India’s Balancing Act in Israel-Palestine War

For Prelims: India’s Balancing Act in Israel-Palestine War, Israel-Palestine conflict, Mahatma Gandhi, Cold War, West Bank, India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

For Mains: India’s Balancing Act in Israel-Palestine War, Bilateral, Regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Source: TH

Why in News?

India's diplomatic stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict has evolved over the years, reflecting a delicate balance between its historical support for Palestine and its growing relationship with Israel.
How has been India’s Policy over the Israel-Palestine Conflict?

- **Background:**
  - India's [historical stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict](#) leaned towards Palestine, driven by factors such as [Mahatma Gandhi’s opposition to a Jewish state in Palestine](#), India's large Muslim population, and the need to maintain good relations with Arab countries.
    - India’s position with regard to Palestine was also guided by the general consensus in the Arab world, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the United Nations.
    - When the partition of Palestine plan was put to vote at the UN, India voted against, along with the Arab countries. India also opposed Israel's admission to the UN.
    - During the Cold War, India aligned itself with the Soviet Union, which supported the Arab states, thus perpetuating its pro-Palestine position.
  - **Shift in India's Policy:**
    - **Establishment of Diplomatic Relations:** In 1992, India established full diplomatic relations with Israel, marking a significant shift. Despite this, India continued to voice support for the Palestinian cause.
      - It was only after the end of the Cold War that Prime Minister Narasimha Rao took the bold step of establishing diplomatic ties with Israel, irrespective of potential fallout with the Arab nations.
    - **Balance in National Interest:** India's diplomatic decisions are guided by national interest, necessitating a balance between maintaining strong relations with Israel, supporting Palestine, and developing ties with the Arab world.

What are the Current Policy and Diplomatic Nuances?

- **Relations with Israel as a National Interest:**
  - India's relations with Israel have strengthened considerably in recent years, encompassing various sectors like trade, technology, defense, and counter-terrorism cooperation.
  - India's support for Israel is seen as a response to its fight against cross-border terrorism, although the situations in Israel and India differ significantly.

- **Stands With Palestine’s Cause:**
  - Besides growing relations with Israel, India has reiterated its stand for Palestine's cause.
    - Amid the ongoing tensions, USD 29.53 million has been contributed by India to the [UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)](#) for Palestinian refugees.
  - India also sent nearly 6.5 tonnes of medical aid and 32 tonnes of disaster relief material for the people of Palestine.

- **India Balancing its Stance:**
  - In 2017, the Indian Prime Minister for the first time visited Israel and in 2018 he made an official visit to Palestine for the first time.
  - In 2017, India voted against the U.S. and Israel for an attempt to declare unilaterally all of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital.
  - India's policy is clear, they condemn terrorism but do not support indiscriminate reprisal bombings.

- **India’s Official Stand:**
  - India's official position on the Israel-Palestine conflict remains unchanged, advocating for a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine as good neighbors.
    - It was only after the mediation of the US, in the 1991 Madrid Peace conference, a two-state solution was agreed to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
  - This is evidenced by the Indian Prime Minister's visit to Ramallah in the West Bank in 2018.

What will be the Likely Implications of Israel Palestine Conflict on India?
Defense Deals with Israel:
- India has a significant defense relationship with Israel, with defense procurement and technology cooperation. The conflict may impact this relationship, as Israel may focus more on its security needs during the conflict.
- Israel supplies the most military equipment to India, with the military business between the two countries worth around USD 2.1 billion.

Energy Security:
- India is dependent on oil imports from the Middle East, and any escalation in the region could affect energy prices and, subsequently, India's economy.
- Since all the world economies are interconnected therefore, if countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran get involved in ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict then definitely there will be direct consequences over India's energy supply, economy and investment.

Impact on India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor:
- The conflict has the potential to affect the stability of the Middle East, a region of strategic importance to India.
- An escalation of hostilities could have implications for India's interests and engagements in the region.
  - India recently signed the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as an ambitious infrastructure project aimed at connecting India, the Middle East, and Europe through various transportation modes, including shipping and rail networks.
  - Instability in the region can create security challenges, and affect the smooth operation of the IMEC.

Way Forward

- Maintaining a status quo in the Israel-Palestine conflict is a challenging endeavor, and India can play a constructive role by promoting a peaceful resolution based on a two-nation theory.
- India should continue its diplomatic efforts and use its international influence to encourage both Israel and Palestine to return to the negotiating table.
- India must continue to act as a mediator and provide humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people to address the immediate needs and alleviate suffering in conflict-affected areas.
- Encourage dialogues and exchanges between Israeli and Palestinian civil society groups, academics, and youth to promote mutual understanding and trust.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q 1. Which one of the following countries of South-West Asia does not open out to the Mediterranean Sea? (2015)

(a) Syria
(b) Jordan
(c) Lebanon
(d) Israel

Ans: (b)

Mains


Q2. “India’s relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back.” Discuss. (2018)