



Strategic Balancing and Geopolitical Narratives: India's Foreign Policy in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Anukrati Singh¹, Dr. Madhu Bhatia², Prof. R. K. Maheshwari³

¹Research Scholar, Department of Applied Economics, University of Lucknow, anukratisingh78@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, University of Lucknow, hatia_madhu@lkouniv.ac.in

³ Professor, Department of Applied Economics, University of Lucknow, rajiv_maheshwari1@rediff.com

ABSTRACT

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a complex and enduring geopolitical issue that shapes global dynamics, with profound implications for international relations and national policies. This paper employs a Critical Geopolitics framework to analyse how geopolitical narratives and representations inform India's foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict. Historical events, including the OPEC oil embargo of 1973-1974 and subsequent Middle Eastern conflicts, demonstrate the region's influence on global economic stability, mainly through its substantial contribution of approximately one-third of the world's oil supply.

This study critically examines India's diplomatic balancing act, exploring how its historical relations with Israel and Palestine are articulated in official discourse and policy. By analysing key documents and statements, this paper highlights the geopolitical storylines and representations that shape India's engagement with the conflict, reflecting the complexities of its national interests and regional aspirations.

Additionally, the paper situates India's stance within the broader context of its Middle East policy, scrutinizing how domestic politics, security imperatives, and economic considerations intertwine to influence India's strategic positioning. Through this lens, the study illustrates how India navigates the intricate geopolitical landscape, balancing its commitments to regional actors while managing the implications of the Israel-Palestine crisis on its foreign policy objectives.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Strategic balancing, Israel-Palestine conflict, International -trade, Middle East Policy, Multilateral Diplomacy, Leadership Style.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's perspective on the Israel-Palestine conflict has shifted throughout time. Historically, India has been a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause, owing to its anticolonial solidarity and Non-Aligned Movement traditions. In 1947, India was one of the few countries in the United Nations General Assembly that opposed Palestine's division and the establishment of Israel. For decades, India maintained close ties with the Arab world, particularly in support of the Palestinian statehood bid. However, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India's policy has shifted, with a significant tilt towards Israel motivated by geopolitical, economic, and security considerations. This balancing act, or "de-hyphenation" strategy, enables India to engage with both Israel and Palestine without having to choose sides, albeit recent developments indicate a growing tilt toward Israel. India was one of the latest non-Muslim states to recognize Israel, but it was the first non-Arab state to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization. However, the balance of ties shifted in the 1990s (Roy, 2023). India maintained a non-alignment policy until it was no longer practicable in a transformed international order that emerged after the Cold War, where the foundations of a new direction in India's foreign policy decision-making known as 'multi-alignment' lie. 1992 was a milestone year in Indian diplomacy. A year ago, the Soviet Union, India's primary source of economic and military support until then, vanished from history, bringing the Cold War to an end.

This created a significant void in India's strategic calculations. Combined with a worldwide oil shock caused by the First Gulf War in 1990, India experienced a balance of payment problem, forcing the Indian government to liberalise and open up its economy for international investment and competition. In 1991, India chose PV Narasimha Rao, a pragmatic new prime minister. His vision for India's global stature differed significantly from that of his predecessors. Dr Manmohan Singh, the then-finance minister and eventually Prime Minister of India, stated in the Indian Parliament that "No power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come". 42 years after India recognized Israel as an independent nation in 1950, the two countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1992. Indian diplomats completed a long-overdue mission without jeopardizing the current friendly relations with Palestine. When President Pranab Mukherjee visited a Palestinian university in East Jerusalem in 2015 during the last round of violence, he was met by protesters holding signs gently criticizing India's expanding ties with Israel. Later in his formal remark, Mukherjee stated, "Our bilateral relations [with Israel] are independent of our relations with Palestine". For the majority of the period after independence, India has associated with the Palestinian cause, fuelled by a combination of anticolonial solidarity with Arab states and dedication to the Non-Aligned Movement. India voted against Israel's

admission to the UN and for Zionism to be denounced alongside racism (Blarel,2017). Despite this, New Delhi maintained a neutral stance, acknowledging Israel in 1950. On a social level, India was known as one of the most welcoming locations for Israeli travellers. Following the Cold War, Delhi reinforced its impartial image. India was the first non-Arab state to recognize Palestine in 1988, and diplomatic ties with Israel were established in 1992 after consultation with Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat.

However, in recent years, the relationship between India and Israel has shifted significantly. In the years that followed, bilateral ties grew significantly, particularly in agriculture, defence, tourism, and trade. Notably, India has become Israel's largest market for defence exports, triggering a growing recognition in New Delhi that Tel Aviv is critical to India's long-term strategic interests. In 2017, Modi became the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel, cementing India's policy pivot amidst expanding ties. In January 2018, Modi welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to New Delhi, accompanied by a 130-member trade group to strengthen business and diplomatic ties. As these visits acquired salience, PM Modi paid a historic visit to Palestine a month after hosting Netanyahu, becoming the first Indian prime minister to do so. Modi's visit to Ramallah was intended to reiterate India's long-standing support for the establishment of a "sovereign, independent Palestine living in a peaceful environment." It also demonstrated New Delhi's balanced approach, which sought to reassure Arab partners that India's increasing ties with Israel would not alter its fundamental attitude on Palestine. In a similar spirit, India fiercely opposed the Trump administration's designation of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, voting in favour of the U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning the decision. Modi's political past would indicate a more decisive inclination toward Israel. He had visited the country while serving as Gujarat's chief minister. As Prime Minister, Modi's gestures toward Israel were undoubtedly his most significant ideological divergence from Congress' Middle East policy. He met Prime Minister Netanyahu at the United Nations (where he might have met with Palestinian President Abbas but did not) and Israeli President Shimon Peres in Singapore. Modi announced plans to visit Israel in June, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to do so. Beyond ideology, Delhi is drawn to Israel due to strategic and economic considerations. The two countries face comparable non-state security threats. India has purchased \$662 million in Israeli armaments since Modi's election. Indian and Israeli lobby groups collaborate in the United States and have same goals, such as pushing Washington to allow Tel Aviv to sell American technology-based weapons systems to Delhi. Annual bilateral trade is approximately \$5 billion, with a prospective free trade agreement expected to treble this year. India too wants to replicate Israel's high-tech industry (Rajiv,2022). While the Palestinians cannot assist India with economic or military technology in the same way that Israel can, India benefits strategically from not alienating them. India is pursuing permanent membership in the UN Security Council, which will require backing from the Arab world and other developing countries. India's strategic interests in ties with Gulf Arab states and Iran are also expanding with growing foreign energy dependence and the increasing multipolarity of the Middle East resulting in competition with China.

