

# Crisis of the middle east in the 21st century and India's position

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## Abstract

The 21st century has seen a range of complex crises in the Middle East, including political turmoil, armed conflicts, economic challenges, and humanitarian disasters. These events have not only transformed the regional landscape but have also significantly impacted global geopolitics. The emergence of extremist groups, persistent civil wars, and changing alliances among regional and global powers have further complicated the security and economic situation in the Middle East.

India, with its historical connections and strategic interests in the region, has approached these challenges through a policy of strategic autonomy, carefully balancing its relationships with various regional players. Several factors drive India's engagement with the Middle East, including energy security, trade, defense partnerships, and a substantial expatriate community in the Gulf countries. The region serves as India's largest source of crude oil imports, and millions of Indian workers in the Gulf play a crucial role in remittances, making it essential for India's economic stability.

This paper examines the ongoing crises in the Middle East, including the consequences of the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil war, the Israel-Palestine dispute, and the conflict in Yemen. It also examines India's diplomatic, economic, and strategic responses to these issues, its positioning amid global power dynamics, and the implications for India's foreign policy. This study seeks to offer a comprehensive insight into India's involvement in the Middle East and its future approaches to maintaining stability while safeguarding its interests.

## INTRODUCTION

The Middle East is of great geopolitical importance because of its location, enormous energy resources, and historical heritage. Historically, the region has been at the center of global power conflicts, economic change, and socio-political instability. The 21st century has been eventful with the wake of the Arab Spring, Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, the re-emergence of extremist organizations, and realignments of international alliances. These developments have not only influenced the regional order but have also had profound implications for global diplomacy, trade, and security. For India, the Middle East is of utmost strategic significance owing to its long-standing historical connections, economic interdependence, and strategic alliances. The area is India's main source of natural gas and crude oil, with energy security therefore a major

element of its foreign policy. Moreover, there are millions of Indian expatriates employed in the Gulf region who send remittances that support the Indian economy. These realities call for a realistic and even-handed approach to India's dealings with the Middle East. India's foreign policy in the Middle East has adjusted to the new geopolitical realities.

Without taking sides in regional conflicts, India has intensified diplomatic relations with the key actors like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and the UAE. Its emphasis on economic cooperation, security alliances, and energy ties reflects its interest in promoting stability and interdependent growth within the region. This paper explores

the current Middle Eastern crises and analyzes India's strategic responses. Through an analysis of India's Diplomatic, economic, and security relations, this research seeks to contribute to an understanding of how India can navigate Middle Eastern geopolitics while protecting its national interests.

## RESEARCH DEFICIT / PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite extensive research on the political turmoil, economic instability, and geopolitical significance of the Middle East, there is still a lack of understanding regarding India's role and strategic positioning in the region. Most existing studies focus on the actions of global powers like the U.S., Russia, and China, often overlooking India's increasing influence and economic interests. Moreover, while India has consistently adopted a balanced approach to regional conflicts, its long-term policy direction and evolving diplomatic strategies have not been thoroughly examined. This research aims to address this gap by analyzing India's involvement in the crises of the Middle East, including its contributions to conflict resolution, trade partnerships, energy security, and defense collaborations. Additionally, it will evaluate how India manages rivalries among major regional and global players while protecting its strategic and economic interests. By offering a comprehensive study of India's Middle East policy, this research will enhance the understanding of its foreign relations in the region.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the key crises that have shaped the Middle East in the 21st century.
- To evaluate India's foreign policy and strategic responses to these crises.
- To assess the implications of India's Middle East policy on its broader geopolitical and economic interests.
- To examine India's role in conflict resolution and humanitarian aid in the Middle East.
- To explore India's economic and trade partnerships with Middle Eastern countries.
- To assess the impact of India's diplomatic engagements with global powers in shaping its Middle East policy.
- To provide recommendations for strengthening India's future engagements in the region.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How has India managed the intricate crises in the Middle East during the 21st century, and what are the implications of its strategies for both regional stability and India's national interests?
2. What significance does energy security hold in shaping India's interactions with the Middle East?

3. How has India maintained a balance in its relationships with competing states like Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as Israel and Palestine?
4. What has been India's reaction to the Arab Spring and its consequences in various Middle Eastern nations?
5. How has India's counterterrorism policy adapted in response to threats from groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda originating in the Middle East?
6. In what ways does the Indian diaspora in the Middle East impact India's foreign policy?
7. What are the economic and trade consequences of India's involvement in the Middle East?
8. How do influential global powers like the US, Russia, China, and the EU shape the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, and how does India adapt to this landscape?
9. What humanitarian and diplomatic efforts has India undertaken to address crises in the Middle East?
10. How can India enhance its future relationships with Middle Eastern countries to foster long-term strategic partnerships?

