

Abraham Accords

August 23, 2021

The recent visit by the Indian Air Force chief, Air Chief Marshal R.K. Bhadauria, to Israel offers a window to study how New Delhi is taking advantage of the Abraham Accords deal signed between Israel and a consortium of Arab States led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2020.

In news: The Abraham Accords as India's West Asia bridge

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions:

- What is the accord?
- India-Israel relations
- India and Arab countries
- India's participation in multilateral military exercise
- Repercussions on India's relations with Iran

Content:

What is the accord?

- The **Abraham Accords** are a **joint statement made between Israel, the United States and the United Arab Emirates** on August 13, 2020.
- It **also refers to the agreement reached between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE to normalise relations** between the three.
- The accords are named after the patriarch Abraham who is regarded as a prophet in both Judaism and Islam.
- The Abraham Accords are comprise the following:
 - The Abraham Accords Declaration
 - Israel-UAE Agreement
 - Bahrain-Israel Agreement
- The Abraham Accords also **open the door for Muslims around the world to visit the historic sites in Israel**

and to peacefully pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem,
the third holiest site in Islam.

- The **agreement shows how the Arab countries are gradually decoupling themselves from the Palestine question.**
- **Israel agreed to suspend plans for annexing parts of the West Bank.** The agreement normalized what had long been informal but robust foreign relations between the two countries.
- The UAE thus became the third Arab country, after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994, to agree to formally normalize its relationship with Israel as well as the first Persian Gulf country to do so.

India-Israel relations:

- India recognized Israel only in 1950 but it was restricted only to consular relations due to geopolitical factors affecting India's foreign policy.
- **India developed full diplomatic relations with Israel only in 1992** with P.V. Narasimha Rao as India's prime minister.
- Since the birth of Israel in 1948, whose admission to the UN India subsequently opposed, Israeli leaders still sought full diplomatic ties.
- With the Indian government establishing full diplomatic ties in 1992, Israel pressed for full acknowledgement of bilateral relations on the international front.

Political Cooperation:

- Since the up-gradation of relations in 1992, defence and agriculture have become the two main pillars of the bilateral engagement.
- In 2017, Prime Minister Modi became the first-ever Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel.
- During this visit, the diplomatic relationship was upgraded to a strategic level and seven agreements/MoUs were signed in the areas of R&D, innovation, water,

agriculture and space.

- In 2018, the Israeli Prime Minister visited India, during which **Government to Government (G2G) agreement on cybersecurity, oil and gas cooperation**, film cooperation and air transport were signed, along with five other semi-government agreements.
- An increase in the high-level exchanges in recent times has expanded cooperation in areas like trade, agriculture, science and technology and security.

Military and strategic cooperation:

- India's arms trade with Israel had reached almost \$600 million in 2016, making Israel the second-largest source of defence equipment for India, after Russia.
- Both nations have enhanced bilateral military and intelligence cooperation since the official establishment of diplomatic relations.
- Israel was one of the few nations, including France and Russia, that did not condemn India's 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests.
- The common aspiration to fight the menace of terrorism led to the enhancement of defence cooperation.
- In February 2014, India and Israel signed three important agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters, Cooperation in Homeland Security and Protection of Classified Material.

Science and Technology cooperation:

- Under a Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement in 1993, Science and Technology institutions undertook joint research.
- Specific areas of cooperation include IT, biotechnology, lasers and electro-optics.
- Israel has also offered to assist with India's Clean Ganga Mission by providing its expertise in water management to address water scarcity.

- India has significantly benefited from Israeli's expertise and technologies in horticulture, mechanisation, protected cultivation, orchard and canopy management, nursery management, micro-irrigation and post-harvest management, particularly in Haryana and Maharashtra.
- Currently, Israeli drip-irrigation technologies and products are widely used in India.
- Furthermore, India is gaining Israel's expertise in managing and improving dairy farming and high milk yield.