The existing literature on the topic of India's balancing act on the Israel-Palestine conflict is focused on the historical relations of India with the two countries separately. Focusing on India's individual relation with both nations or in viz a viz US, fragments of a section focusing on how both the internal factors of these countries and with each other interplay in India's diplomatic policy. (Barel,2014) gave a brief analysis of a dynamic evolution of India's relation with the Israel since 1922. The book argues that the shift in the India's preference of Israel over Palestine is not a sudden one rather it has evolved over time. (Kumaraswamy,2017) argues that before Modi, India has been balancing its relations with Israel and Palestine but with the advent of Modi it has now *de-hyphenated* it. Meaning that besides being unapologetic about engaging with Israel, he is now prepared to deal with both the parties independently and bilaterally. Earlier also P. R. Kumaraswamy in 2010 in his book titled "India's Israel Policy" debunks the belief of many as to the India's homogenous policy towards the Middle East. Emphasising that since the early days of India's Independence many within the country have supported and pursued relations with the Israel. He goes on to underscore the factors such as anticolonial sentiments and major Muslim population on shaping and hindering relations between the two nations. His views had been in conformity with the (Srivastava,1970) that the India's policy have long been measured in term of its likely repercussions on India's interests in the Arab world. Much of this attitude towards Israel goes back even before when India became independent. The attitude of the Congress Party that believed, the Arab-Jewish dispute was essentially between nationalist and imperialist forces. They failed to see beyond those lenses. Mahatma Gandhi in his article in November 1938 titled 'The Jews' expressed his views about the Arab-Jew question in Palestine and the persecution of the Jews in Germany. His entire view regarding the situation can be summed up in one sentence that is "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French". For many decades India foreign policy have been influenced and shadowed by the views of its national freedom struggle leaders. And with the most prominent and celebrated leader as Gandhi, his views and words have inspired and framed much of India's policies domestically and internationally. For the same reason it took India many years after its independence to recognise Israel. (Kumaraswamy,2018) has critically analysed the above article written by Gandhi in 1938 emphasising on the limited understanding of his on the Jewish religion and an accommodative attitude towards the Arab violence in Palestine. (Rubinoff,1995) talks about the factors that act as a catalyst for India in establishing diplomatic ties with the Israel. He argues that the change in India's attitude towards Israel is much due to it been an impediment in its relations with the United States. As its indifferent attitude towards Israel has caused most of its ardent supporters in congress to alienate themselves with India. But the relation between the two countries which were still born for 40 years have certainly made up for the lost time. Beside from the traditional export and import, now Israel has been able to capture the untapped and vast market of India. Israel patience has been awarded and India too has benefitted from this normalisation of relationship between the two. Pate (2020) explores India's foreign policy towards Israel following the NDA government's rise to power, analysing it through the lens of practical geopolitical reasoning. Under this framework, India is represented as a rising global actor, and Israel as a key player in West Asia, paving the way for the Modi-led government to formalize and strengthen the India-Israel bilateral partnership. Modi's historic visit to Israel marked a turning point, solidifying this partnership as an overt, normalized relationship that had long been understated." Building further on this foundation, the theoretical framework of Critical Geopolitics, pioneered by scholars such as Gearoid o Tuathail (1996), gives lens for deconstructing India's foreign policy shifts. Critical geopolitics focuses on the way global knowledge is produced and represented in state discourse, media, and the political rhetoric. As in the case of India-Israel relations, the geopolitical narrative constructed before the Modi government is a lot different than now. Modi government has time and time again portrayed India as a rising power, navigating through complex regional dynamics while maintain a balance between its traditional stance. This approach of critical geopolitical study aligns with a broader aspect of the

subject given by [John Agnew \(1999\)](#), which emphasises the role of national identity and representation in shaping a country's foreign policy decision. After 2014, India's foreign policy is such that solely focuses in its pragmatic interests. India's geopolitical narrative now incorporates Israel as a strategic ally. Additionally, Simon Dalby's Critical approach to geopolitics offers useful insights as how the geopolitical stories are not neutral, they are formed through power relations, media and policy narratives. India's action towards the Middle East and its balancing act and narratives, exemplify the use of geopolitical storytelling. India stance on lot of the global conflicts such as that of Russia-Ukraine shows a lot more than balancing act on its behalf but also putting itself and its citizen needs first before taking any action. India has represented itself both as a rising power and a responsible global actor. Not coming under the pressure of global narrative rather framing its own path which seems to be beneficial for it. The broader literature on post-9/11 securitization of foreign policy, particularly the security threat India have had experienced from its neighbours, illustrates how India's partnerships with countries like Israel are framed in terms of national security, counterterrorism, regional security and economic growth. These themes are evident in India's engagement with Israel, where the cooperation in defence, technology and security sectors are prioritized alongside its diplomatic balancing act.

This article critically examines the India's foreign policy balancing act amidst the Israel-Palestine conflict through the lens of Critical Geopolitics. By analysing the geopolitical narratives, discourses, and representations that shape India's diplomatic manoeuvres, the paper explores how India negotiates its strategic partnerships with Israel while maintaining historical solidarity with Palestine. Drawing on official statements, policy documents, and diplomatic engagements, this study highlights the geopolitical storylines India constructs to balance its domestic considerations, energy security needs, and international relations in the Middle East. Furthermore, the article situates India's stance within its broader Middle East policy. The paper illuminates the complex interplay between India's strategic interests and its geopolitical representations, offering a critical analysis of how these factors influence India's engagement with the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict.

2. ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT: CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

The conflict pits Israeli desires for security in what it considers a hostile region against the Palestinians aspirations for their own state.

On May 14, 1948, Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion, declared the modern State of Israel, providing a safe haven for Jews fleeing persecution and seeking a national home on land to which they had profound ties. Palestinians refer to Israel's establishment as the Nakba, or catastrophe, which resulted in their dispossession and shattered their ambitions of independence. In the conflict that followed, some 700,000 Palestinians, half the Arab population of what was British-ruled Palestine, fled or were driven from their homes, ending up in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, as well as in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. is largely divided

Israel, a strong US ally, disputes the claim that it drove Palestinians from their homes, noting that it was attacked by five Arab governments the day after its founding. Armistice treaties ceased war in 1949, but there was no genuine peace. Israel launched the historic Six-Day War in 1967 by striking Egypt and Syria before they could strike Israel. Israel has occupied the West Bank, Arab East Jerusalem, which it seized from Jordan, and Syria's Golan Heights ever since. The Yom Kippur War began in 1973, when Egypt and Syria assaulted Israeli positions around the Suez Canal and the Golan Heights ([Reuters, n.d](#))

Israel retaliated by attacking Lebanon in 1982, evacuating thousands of Palestinian fighters under Yasser Arafat by sea after a 10-week blockade. In 2006, war broke out in Lebanon again when Hezbollah fighters kidnapped two Israeli troops, prompting Israel to respond. In 2005, Israel abandoned Gaza, which it had taken from Egypt in 1967. However, Gaza experienced severe flare-ups in 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2021, which included Israeli air strikes and Palestinian rocket fire, as well as occasional cross-border incursions by either side. There have been two Palestinian intifadas, one from 1987 to 1993 and another from 2000 to 2005. The second witnessed a surge of Hamas suicide attacks against Israelis. Egypt and Israel signed a peace pact in 1979, bringing an end to their 30-year animosity. The Oslo Accords, which granted limited Palestinian authority, were signed in 1993 by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Arafat. In 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a peace pact. During the 2000 Camp David conference, President Bill Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and Arafat were unable to reach a final peace agreement. In 2002, an Arab proposal proposed normalizing relations with all Arab countries in exchange for Israel's complete departure from the lands it captured during the 1967 Middle East conflict, the establishment of a Palestinian state, and a "just solution" for Palestinian refugees. Peace efforts have been stalled since 2014, when talks failed between Israelis and Palestinians in Washington. Palestinians later boycotted dealings with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump since it reversed decades of U.S. policy by refusing to endorse the two-state solution - the peace formula that envisages a Palestinian state established in territory that Israel captured in 1967. (Sayaki,2023).

Table 1:

Key Historical Events in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

YEAR	EVENTS
1897	The First Zionist Congress is held in Basel, Switzerland, led by Theodor Herzl, promoting the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
1917	Balfour Declaration: The British government expresses support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine.
1920	The League of Nations grants Britain the mandate to administer Palestine, further escalating tensions between Jews and Arabs in the region.
1936-39	The Arab Revolt in Palestine: Palestinian Arabs launch an uprising against British rule and increased Jewish immigration.
1947	UN Partition Plan: The United Nations proposes a plan to divide Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem under international control.
1948	Establishment of the State of Israel: Israel declares independence. Arab-Israeli War begins as neighbouring Arab states invade. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians flee or are expelled (Nakba).
1949	Armistice Agreements: Israel and its neighbours (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria) sign armistice agreements, establishing the borders of Israel.
1964	Formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), with the aim of liberating Palestine through armed struggle.
1967	THE SIX-DAY WAR: Israel defeats Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and occupies the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights.
1973	Yom Kippur War: Egypt and Syria launch a surprise attack on Israel to reclaim lost territory, but Israel eventually prevails.
1978	Camp David Accords: Egypt becomes the first Arab country to sign a peace agreement with Israel, facilitated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter.
1987-93	First Intifada: A Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation begins in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, leading to increased international attention to the conflict.
1993	Oslo Accords: Israel and the PLO sign a historic agreement, granting limited self-governance to Palestinians in parts of the West Bank and Gaza and recognizing each other.
2000-05	Second Intifada: A more violent Palestinian uprising breaks out after failed peace negotiations, leading to widespread violence and Israeli military actions.
2005	Israel withdraws from the Gaza Strip, but maintains control over its borders, airspace, and maritime access.
2006	Hamas wins the Palestinian legislative elections, leading to increased tensions between Fatah (which controls the West Bank) and Hamas (which controls Gaza).
2008-09	Gaza War: Israel launches military operations against Hamas in Gaza after rocket fire into Israeli territory.
2014	Another major Gaza conflict between Israel and Hamas results in significant casualties and destruction.
2017	U.S. President Donald Trump recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, sparking widespread protests and condemnation.
2020	The Abraham Accords: Israel normalizes relations with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, but the core issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace remains unresolved.
2021	Israel-Gaza Conflict: Renewed fighting breaks out between Hamas and Israel, leading to a ceasefire after 11 days of hostilities.
2023	Ongoing tensions continue, with sporadic clashes in the West Bank and Gaza, and peace talks remain stalled.

Source: Author own creation.

PRESENT SCENARIO

In October 2023, Hamas militants fired rockets into Israel and stormed southern Israeli cities and towns across the Gaza Strip in an unprovoked attack on Israeli residents, killing over 1,300 and taking hundreds hostage. Following this day, Israel officially declared war on Hamas, with the defence minister instructing the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to carry out a "complete siege" of Gaza. This is the most serious escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in decades.

