

18BPO64C- INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY- UNIT-3

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UNIT-3-INDIA AND WORLD PROBLEMS:

WEST ASIAN CRISIS:- West Asia also known as Middle East , comprises of the Gulf nations and other countries like Iran, Israel, and Palestine. This topic will trace West Asian crisis and India's position in the said crisis, specifically with regard to the Gulf countries.

This crisis is characterized by three major issues being the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Saudi Arabia- Iran rivalry and the Qatar diplomatic crisis.

The Israel Palestine conflict is about land and identity. The root cause for the conflict can be traced back to biblical times.

However, the modern day dispute started in the late 1800s and early 1990s when the then reign of Palestine was occupied largely by the Arabs. After the second world war ,a large number of Jews fleeing persecution arrived in West Asia and began to settle in Palestine. The Arabs saw this an invasion of their space and lead to the rise disputes against Jewish idea of Zionism.

In 1947, the United Nations advised in the splitting of the territory into there parts. The Arabs rejected the deal. In 1948 the State of Israel was established as the home for the Jewish people.

Violent wars broke out with the Palestinians demanding the right of return of the lands. There are many attempts at peaceful settlement,matters escalated in 2018, when the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran is largely relating to power and influence in West Asia, because ,both countries wanting to be

Islamic leaders in region. Both countries have extended their support to their own sects in international affairs.

The Qatar diplomatic crisis is the result of 9 countries cutting off relations with Qatar over its alleged support for terrorism. This move by Qatar's neighbours has seriously affected the tiny nation as Saudi Arabia has not only closed off the land borders it shares with it, but ships and planes flying the Qatar flag are banned.

INDIA'S STANCE IN THE WEST ASIAN CRISIS:

India's policy of neutrality is seen since the time of the cold war where it refused to ally itself with either the US led capitalist bloc or the USSR led communist bloc.

The country's history with Arab nations is ancient with trade having taken place between the regions for centuries. In today's world, with India's increasing energy needs, its leaders have acknowledged the geopolitical importance of West Asia.

Prime minister Narendra Modi and the then External affairs minister paid several high level visits to West Asia and India has also hosted West Asian leaders. Modi launched Link West Policy, first uttered by him at a Delhi conference on Make in India. This is akin to his Act East Policy, will the vision to strengthen ties with the Gulf and other western Asian countries.

Even amidst this West Asian crisis, India has long standing relationships with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. The country is, however, cautious of not commenting on any issues that are likely to affect the relationship and is careful to not exhibit any favouritism. This is vital as India relies on each Arab country for different reasons.

INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN:

Contact between the people of modern day India and Afghanistan has existed since the days of the Indus valley civilization. One of Alexander the great's Diadochi, Seleucus Nicator, controlled most of Afghanistan before ceding much of it to the Mauryan Empire in 305 BC as part of an alliance treaty.

India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet backed democratic republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s , though relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government.

Recently, the United Nations secretariat held a meeting of the "6+2+1" group on regional efforts to support peace in Afghanistan. This group includes six neighbouring countries: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, two global countries US and Russia, and Afghanistan itself. However, India has not been invited to this peace process.

Despite all the development work taken up by India and Afghanistan over the past 20 years since the Taliban were ousted from Kabul in 2001, it finds itself on the margins of international diplomacy in Afghanistan.

INDIA'S VOICE IN THE AFGHAN'S RECONCILIATION PROCESS: In the past ,due to terror activities of the Taliban, India has been very critical of the Taliban coming into power and shown resistance to publically dealing with the Taliban.

Under the US- Taliban peace deal , the Taliban will be in the centre of power in Afghanistan, as the US forces withdraw from Afghanistan.

In the present scenario, India has never announced its support for the US Taliban peace deal. Rather, India supports the Ashraf Ghani

government and backs the Idea of an Afghan led, Afghan owned , and Afghan controlled process.

Due to these factors, India's voice in the reconciliation process has been limited.