Indian diaspora:

- There are approximately 85,000 Jews of Indian-origin in Israel (at least one Indian parent).
- The main waves of immigration into Israel from India took place in the 1950s and 1960s mostly from Maharashtra (Bene Israelis) and relatively smaller numbers from Kerala (Cochini Jews) and Kolkata (Baghdadi Jews).
- In recent years, some Indian Jews from the North Eastern States (Bnei Menashe) have been immigrating to Israel.

Economic Cooperation:

- The bilateral merchandise trade stood at \$5.02 billion (excluding defence) in 2016-17.
- While exports from India were \$3.06 billion, the import to India from Israel was \$1.96 billion.
- The diamond trade constitutes more than 53% of the bilateral trade.
- India is Israel's third-largest trading partner in Asia after China and Hong Kong.

India's stand on Israel-Palestine Issue

- India, for a very long time, had called for the **2-state solution** that supports the establishment of a sovereign

independent state of Palestine.

- However, India's stand on Israel-Palestine conflict has not hindered the growing diplomatic relationship with India and Israel.
- Yet, the **recent close ties with Israel have diluted India's stance on the issue.**
- In **2014**, India favoured a **UN resolution** that established a **Commission of Inquiry to investigate a violation of an international humanitarian and human rights law** in the "Occupied Territories" during **Operation Protective Edge conducted by Israel** in the Gaza Strip.
- However, the **Indian Government did not pass a resolution in the parliament** condemning the Israeli action, contrary to the earlier practices.
- At the **UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC)**, India abstained on the resolution that welcomed the report of the same Commission of Inquiry, making it the first time India had refused to vote against Israel at the UN.
- However, the Indian government clarified that this does not mean that there is a change in India's traditional support for the separate state of Palestine.
- Nevertheless, from the growing strategic ties, it is evident that India is distancing itself from advocating for the Palestinian cause.

India and Arab Countries:

- India has traditionally enjoyed close and friendly relations with Arab countries. These relations date back to ancient times.
- India's staunch commitment to the Palestinian cause, common views on major international developments and strong economic and commercial relations form the foundations of India-Arab relations today.
- India has stronger, multifaceted and growing socio-economic engagements with the Gulf countries.
- With over eight million Indian diaspora in the Gulf

remitting annually nearly \$50 billion, annual merchandise trade of over \$150 billion.

- The Middle East sources nearly two-thirds of India's hydrocarbon imports, major investments, etc.
- **India had welcomed the Abraham Accord**, highlighting its support for mechanisms that offer peace and stability in the region.
- **India has acquired a large and rewarding regional footprint**, particularly as the preferred source of manpower, food products, pharmaceuticals, gem and jewellery, light engineering items, etc.
- Indians are also the biggest stakeholders in Dubai's real estate, tourism and Free Economic Zones.

Changing Dynamics in India's relations in the Middle East

- Traditionally India has seen West Asia from the prism of 3 Nations: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel.
- **Saudi Arabia and Iran are the Arch rivals** in West Asia's geopolitics. Also Israel has hostility against the Arab World.
- **India has to balance its relations with 3 major powers of West Asia**, since it has stakes in all 3 nations.
- In the recent few years the dynamics of India West Asia relations have changed. Apart from these 3 major powers, India has expanded its relationships with other countries as well. India is heavily dependent on West Asia for its Domestic energy demands.
- On the other hand, **Israel is the strategic partner of India**. Israel is a major defense partner. Also as far as science and technology is concerned, Israel has expertise in Agricultural technologies and Water Management technologies.

India has always adopted a dehyphenation policy while dealing with Israel and the Arab world.

Mould your thought: Israeli foray into the Gulf has the

potential to disrupt the existing politico-economic architecture India has carefully built with the GCC states. Evaluate.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss the Abraham Accords
- Highlight the relations of India with Israel and Arab World in brief
- Discuss the changing dynamics of these relations
- Discuss how the Abraham Accords affect India-Iran relations
- Conclusion