Following this, Israel ordered over a million Palestinian inhabitants in northern Gaza to flee ahead of a ground assault that began on October 27. The ground invasion began in the north, coinciding with Israel's ongoing aerial bombardment. The initial stage of the ground invasion concluded on November 24 with a hostage-for-prisoner transfer, which allowed further aid into Gaza. After seven days, the war resumed, particularly in Khan Younis, southern Gaza's largest city and Israel's claim of a Hamas stronghold. Under pressure from its leading partner, the United States, Israel stated that it will begin withdrawing troops from the Gaza Strip in January 2024. Since then, military analysts believe the IDF has evacuated at least 90% of the troops who were in the zone a few months ago, leaving only one brigade ([Centre for Preventive Action, 2024](#)). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on the other hand, remains adamant that an Israeli offensive in Rafah, the Gaza Strip's southernmost city where over one million Palestinians have sought safety, is critical to destroying Hamas.

While the US said there was "no direct evidence" that Iranian intelligence and security personnel actively assisted Hamas in planning its October 7 attack, Iran has a long-standing patronage connection with Hamas and other terrorist groups in the Middle East. Israel has traded artillery fire with Iran-backed Hezbollah practically daily and bombed Syrian military facilities and airports, raising concerns that the conflict could spread north. To the south, Yemen's Houthi rebels have fired multiple missiles against Israel. Meanwhile, the Islamic Resistance of Iraq, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias, has claimed responsibility for hundreds of attacks on American military targets in Iraq and Syria since the conflict began. So far in the battle, the Israeli strike in September 2024 has been the most significant in recent years. Following Israel's detonation of several pager devices used by Hezbollah in an attempt to disrupt communication and target the militant group's members, Ismail Haniyeh, a top Hamas leader, was assassinated on September 25th by an explosive device covertly smuggled into the Tehran guesthouse where he was staying, according to seven Middle Eastern officials, including two Iranians and an American. Mr. Haniyeh was in the Iranian capital for the presidential inauguration. The device was detonated remotely, according to the five authorities, after it was determined that he was in his guesthouse room ([Bergman, Mazzetti, Fassihi, 2024](#)). The assassination has threatened to unleash another wave of violence in the Middle East and upend the ongoing negotiations to end the war in Gaza. Mr. Haniyeh had been a top negotiator in the cease-fire talks. On 27 September 2024, a day after the assassination of the Hamas militant group leader Ismail Haniyeh, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed during an address to the UN General Assembly on Friday said that his country would continue its military operation in Lebanon. Netanyahu declared in his address that Israel is "winning," and he pledged to "continue degrading Hezbollah until all our objectives are met." Hezbollah has returned fire with scores of rockets and missiles and has rallied governments across the world to urge restraint ([Tol Staff, 2024](#)).

This ongoing and prolonged war and its regional fallouts can affect India's economic and strategic moves, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and maintaining a balance between relations with Israel and Iran ([Quamar, 2024](#)). Since the Israel-Hamas War, the Middle East's geopolitical situation has remained on tenterhooks. Furthermore, geopolitical trends, mainly the rising Chinese footprints, may limit India's manoeuvring space in this strategic region. The implied truth is that India has not openly explained the rationale for its various tactics. Two key elements can explain India's decisions. One of Israel's present priorities is to eradicate terrorism, which is consistent with India's relentless war against all forms of terrorism. In recent years, Israel has become India's dependable partner in the security and commercial areas. Second, to offset any negative Palestinian sentiments against India for its stand at the UN, PM Modi assured the Palestine President of India's continued humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian civilians.

The Middle East's geopolitics are still changing. And how the Israel-Hamas war ends may influence India's intentions to serve as economic and connectivity partners on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide. The outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict has most certainly put a Saudi-Israeli normalization agreement on hold, at least for the time being. While calling for an end to the escalation, Saudi Arabia has joined Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar in blaming the violence on the Israeli occupation. Despite the strategic benefits that Riyadh could gain from improved relations with Israel, the internal and regional political cost of pursuing normalization amid the protracted conflict would be prohibitively expensive. In contrast to the Saudi attitude, the UAE has reaffirmed its ties with Israel, declaring that it was 'appalled' by the targeting of Israeli citizens. The UAE takes a harsh approach against the Muslim Brotherhood and its associated groups, such as Hamas, which it considers a threat to its security ([Cornwell, 2023](#)). Furthermore, R Ravindra, India's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, stated that "the ongoing conflict is also impacting the safety of maritime commercial traffic in the Indian Ocean, including some attacks in the vicinity of India," indicating that this war has a direct bearing on India's own energy and economic interests. There have been concerns about the safety of maritime transportation in the region. The Houthis claim the assaults are in response to Israel's conflict in Gaza and to demonstrate their solidarity with the Palestinians. Ravindar reiterated India's long-standing support for a Two-State solution in which the Palestinian people can live freely in an independent country within secure borders, while taking Israel's security needs into account ([Bilal, 2023](#)). India believes that only a Two-State solution, achieved through direct and meaningful negotiations between both sides on final status issues, will deliver the long-term peace that the people of Israel and Palestine desire and deserve. However, this could only be accomplished if the only guarantor of peace is a Two-State solution with Israel's security assured ("[India supports Palestine's membership at UN.](#)" 2024).

