennia, India has had links with West Asia. Dilmun was a trading partner of the Indus Valley civilization (Modern Bahrain). Punjab was a part of the Persian Empire in the 6th century BCE. Egypt's Ptolemy II and the Mauryan emperors Chandragupta Maurya and Asoka exchanged diplomats in the third century BCE. Until 1835, Farsi was the official language of the Mughal court and India.ⁱ

West Asia is a critical strategic zone for India, with significant geopolitical and economic implications. Deep civilizational links, cultural exchange, and historical ties exist between India and the rest of the world. Both have shared colonial histories and struggles for freedom in modern times. After independence, India's policy of non-alignment received enormous support and strength in the region, allowing it to tackle the difficulties of Cold War influences and their potentially disastrous consequences. Our policy methods and goals toward the region have also been impacted by India's huge Muslim population and managing Pakistan's promotion of the Kashmir issue in Islamic forums.ⁱⁱ With the historic relations with the West Asia, the diaspora makes a significant contribution to this relation as India receives very good amount of remittances from the West Asia, in this way India also radiates cultural influence over the West Asia.ⁱⁱⁱ

Objectives

How can India break free from its historic position by changing multinational activities? India has been a reluctant power in this region until recently, but with the US's significant detachment and the development of China's presence, India can no longer afford to be isolated. For its own security and geopolitical interests, New Delhi must calibrate its options and actions in accordance with Gulf partners and Israel. West Asia has become increasingly essential for India's economic development, both as a source of energy and as a source of labor and remittances. As a result, India needs to improve its position in the area, and we need to examine how this Accord will allow India to flex its muscles and develop stronger and deeper ties with Gulf countries

Why West-Asia is so Important to India

West Asia is known for its vast energy resources, which play an important part in India's economy. Geographically, it connects two main continents and also provides the shortest route to Europe for trade, making this region significant for all of the world's major countries, including India. India is one of the world's fastest rising powers, with the third largest GDP in terms of purchasing power parity. Its renewed attention on the Middle East reflects the growth of India's power and prestige, as well as its active diplomacy. Recognizing that India's "footprint" in the region has been remarkably unaffected by strategic considerations. India wants to expand commercial relations as well as formalize long-term collaboration.^{iv}

It has strong relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran as a neutral player in the region, and it supports the Palestinian cause and has growing diplomatic ties with Israel. India has a high population of expatriate employees in the region, who send remittances back to India in large amounts. If India manages to mediate diplomatically to ease tensions between Saudi-Iran rivalries as a result of its good relations with both countries, it will

provide more leverage to India's interests in regions such as Chahbahar Port, INSTC (International North-South Corridor), and this region will provide ground to confront China in Gwadar Port, East Africa, and it will also strengthen India's security to secure the IOR. China, which has grown its investment in the region and has solid relations with Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and East African countries, has also increased its presence in the region by investing billions.^v

With the change in the status quo in Afghanistan, Pakistan and China have become more active in Central Asia, forcing India to retreat from Afghanistan and lose access to Central Asia, leaving it with only one option: West Asia. It is only West Asia that provides excess for India to enter Central Asian countries and seize their markets, as well as to deter China and Pakistan.^{vi}

Rise of China

For decades, China has avoided becoming involved in West Asian politics, whether it is the Saudi-Iran rivalry or the Israel-Palestine dispute, and has remained neutral in all respects, allowing the US to maintain its dominance in the region. China's major goal has been economic development. As a result, it established relationships with West Asian countries based on three principles: safe energy supplies, market expansion, and investment prospects. As a result, it invests billions of dollars and maintains good relations with Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and East Africa, as well as Western and Central Asian countries.^{vii}

Even now, the fundamentals of China's economic development are largely intact. However, a detailed examination of contemporary Chinese foreign policy reveals that the country's overall stance to West Asia has begun to shift. Beijing has become more involved in global diplomacy touching the region in recent years, such as the Iran Nuclear Deal, adopting strong views at the UN (Syria Vetoes), and flexing its muscles with Russia in the Mediterranean. Mr. Xi's recent trip to West Asia is the clearest indication yet that China is willing to take a more active role in the region.^{viii}

China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran have formed a nexus that India considers to be very dangerous to deal with, given that China has already invested more than \$60 billion in the BRI project and has a well-developed Gwadar Port with direct access to the Arabian Sea, as well as the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan. China is in direct talks with the Taliban's new leadership about development projects and extending its CPEC project in Afghanistan, while India has hit a new low in Afghanistan. In 2016, China inked a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) with Iran, pledging a \$400 billion investment over a 25-year period. Iran is critical to China's continued expansion because of its strategic location, which connects West Asia and Central Asia while also providing access to the Indian Ocean via the Persian Gulf, which is crucial to President Xi's OBOR project. Iran presents enormous investment opportunities for Chinese enterprises in a variety of fields, particularly in the energy industry. Iran is one of the most stable countries in the area, according to China, and the only major country where the US has virtually no presence. As a result, China sees Tehran as a gateway to West Asia. Both the CPEC and the CSP have helped China strengthen its position as a rival to India and, to a lesser extent, the United States.^{ix}

