India’s West Asia policy

Why in news?

- In November, India held its first joint commission meeting with the Palestinian Authority and this week will send a representative to a Paris meeting on reviving the West Asia peace process.

Are these moves mean something?

- None of this is path-breaking and still a far cry from the pre-1990 days when India was a vociferous supporter of the Palestinian cause.
- But there are reasons India is considering tentative steps in this direction.

What are the reasons?

- One, the transformation of relations between India and the UAE, with Saudi Arabia and Qatar a few steps behind, has meant the present government is beginning to shape what its officials call a “greater West Asia” policy.
- Besides some standard diplomatic and economic interests, India probably sees an opportunity to reduce Pakistan’s standing in a part of the world from which it has long received blind support.
- Two, Modi is personally a source of suspicion across much of the Arab and Muslim world thanks to the shadow of the 2002 Gujarat riots.
- Part of New Delhi’s problem is that it is increasingly hard to find Arab interlocutors it is comfortable with. There are few functional examples of
the secular, if largely undemocratic, Arab political parties or movements that India has traditionally preferred.

- **Three, India is likely to further expand its relationship with Israel.**
  
  - Already the larger importer of Israeli arms in the world, India now has a security relationship that extends to the most sensitive defence areas like nuclear weapons technology and doctrine.
  
  - Modi’s additional interest in the relationship is water. Israel is the acknowledged world leader in this area and the PM wants this to be a new pillar in the relationship.

---

**Do the renewed Palestine interest help India?**

- New Delhi knows that as it becomes closer to Tel Aviv there is an inevitable blowback in the Arab world. Showing renewed interest in Palestine is a useful means to help counter this.

- **New Delhi has used support for Palestinian nationalism as a foil to counter criticism of its shift to Tel Aviv for decades.**

  - Interestingly, in the joint commission meeting the Palestinians said they were pleased to talk to India because of its presumed influence on the Israelis.

---

**Will we involve in West Asian peace process?**

- New Delhi has **no interest in getting directly involved** in the West Asian peace process. It has neither the means and interest nor the diplomatic heft to do so.

  - And arguably there could be no worse time to do so than now — when polls show that support for a two-nation solution is at its lowest point among both Israelis and Palestinians.
That the cause is being suddenly picked up by the lamest of lame duck governments — Ex. The outgoing Barack Obama — is a sign what the international community actually thinks about its prospects.

**Conclusion:**

- India has other problems. One of them is its refusal to deal with Hamas, the Palestinian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, because of its dislike for non-secular Islamic groups. But to talk Palestine without Hamas is like speaking a language without vowels.

- None of this will matter for now. New Delhi’s interest in Palestine is about issues other than Palestine itself.

- As is true for much of the world. India’s proposal to build an infotech park in Gaza may be the most important and tangible contribution it can make to the Palestinians.

Category: Mains | GS - II | Bilateral Relations

Source: Hindustan Times