The Arab Gulf states are also likely apprehensive that an escalation will result in the violence spilling over into the Gulf region. An Israeli ground invasion of Gaza might spark Hizbullah's involvement, necessitating US engagement. In reprisal, Iran or its partner groups may target US bases in the Gulf region, escalating the confrontation into a regional war. If this happens and the Arab Gulf states become entangled in the fight, it might send ripples across the oil market. It serves as a reminder that what happens in one corner of the world can have far-reaching consequences, especially when dealing with

something as important as oil. So, even if Israel and Palestine are not the world's largest oil producers, their conflict has the potential to have a global influence (Goodman,2024). If oil prices continue to climb, inflation will grow, putting strain on global economies. Indian stocks with an Israeli connection, including Adani Ports, Sun Pharmaceutical, Dr Reddy's and Lupin, NMDC, Kalyan Jewellers, and Titan, may see favourable and unfavourable effects, depending on India's future diplomatic decisions (Govindharaj, Yoganandham, Abdul, 2023). However, given the trust gap on both sides, thawing relations between Israel and Arab governments would require some time and effort. In the latest developments, have been seen that Israel's strategic advantage in the region falls slightly with the economic unshackling of Iran following the nuclear deal and with Russia making clear it will intervene to buttress its allies like Assad, providing relief for Hezbollah and Iran. There is also a longer-term trend that will further Israel's need for new Great Power partners. Neutrality makes Delhi a more valuable diplomatic partner, giving India more leverage with Israel, Palestine, Arab states and Iran. If Modi can accurately gauge the value Middle Eastern countries place on ties with Delhi, it could be possible to achieve India's interests while still adhering to its values, instilling confidence in India's diplomatic capabilities in a complex geopolitical landscape.

3. Historical & Strategic Evolution of India's Stance on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Since independence, India has supported the Palestinian cause, driven by a combination of anticolonial solidarity with Arab states and commitment to the Non-Aligned Movement (Motwani,2023). India voted against Israel's admission to the United Nations and for Zionism to be condemned as racist. This was driven by Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to a Jewish state in Palestine, India's sizable Muslim population, and a desire to maintain positive relations with Arab countries. India's position to Palestine was also influenced by Arab consensus, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the United Nations. When the Palestinian partition plan was put to a vote at the United Nations, India, like the Arab countries, voted against it. India has also opposed Israel's admission to the UN. During the Cold War, India aligned with the Soviet Union, which supported the Arab states while implicitly retaining a pro-Palestine stance.

A fundamental shift in India's policy occurred in 1992, when the country established full diplomatic relations with Israel. Despite this, India continues to support the Palestinian cause. Only after the Cold War ended did Prime Minister Narasimha Rao take the risk of establishing diplomatic ties with Israel, despite the potential ramifications with Arab states. During the latter half of the twentieth century, India made mostly symbolic steps to help Palestine. In 1988, it was one of the first countries to recognize Palestine as a state, and in 1996, it established a representative office on Palestinian territory that is still in operation today. Meanwhile, Israel was not forgotten. Consular relations between the two states began in 1996, followed by a close relationship in defence and security.

The election of a Modi-led administration in 2014 marked a shift in Indian foreign policy. India aspired to establish and sustain open relations without subscribing to ideological positions, so that national interests and foreign policy independence could be prioritized. Modi enacted a de-hyphenation approach toward Israel. The policy's goal was to establish diplomatic ties with Israel separate from those India would have with Palestine. Mr. Modi's attitude to the Israel-Palestine conflict has been proactive. In 2017, he became the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel, and in 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited Delhi. Palestine was also not overlooked: Modi was the first to visit Ramallah, just a month after Netanyahu's visit. In 2019, the Indian prime minister referred to his Israeli counterpart as a "dear friend". The Indian leadership has acknowledged that, while it is vital to maintain closer ties with both Israel and the Arabs, concealing the country's growing friendship with Israel is counterproductive (Kaura,2017). However, India has become closer to Israel than ever before. Israel and India have reached agreements on issues of common interest, such as defence and trade. Since 2017, India has been Israel's top buyer of defence products and the country's second-largest Asian trading partner. During Netanyahu's 2018 visit, several trade memoranda of understanding were signed.

Modi's swift condemnation of Hamas following the October 7 assaults, the clearest indicator of India's departure from non-alignment, demonstrates the two countries' blossoming friendship. In recent days, Israeli businesses have sought to replace Palestinian workers (whose permits were revoked during the fighting) with Indian migrants. India's close cooperation with Israel on such issues has necessitated the maintenance of friendly relations. As demonstrated well in 2017, when he made a well-publicized and photographed journey to Israel, the first by any Indian prime minister in history.

The cooperation between these two nations also has a pragmatic and ideological foundation. India has already faced Islamic extremism, such as the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in 2008, a situation shared with Israel, which also has Islamic militancy on its border. Delhi and Tel Aviv both feel compelled to respond to such threats to state security with force and military might ("The evolution of India's Israel-Palestine policy," 2024). These two nations will undoubtedly continue to work closely together on security and defence issues. Mr Modi's BJP and Mr Netanyahu's Likud, both of which have similar political views, serve as a vital link between the two governments. India's shift toward Israel is part of a decades-long transition. Following independence, a strong postcolonial affinity to Palestine reigned supreme in New Delhi. India did not establish formal diplomatic relations with Israel until after the Oslo peace process began in 1992. Over the next decade, a blossoming, if still understated, defence and technological collaboration brought Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to New Delhi in 2003. By that time, Israel was India's second-largest weaponry supplier, after Russia. However, it was only after 2014 that India's connections with Israel came out of the shadows (Markey, 2023).

The current position of India is unique as it handles great power competition while maintaining its core interests. Concurrently, the country's continuation of calling for a two-state solution creates the potential to further deepen its relations with Arab nations such as the UAE (through the I2U2 dialogue) and Saudi Arabia (through the IMEC initiative). The ability to maintain such autonomy in its foreign policy is a result of decision making based on national interests rather than moral or ideological views. An illustration of this strategy is India's refusal to distance itself from Russia for the war in Ukraine. Despite pressure from the US and its allies, it has refused to break longstanding economic and defence ties with Moscow. It is a new model of 'strategic autonomy': India can pursue beneficial relationships with multiple allies without committing to intractable policy positions.