Abraham Accords and its Implications for India

On September 15, 2020, US President Donald Trump hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and foreign ministers of the UAE and Bahrain for signing of the historic Abraham Accords. Under this deal recognition has given to the Israel and in return Israel has halted its plan to annex the parts of the occupied West Bank, later, this deal has been extended to North African countries and Morocco and Sudan has also accepted the deal. Thus, Abraham Accords is the first Arab-Israeli peace deal in 26 years which make it so significant for the whole world and particularly India.^x

Geopolitically, India has welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and other countries in the region as it will bring peace and stability and calling it a strategic partnership. India now has stronger, multifaceted and growing socioeconomic engagements with Israel and the Gulf countries than before. With over 8 million diaspora in the Gulf remitting annually nearly \$150 billion and sourcing of nearly two-thirds of the India's hydrocarbon imports and major investment. India is the preferred source of manpower, food products, pharmaceuticals, gems, jewellery and the light engineering items. Indians are also the biggest stakeholder in Dubai's real estate, tourism and Free Economic Zone.^{xi} With the signing of Abraham Accords, India has increased strategic footprint in the West Asia for some time now. There have been developments on the defence front between India and West Asian region. In, December 2020, Indian Army Chief M.M. Narawane, visited UAE and Saudi Arabia, becoming the first chief of the Indian Army to do so, the India Air Force and Navy have conducted various multilateral exercises with no of countries, like '*Zayed Talwar*' - a naval exercise between India and UAE.^{xii}

Before, the Abraham Accords had been signed; India has had to play out a delicate balancing act between Arab Gulf and Israel over the decades, but with the signing of the Abraham Accords this significant strategic obstacle has been removed for India. More recently, 10th Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC) signed in New Delhi with Oman, India's closest defence partner in the region with which all the three services of India conducted regular bilateral exercises and staff talks. The Duqm Port in Oman on which, New Delhi has a deal to access the facility, including dry dock use by the Indian Navy. The above example show the pace developments between India and the West Asia region.^{xiii}

In recent developments India joined Israel, UAE and the USA to launch a new quadrilateral consultation for expanding economic and political cooperation in the West Asia, in addition to step energy cooperation, combating climate change and increase maritime security cooperation.^{xiv} In West Asia, the Israel in particular with which India has robust critical engagement with Israel on various issues from defence to agriculture and cyber and artificial intelligence shapes this special relations. It further deepened in past few years especially with the Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel in 2017 and signing \$2 billion defence deal, and with this Abraham Accords their relations have gone to a new edge. With the recent visit by India's EAM S. Jaishankar's visit to Israel and met with his counterpart Yair Lapid had a bilateral meeting in the Jerusalem, there they agreed to launch the negotiations for the India-Israel Free Trade Agreement which will come to in effect very soon.^{xv}

India's engagement with the Gulf States has gone beyond oil and without any interference in domestic issues like Kashmir. The emerging ties between

India and Israel and India-GCC relations may help find new ways for multilateral engagement on strategic issues like, security, energy challenges, agriculture, climate change, space to cyber technology. The mutual interest among these countries would redefine India's policy in the region. India's energy security challenges and condition of its expatriate workers in the Gulf might serve India's long term interest if it engages more pragmatically in this region.

Conclusion

With the Taliban's restoration to power in Kabul, Pakistan and China have gained a strategic advantage over India in Afghanistan, though India has benefited from the Abraham Accords, which have allowed India to develop its strategic partnerships with Israel, the UAE, and other Gulf countries. Although the signing of the Abraham Accords will give India more leverage than any other country, this does not mean that India will be able to easily deal with both its neighboring rivals, China and Pakistan, who are also flexing their muscles in the region and have an upper hand with Afghanistan in their hands, cutting India's direct links to Central Asia. India will then need Iran, which will play a crucial role in helping India deal with both of these rivals. Though India enjoys excellent relations with Iran, the enmity between the US and Iran, as well as India's status as a US ally and the US's policies against Iran, has created a barrier, and India has yet to reach the desired relationship with Iran. India has suffered in numerous spheres as a result of the US economic sanctions on Iran, including a reduction in oil imports to barely 11% and a delay in investment in the Chabahar Port, which has led to the inclusion of other members such as China. India was kicked out of the Farzad-B gas field project due to delays in development and the Abraham Accords, which enraged Iran.

The engagement of Iran with China, where many perceive China's rise as a regional danger, is also a source of concern for New Delhi. Tehran has made it plain that it wants to expand business ties with China in order to combat US economic sanctions, which has complicated India's relationship with Iran. To resolve all of these issues, India must act strategically so as not to jeopardize its historical relations with Iran. Despite some reservations and reservations, India's developing connection with Israel and Gulf Arab states should continue to expand collaboration with Iran, which gives New Delhi a unique influence in the Middle East as a vital geopolitical partner for all. New Delhi will be expected to be more forceful in the region, both diplomatically and militarily, in its posturing of foreign policy being conducted from a balanced stage, as a reflection of its economic progress and, by extension, an increasingly important place in the global order.

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