



## Strengthening India-West Asia Ties

**For Prelims:** [Iran and Israel](#), [West Asian region](#), [United Nations](#), [Strait of Hormuz](#), [Palestinian-Israeli conflict](#), [Gulf Cooperation Council](#), [Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements](#), [Belt and Road Initiative](#), [Organization of Islamic Cooperation](#).

**For Mains:** India's Relation with West Asian Countries, Challenges Related to India-West Asia Relations, Measures can India Adopt to Balance its Relations to Western Asian Countries

[Source: HT](#)

### Why in News?

**West Asia** holds major **strategic and economic importance for India** under the '**Link West**' policy. India's deepening ties with the countries like **UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel** reflect its strategic shift to secure **energy, enhance trade**, and assert its **role in West Asian geopolitics**.

### How is West Asia Geographically Classified?

- **West Asia** is a subregion of **Asia**, located **West of Central and South Asia, South of Eastern Europe, and North of Africa**.
  - It is bordered by major water bodies including the **Mediterranean Sea, Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Caspian Sea**, and the **Gulf of Oman**.
- The region comprises **18 countries**, with key subregions like the **Arabian Peninsula (e.g., Saudi Arabia, UAE)**, the **Fertile Crescent** (e.g., Iraq, Syria), the **Caucasus** (e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan), and **Anatolia** (Turkey).
- Home to around **283 million people**, the region is geopolitically significant due to its vast **oil reserves**, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula.
  - **Saudi Arabia**, with 35 million people, has the region's largest economy, while **Bahrain** is the smallest by population.



## India's Look West Policy:

**Launched in 2005**, It aims to **enhance India's political, economic, and security cooperation with West Asia**, focusing on **energy security, trade, and regional stability**, while maintaining **neutrality in regional political conflicts**.

- India views the Gulf as part of its extended neighbourhood, with Iran being a key part of its proximate neighbourhood, emphasizing geographic, economic, and cultural ties.

## What is the Significance of West Asia for India?

- Energy and Economic Ties:** West Asia is vital for India's energy security, supplying nearly **50% of its crude oil**. With over **40% of global natural gas reserves** and more than **50% of global oil reserves**, the region is crucial for India's oil-dependent economy.
  - Iraq**, a **key oil supplier**, was India's **fifth-largest trading partner in 2021-22**, while **Qatar**, **providing 41% of India's natural gas imports**, plays a vital role in India's security strategy.
  - The **UAE is India's 3rd largest trading partner**, with trade bolstered by the CEPA, while Saudi Arabia ranks 4th, formalized through the 2019 Strategic Partnership Council.

- **Connectivity & Trade Corridors:** West Asia is key to enhancing India's strategic connectivity. Initiatives like the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC)** connect India to Europe, countering **China's Belt and Road Initiative**.
  - The **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** links India to Central Asia and Russia via Iran's **Chabahar Port**, supporting India's Central Asia policy.
  - Vital maritime chokepoints like the **Strait of Hormuz** and **Bab el-Mandeb** ensure secure trade and energy flow for India.



- **Security & Counterterrorism Cooperation:** West Asia is vital for India's defense, security, and counterterrorism cooperation. India has strengthened ties with nations like **Saudi Arabia and the UAE in defense, IT, and counterterrorism efforts**.
  - The **rising missile and drone threats** from **Yemen's Houthi rebels** underscore the **region's security vulnerabilities**, as demonstrated by the recent **Red Sea Crisis**.
  - India's joint military exercises, **Desert Cyclone** with the UAE and **Naseem Al Bahr** with Oman, underscore its **deepening strategic ties and enhanced interoperability** with key Gulf partners.
- **Balanced Multilateral Diplomacy:** India-Israel cooperation spans **defence, cybersecurity, agriculture, and water management**.
  - India's participation in **mini-lateral initiatives** like **I2U2** (India, Israel, UAE, US) reflects its focus on **interest-based coalitions**.
  - India's continued engagement in **Afghanistan** through **infrastructure, education, and humanitarian aid** supports its regional stability objectives, countering **China and Pakistan's influence** in the region.
- **Diaspora and Remittance:** West Asia is home to over **9 million Indian expatriates**, whose remittances play a vital role in supporting India's economy.
  - In 2021, India received around **USD 87 billion** in remittances, with a major share coming from **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** countries.
  - Additionally, the large Indian diaspora enhances India's **soft power** and **socio-cultural engagement** in the region. Eg: **BAPS Hindu Temple in Abu Dhabi** is the first traditional