4. GEOPOLITICAL NARRATIVES AND STRATEGIC INTEREST IN INDIA-ISRAEL RELATIONS

In recent years, India and Israel have formed a strong strategic connection, with defence cooperation serving as a cornerstone of the alliance. This collaboration addresses both countries' common security concerns, utilizes their technological prowess, and boosts their military capabilities. Israel has emerged as a major provider of advanced defence technology to India, such as radars, missile defence systems, and unmanned aerial vehicles. A prominent recent example is India's Barak-8 air defence system, which is an important component to the country's missile shield. This collaboration not only strengthens India's defence capabilities, but it also aligns with the "Make in India" effort, which includes joint ventures such as the Adani-Elbit alliance for UAV manufacture in India. Beyond arms sales, the collaboration includes knowledge sharing and joint research and development (R&D).

This focus on co-creation fosters technological innovation and leverages the strengths of both nations. Israel, a leader in areas like cyber defence and counter-terrorism, shares its expertise, while India, with its robust domestic defence industry, contributes its manufacturing muscle. This strategic partnership transcends immediate security concerns. It sends a strong message of regional cooperation and deters potential adversaries. The recent I2U2 grouping, which includes India, Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates, exemplifies this broader strategic vision. The success of the India-Israel defence partnership can be attributed to several factors.

- There's a strong political commitment from both governments to nurture this relationship.
- The complementarity of their needs – India requires advanced technology, and Israel seeks a reliable market.
- The personal rapport between the leaders has also played a crucial role.

There are obstacles to overcome. Balancing this connection with India's long-standing ties with Russia, as well as Israel's delicate relations with some Arab nations, would need diplomatic skill. In addition, securing technology transfer and resolving potential cost concerns are continuing discussions. The future of India-Israel defence collaboration looks good. The "Indo-Israel Vision on Defence Production," inked in 2021, lays out a plan for increased collaboration in areas such as co-production and cooperative development of next-generation defence systems. The expanding space technology and cybersecurity industries are also ripe for exploration. But in the backdrop India is also attempting to strike a balance in its Middle Eastern policy. Following Hamas' attack on Israel in October, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged his solidarity for Israel. Just four months later, he went on a successful Middle East tour. He hosted an Indian diaspora rally in the United Arab Emirates and inaugurated the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi. Modi also visited Qatar, where he promised to deepen bilateral ties ([Miller, 2024](#)). These examples highlight the difficult balancing act India is seeking to do in the Middle East—and it appears Modi is succeeding. The United Arab Emirates is now India's third largest commercial partner, second largest export destination, and fourth largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Modi travelled from the UAE to Qatar, where he pledged to "further expand and deepen bilateral cooperation." The Qatar trip occurred after the Indian government successfully negotiated with the Qataris to release eight Indians sentenced to death for allegedly spying. The two hugely successful trips were preceded by Modi strongly voicing support for Israel following the attacks by Hamas, just over four months ago. The dizzying juggling act that India seems to be perfecting in West Asia is paying off in spades. But it comes with risks. Meanwhile large Indian companies have become competitive in securing infrastructure contracts in Arab nations, Indian and Arab companies have secured mutually beneficial energy deals (such as the liquefied natural gas deal between India and Qatar's state-owned hydrocarbon companies Petronet and Qatar Energy which will supply India 7.5 million tons of LNG per year for the next two decades), and Arab nations have pledged to invest billions in India (for example, Saudi Arabia has pledged \$100 billion) ([Miller, 2024](#)).

At the G20 Leader Summit last year, Modi announced the India-Middle-East-Europe-Economic Corridor (IMEEC) touted by some as a counter corridor to China's Belt and Road Initiative that involves Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, Germany, Italy, the European Union, and the United States in addition to India. The IMEEC corridor will also include an electricity cable, a hydrogen pipeline and a high-speed data cable ([Motwani, 2023](#)). Globally it is seen as a strategic move from India's side for having an upper hand to the growing Chinese influence in the Pacific Ocean. The corridor deepens India's strategic engagement with the Arabian- peninsula by establishing enduring connectivity and elevating political and strategic links with nations in the region.

Despite this move toward Arab nations, India maintains a strong relationship with Israel. Israel is one of India's top arms suppliers, and India remains hugely concerned about the spectre of state-sponsored Islamist terror groups. The most public expression was India's decision in July to abstain from a vote against Israel in the United Nations Human Rights Council that blamed Israel for "war crimes" perpetrated during Operation Protective Edge, while ignoring the war-mongering of Hamas and the terrorist organization's cynical use of its own civilian population as human shields to maximize Palestinian "martyrs." Admittedly, India has no interest in flaunting its improved ties with the Jewish state. At about 180 million, India has the largest Muslim population of any non-Muslim state ([JPOST Editorial, 2015](#)). India has profited little from its consistent pro-Palestinian position. Arab countries have failed to back India against Pakistan in its dispute over Kashmir. India has profited little from its consistent pro-Palestinian position. Arab countries have failed to back India against Pakistan in its dispute over Kashmir. Both countries face threats from Islamist terrorists who are motivated to violent acts not by anything India or Israel has done, but by what the countries represent. And ultimately, caving in to Muslim dictates is bad for India. Muslim countries have little of consequence to offer India. In contrast, Israel's innovative, dynamic, and free economy has so much to contribute and share with India. Indian farmers of all faiths can benefit from Israeli expertise in drip irrigation. Startups in Bangalore and Hyderabad see Israeli firms as role models. In addition, Israel has hailed India as a strategic partner in Asia, while China as merely a trading partner. And with Modi entrenched in power, and strategic interests aligned, we are poised to see India and Israel expand on their already-strong relationship ([Blarel & Sarkar, 2019](#)).

5. INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC BALANCING ACT AMID RISING TENSION

New Delhi's overarching geopolitical view, shared by the general public, most political leaders, and the permanent foreign-policy elite (civil officials, influential think tanks, etc.), is of a multipolar international order, with India at one of its poles. This will eventually force India to deal with the Israel-Palestine conflict not as a South Asian regional power, but as a great power. Modi's current support for Israel exemplifies a school of thought in Indian foreign policy that views the Middle East through the lens of South Asian politics (i.e., regional tensions with Pakistan), security challenges like terrorism, and previous approaches to Islamist militancy. Simply expressed, the public messaging for this stance is as follows: Israel and India both combat Islamic militants; so, we should be allies. The continuing conflict between Israel and Hamas, precipitated by the latter's brazen strike on Oct. 7, has brought it to the forefront. [Taneja \(2023\)](#) discusses New Delhi's diplomatic balancing of a "new" Middle East and its traditional support for the "old" Several commentators have noted that India's position toward the Middle East has shifted under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Gulf states have historically supplied more than 60% of India's oil and gas needs, making them essential to the country's energy security (PTI 2016). Over the previous decade, the financial worth of India's links with Gulf countries has increased as well. While India only represented only 3% of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)'s total trade in 1992, it represented 11% in 2012. By 2020, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had become India's fourth- and third-largest trade partners ([Pulipaka and Musaddi 2020](#)).

Some outside observers may perceive evidence of India's policy change toward Israel as minor, if not insignificant. The adage that Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has maintained in other sensitive geopolitical contexts applies equally to India's attitude in the Middle East: "Do not believe it is vital for India to join any axis. India has the right to make its own decisions that are balanced between its principles and interests." However, following the Hamas attack on October 7, India now has a significant stake in averting any regional military escalation that might eliminate such prospects permanently. A fast Israeli victory followed by the imposition of a Gulf-friendly governmental entity in Gaza would fit the Modi's objectives better than any other conclusion. If the fires of Gaza instead ignite the rest of the region in war, India's previous diplomatic expenditures would be lost, and, worse, the country would confront the terrifying prospect of a resurgent terrorist threat. So far, India has attempted to strike a balance in its attitude on the Israel-Hamas conflict. Nor has India criticized its old friend Russia for the Ukraine conflict, emphasizing the importance of communication and diplomacy in resolving it. During the G20 summit in 2023, PM Modi addressed the world leaders saying "The situation of insecurity and instability in the West Asian region is a matter of concern for all of us," he continued "It is necessary to ensure that the Israel-Hamas conflict does not become any form of a regional conflict.

To summarize, India's foreign policy in the context of the Israel-Palestine issue is governed by the need for balance. India strives to maintain peace in a dangerous region by preserving vital partnerships with Israel and the Arab countries. The result of the fight will have a significant impact on India's future role in the Middle East, including its geopolitical stature, economic ties, and internal security. As the situation progresses, India is likely to continue to support for diplomacy and a peaceful conclusion, consistent with its broader strategic autonomy policy. This delicate balancing act demonstrates India's expanding global influence, as it navigates the complexity of regional and international power relations while focusing on its own national goals.

6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: FACTORS INFLUENCING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

After its independence in 1947, Indian foreign policymakers had to deal with an ideologically divided world. Western (liberal-capitalist) and Eastern (communist) blocs were led by the United States of America (USA) and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), respectively. Instead of joining any of the two blocs, India, along with many of the then newly independent colonies, established the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961, which became a voice of the developing countries at multilateral forums. The Cold War (1947-1991) based World Order crumbled with the disintegration of the former USSR in 1991. The end of the Cold War made many countries, including India, rethink their foreign policy and adjust their economic structures. In the immediate post-Cold War years, India took political steps to improve its relationship with the USA, Western European countries, and China. In 1991, India also adopted a new economic policy based on liberalization, privatization and globalization.

In the 30 years after India significantly shifted its foreign and economic policy, much has changed in global politics. To secure its interests in a changed world, India has deliberately, or out of compulsion, made certain adjustments to its foreign policy. However, some of the basic tenets of India's foreign policy remain unchanged, though modified from time to time to achieve the country's interests. The article by Smruti S Pattanaik¹ recognizes that India's neighbourhood constitutes the core of the country's foreign policy. It is entwined with the security and stability of India's periphery, home to diverse ethnic groups with familial ties and socio-cultural affinities that often crisscross physical borders. India's neighbourhood policy has undergone several shifts; it is slowly moving away from an overtly security-centric approach towards forging development partnerships with its neighbours to ensure security. From the theoretical view, India's Foreign Policy could be divided into seven phases of evolution.

On similar lines, India's relationship with Israel, too, after its independence, has seen significant shifts. Although India recognized Israel on September 17, 1950, it did not establish diplomatic relations until 1992. The civilizational relations between the countries date back more than two millennia. India has welcomed Jews for several centuries, and their contribution, in turn, has enriched Indian culture. India is known in Israel as an ancient nation with strong cultural traditions and as an attractive tourist destination ([Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, n.d.](#)). In the following years, bilateral ties gradually gained substantial momentum, particularly in agriculture, defence, tourism, and trade. Notably, India has become Israel's top market for defence exports, prompting a growing realization in New Delhi that Tel Aviv is vital for India's long-term strategic interests. Against the backdrop of burgeoning ties, the political glue that cemented India's policy shift occurred when Modi became the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel in 2017.

The following year, in January 2018, Modi hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in New Delhi, accompanied by a 130-strong trade delegation to boost commercial and diplomatic ties. India and Israel have established bilateral consultation mechanisms in all sectors of collaboration, including water, agriculture, counter-terrorism, and defence. The second Policy Planning Dialogue was held in Israel on May 29, 2023. The 15th India-Israel Forum, a Track 2 dialogue, was held in New Delhi in December 2022. The second round of consultations on U.N. and multilateral issues was held in Israel on May 23, 2022. The 16th Foreign Office Consultations were held in December 2020 ([Embassy of India, 2023](#)).

India is Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia and the seventh-largest globally. Though the bilateral merchandise trade is dominated mainly by diamonds, petroleum products, and chemicals, recent years have increased trade in electronic machinery, high-tech products, communications systems, and medical equipment. The two countries' defence collaboration has also seen tremendous growth in recent years. Israel has been willing to supply India with high-tech weapons without expecting an explicit change in India's voting patterns at the U.N. or a dilution of its pro-Palestine positioning (Ramachandran,2023).