INDIA'S INTEREST IN AFGHANISTAN:

Economic and strategic interest: Afghanistan is a gateway to the oil and mineral- rich central Asian republics.

Afghanistan's main advantage is its geography,as anyone who is in power Afghanistan controls the land routes connecting India with Central Asia.

Developmental projects: The massive reconstruction plans for the country to offer a lot of opportunities for Indian companies.

Three major projects: the Afghan parliament, the Zaranj- Delaram Highway , and the Afghanistan- India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam) , along with India's assistance of more than \$3 billion in projects, hundreds of small development projects have cemented India's position in Afghanistan.

Security Interest: India has been the victim of state sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan supported terrorist group operating in the region. Thus, India has two priorities in Afghanistan.

To prevent Pakistan from setting up a friendly government in Afghanistan, and to avoid the return of Jihadi groups, like al Qaeda, which could strike in India.

India has been excluded from the Afghanistan peace process many times including the recent meeting (6+2+1 grouping)

This poses a challenge for India to secure its interest in deciding the fate of Afghanistan and its people.

STEPS TO BE TAKEN: The following steps are to be taken by the Indian government to strengthen the relationship with Afghanistan.

India must pursue opportunities to fulfill its role in the peace efforts in Afghanistan, starting with efforts to bridge the Ghani- Abdullah divide, and bringing together other major leaders with whom India built ties for decades.

India should take the diplomatic route to press for its inclusion in “6+2+1” dialogue, to claim its legitimate role in the Afghan peace process.

Also, India can learn from US Taliban talks where two opposing parties came to the negotiating table for talks on Afghanistan’s future.

In the current situation, it is essential for India to maintain its strong links with the Afghan government, build and support its traditional Afghan allies and open lines of communication with the Taliban.

INDIA AND IRAN:

Besides geographic proximity , India and Iran share a historic relationship that has its mark even today. However, despite these historic ties , both countries have not been able to take this relationship to the desired level.

Although several factors account for this failure , the biggest being the prevailing hostility between the US and Iran. Throughout the cold war era, both Tehran and Washington were close allies. However, this situation completely changed following the Iranian revolution and the 1979 hostage crisis. This sudden change between the US and Iran had an impact on Iran’s relationship with the rest of the world.

Since India is aspiring to become a global economic power, it is imperative for India to ensure a continuous supply of energy resources

has compelled India to maintain some level of Cooperation with Iran despite the US pressure.

Thus, New Delhi finds itself walking a tight rope balancing its relationship with energy rich Iran and the world's dominant power, the US.

From the economic perspective, Iran is the second largest supplier of crude oil to India , supplying more than 425,000 barrels of oil per day, and consequently India is one of the largest foreign investors in Iran's oil and gas industry.

In 2011, the US\$12 billion annual oil trade between India and Iran was halted due to extensive economic sanctions against Iran.

From the geopolitical perspective, even though the two countries share some common strategic interests , India and Iran differ significantly on key foreign policy issues. India has expressed strong opposition to Iran's nuclear programme and whilst both nations continue to oppose the Taliban, India supports the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan unlike Iran.

CURRENT RELATIONS:

India and Iran have friendly in many areas, despite not welcoming the 1979 Revolution. There are significant trade ties particularly in crude oil imports.

India welcomes Iran's inclusion as an observer state in the SAARC regional organization.

A growing number of students from Iran are enrolled at universities in India , most notably in Pune and Bengaluru.

Indian Shiites enjoy national holiday for Muharram.

Lucknow continues to be a major center of Shiite culture and Persian study in the subcontinent.

In August 2013, while carrying oil in the Persian Gulf , Iran detained India's largest ocean liner shipping corporation's vessel MT Desh Shanti carrying crude oil from Iraq.

On May 2016, prime minister Narendra Modi paid an official visit to Iran . The visit focused on bilateral connectivity and infrastructure, an energy partnership, and trade.

(For extensive reading refer books)