## What are the Challenges to India-West Asia Relations?

- **Limited Economic Ties:** Although efforts have been made to expand economic relations, trade between India and West Asia remains relatively limited compared to other regions.
  - For instance, **in 2019**, India's **total trade with West Asia** accounted for only **7.5%** of its global trade.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** West Asia is a **politically volatile region**, and India faces the challenge of navigating these **complex geopolitical dynamics**, such as maintaining ties with both **Israel and Palestine**, as well as managing strategic relationships with regional rivals like **Iran and Saudi Arabia**.
  - Also, political instability in several West Asian countries, including **Syria, Iraq, and Yemen**, has had a **negative impact on India's strategic and economic interests** in the region.
- **Competition with Other Major Powers:** India's interests in West Asia are influenced by the competing interests of global powers, particularly **China**, which has been increasing its regional influence.
  - India's interests in West Asia are shaped by the growing presence of global powers, particularly **China**, which has expanded its regional influence through **strategic investments in infrastructure and ports**, such as the development of the **Jebel Ali Port in the UAE** and **partnerships in Oman's Duqm Port**, posing a challenge to India's own maritime and economic outreach in the region.
- **Energy Diplomacy Issues:** West Asia supplies a **significant share of India's crude oil and natural gas**, making it vital to India's energy security.
  - **Geopolitical instability or conflict** in the region could disrupt supplies, impacting India's economy.
    - While India is steadily **transitioning to renewable energy, maintaining stable traditional energy ties with West Asia** remains crucial during this transition phase.

## What Measures can India Adopt to Balance its Ties to West Asia?

- **Balanced Diplomatic Approach:** India should **uphold its strategic autonomy and non-alignment policy** in West Asia, fostering **strong bilateral ties with key players** like **Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and the UAE**.
  - By avoiding overt alignment with any particular faction, India can navigate regional rivalries while safeguarding its national interests.
  - By **supporting and engaging in diplomatic efforts** like [Abraham Accords 2.0](#) between **Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran**, India can **strengthen its role as a constructive partner**, fostering regional stability and peace.
- **Strengthen Economic and Energy Ties:** India should **diversify its energy imports to reduce dependency** on West Asia. Enhancing **renewable energy** capabilities will help reduce reliance on West Asian oil over time.
  - Strengthening trade and investment relations with **GCC countries** is essential, focusing on sectors like **technology, defense, and infrastructure**.
  - The **India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** can significantly boost trade, and **similar agreements with other GCC nations** will safeguard India's economic interests, fostering **sustained growth and diversification of commercial ties**.
- **Countering Terrorism and Security Cooperation:** India should collaborate with **Israel, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain** through a **mutual security and military pact** with focus on **intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism operations, and joint military exercises** to address regional security concerns and combat common threats like extremism.
  - **Enhancing defense cooperation** with these countries will help India ensure the safety of its interests in the region.
- **Climate Change Resilience and Sustainable Development:** India should **enhance regional cooperation on climate change** through frameworks like **I2U2**, expanding it to **include more**

### West Asian countries.

- As West Asia faces **desertification**, India can assist by **sharing expertise in desertification management, water conservation strategies, and Desalination**. Collaborative initiatives can enhance the **resilience of arid landscapes**. **Knowledge exchange and joint efforts** in sustainable agriculture and water management will be key.
- **Enhanced Cultural Exchange and People-to-People Ties:** India should **strengthen academic partnerships, cultural diplomacy, and tourism**, while engaging with the **region's youth and academic institutions** to build long-term cooperation.
  - Cultural ties can be further deepened through **digital collaborations, media co-productions, youth diplomacy, and sports engagement**, exemplified by **IPL matches in the UAE** and the **IPL Auction in Saudi Arabia**, fostering mutual understanding and shared experiences.

## Conclusion

India's strategic interests in West Asia require a **balanced approach to navigate regional tensions**. By prioritizing **issue-based diplomacy and multilateral cooperation**, India can position itself as a stabilizing force in the region, safeguarding its national interests while contributing to peace and stability.

### **Drishti Mains Question**

Discuss the factors behind the persistent instability in West Asia and how India can maintain a balanced approach in its relations with the region.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Prelims**

**Q. 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**

**Q. The term "two-state solution" is sometimes mentioned in the news in the context of the affairs of (2018)**

- (a) China
- (b) Israel
- (c) Iraq
- (d) Yemen

**Ans: B**

## **Mains**

**Q.** "India's relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back." Discuss. (2018)

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