In addition to defence security, energy security has created a niche in Indian foreign policy-making in recent years. Indian economic growth requires a considerable consumption of energy. Despite recent advances in developing renewable energy sources and the advent of electric vehicles, their share in the energy mix remains limited as oil meets most of the transportation sector's needs. The Middle East, including the Gulf region, contains almost half of the oil that is easily accessible. Russia, the Middle East, and now the United States are the primary sources of gas ([Abouyoub,2023](#)). Energy policies underwent a systemic shock beginning in 1973. Hence, India is particularly interested in energy diplomacy to secure reliable energy sources. As the Israel-Hamas conflict escalates, engulfing other regions into the war as Iran has already stepped in by attacking Israel poses serious concerns not only for India but economies around the world. Following Iran's attack and Israel's subsequent threats, tensions have escalated throughout the Middle East, leading to global repercussions. Anxiety is rising; stock markets fluctuate, inflation concerns mount and several Indian companies may suffer losses. India maintains trade relations with both Iran and Israel. Last year, trade with the two countries amounted to approximately Rs 1.1 lakh crore. Trade with Iran was valued at Rs 20,800 crore. During the same period, trade with Israel reached Rs 89,000 crore. Major Indian companies such as TCS, Infosys, Adani Ports, Sun Pharma, Lupin, SBI, Wipro, Tech Mahindra, NMDC, Kalyan Jewellers, Titan, and L&T have significant business interests in Israel. Should the conflict between the two countries escalate, many companies could face substantial losses.

Amidst this tension, crude oil prices have strengthened, with Brent crude reaching around \$90 per barrel and WTI at \$85 per barrel in the global market ([Khan, 2024](#)). A full-blown Israel-Iran war can imperil India's oil security. Despite India's rising oil imports from Russia, it still depends significantly on oil and gas imports from the Middle East. Amidst this attack, on October 2, 2024, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin visited Iran to strengthen ties with a plan to link Russia to the Persian Gulf. The strategic discussions revolve around the ongoing escalation of hostilities in the region, which some analysts believe could lead to a Third World War. In light of this, both countries focus on enhancing cooperation across political, economic, and military sectors. India's foreign policy discourse often frames its actions as balancing strategic pragmatism with moral principles. India continues to express support for Palestine on international platforms while strengthening relations with Israel for economic and security reasons. This duality in India's foreign policy—supporting the Palestinian cause while maintaining strong strategic ties with Israel—reflects the country's *geopolitical imperatives*. Based upon factors such as Energy Security, Diaspora Diplomacy, Domestic political consideration, its strategic partnership with Israel and global positioning. On October 02, 2024, PM Modi wished Netanyahu a Jewish New Year. On the same day, India External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar, while stating the Carnegie Endowment Centre for International Peace in the U.S., said that India is "very much" concerned at the possibility of a regional war. He said that New Delhi "understands" that Tel Aviv needs to respond, asserting that any retaliation or response by Israel should take into account international humanitarian law. "We regard October 7 as a terrorist attack. We understand that Israel needed to respond, but we also believe that any response by any country has to take into account international humanitarian law and that it must be careful about any damage or implications for civilian populations," said S Jaishankar, calling for an international humanitarian effort in the conflict-hit region. It is becoming more evident that a complex interplay of regional, domestic, and global factors influences India's foreign policy decisions. India's ability to balance these multiple interests while maintaining diplomatic relations with Israel and Palestine is a testament to its pragmatic approach to diplomacy. However, this balancing act is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in the face of rising regional tensions and the shifting geopolitical landscape in the Middle East ([Blarel,2022](#)).

7. CONCLUSION

The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, now escalating towards war with Iran in the picture, has placed India in a challenging position, requiring it to navigate through the multiple *geopolitical realities*. By adopting a Critical Geopolitics framework, this paper has deconstructed India's diplomatic narratives and highlighted how India's approach reflects its broader global ambitions and regional aspirations. Looking ahead, as tensions in the region continue to evolve, India will likely need to reassess its strategies, ensuring that its foreign policy remains flexible yet consistent with its core values of non-alignment and strategic autonomy. The challenges posed by the conflict could shape not only India's regional relationships but also its international standing in an increasingly multipolar world. India's policy in the Middle East as well is a delicate balancing act influenced by a range of factors, from the strategic interest to domestic needs consideration. PM Modi's public condemnation of Hamas attacks, while maintaining a call for restraint and adherence to international humanitarian law, reflects this complex approach. India portrays itself as a responsible global actor, emphasizing peace, stability, and the rule of law. The critical geopolitics framework exposes the underlying contradictions in India's discourse, where the moral imperative of supporting Palestinian self-determination coexists with the realpolitik of enhancing its ties with Israel. By deconstructing these narratives, it becomes clear that India's stance is heavily influenced by both domestic and international factors. Domestically, the Modi government faces pressure from various interest groups, including a growing pro-Israel sentiment among some political factions, while also needing to account for the views of its large Muslim

population, which traditionally supports Palestine. Internationally, India's relationship with Israel offers strategic advantages, particularly in terms of defence technology and intelligence, which are crucial for India's security apparatus, especially concerning its borders with China and Pakistan.

Furthermore, India's aspirations for greater global influence, including a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, push it to adopt a more pragmatic stance on conflicts like Israel-Palestine, where its actions are closely watched by the international community. As India continues to rise as an economic and geopolitical power, its foreign policy must adapt to the shifting dynamics of the Middle East. This includes not only managing relations with Israel and Palestine but also maintaining strong ties with key regional actors like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which are vital for India's energy security and economic growth.

India's foreign policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict is shaped by a complex web of historical legacies, ideological commitments, and strategic imperatives. Using critical geopolitics as a lens allows for a deeper understanding of the narratives and representations that drive India's diplomatic actions. Moving forward, India's ability to maintain this delicate balance will be crucial for its broader regional strategy and its standing on the global stage. As the Middle East continues to evolve, India's engagement with the region will remain a key aspect of its foreign policy, requiring careful navigation of competing interests and geopolitical realities.

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