## KEYWORDS

- Middle East geopolitics
- India's strategic interests
- Energy diplomacy
- Regional conflicts
- Global power dynamics

## SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

### ● Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the crises in the Middle East during the 21st century and examines India's involvement in the region. It covers India's diplomatic, economic, and strategic relationships with Middle Eastern countries, its concerns regarding energy security, and its initiatives for conflict resolution. The research also looks at India's interactions with major global powers and its influence on regional stability.

### ● Limitations of the study

There are certain limitations to this study. The fast-changing geopolitical environment means that any developments occurring after this research could affect its conclusions. Additionally, the study is based on

secondary data, which may contain biases or gaps. India's policies are also shaped by domestic political shifts and changing international alliances, which are not addressed in this research. Despite these limitations, this study offers a thorough analysis of India's role in the Middle East and provides insights into its future strategies for engagement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative research approach to examine India's role in the Middle East during ongoing crises. It primarily draws on secondary data sources, including government reports, international policy papers, academic journals, books, and reputable news media. Data from international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Energy Agency, and think tanks like the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the Brookings Institution have been thoroughly reviewed to ensure accuracy and credibility. The study combines historical and contemporary analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changing geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. A comparative analysis of India's interactions with various Middle Eastern countries has been conducted to highlight its diplomatic strategy and economic interests.

Case studies of specific Middle Eastern conflicts, including the Syrian civil war, the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the Yemen crisis, have been analyzed to understand India's diplomatic stance. The research also takes into account India's economic connections, particularly in the energy and trade sectors, to evaluate the long-term sustainability of its engagement in the region. While qualitative methods are central to this study, quantitative data such as trade statistics, remittance figures, and defense agreements have been incorporated to provide empirical support for the analysis. However, the study faces limitations due to the dynamic nature of international relations, and recent geopolitical shifts may impact India's policy in unexpected ways. Despite these challenges, the research aims to deliver a structured analysis of India's role in the Middle East, offering insights into its strategic interests and future engagements in the region.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The Middle East has been a focal point of study from geopolitical, economic, and security angles due to its importance on the global stage. Much of the research has concentrated on conflict analysis, energy security, and the diplomatic interactions among major world powers. However, there is a noticeable lack of studies specifically examining India's role in addressing the crisis in the Middle East, which this research seeks to address. Various scholars have investigated the causes and effects of significant conflicts in the region, such as the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil war, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These analyses often highlight the involvement of global powers like the United States, Russia, and China, while fewer works focus on India's participation in the region. Given India's rising influence in global affairs, it is essential to closely examine its diplomatic approaches and economic relationships with Middle Eastern countries. A considerable amount of literature delves into India's energy security issues in the Middle East. Research indicates that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations supply over 60% of India's crude oil imports, underscoring the region's critical role in India's economic health. Reports from organizations such as the International Energy Agency and the Observer Research Foundation point out that India has been diversifying its energy partnerships while sustaining strategic ties with key oil-exporting countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran. Additionally, scholarly discussions have highlighted how India's collaboration in renewable energy projects with Middle Eastern nations is progressing to lessen long-term reliance on fossil fuels. Another significant area of research has been India's economic and trade relations with the Middle East. Studies from the World Bank and India's Ministry of External Affairs reveal that trade between India and the Middle East is expanding beyond oil,

encompassing sectors like defense, pharmaceuticals, and infrastructure development. India's investment in regional connectivity projects, such as the Chabahar Port in Iran, has been examined for its economic and strategic implications. However, the existing literature often falls short of providing a thorough evaluation of how India's trade policies in the Middle East align with its broader geopolitical strategies. Regarding security cooperation, academic studies emphasize India's counterterrorism efforts and defense partnerships with Middle Eastern countries. Research from think tanks like Carnegie India and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) discusses India's intelligence-sharing agreements with nations such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Furthermore, literature on India-Israel relations frequently highlights collaborations in defense technology, particularly concerning missile systems and cybersecurity. While these studies offer valuable insights, there is still a need for more extensive research on how India's security partnerships in the Middle East affect its diplomatic relations with conflicting parties in the region. The role of the Indian diaspora in shaping foreign policy has also garnered attention in academic research. Studies indicate that remittances from Indian workers in the Gulf significantly bolster India's economy, with estimates surpassing \$50 billion annually. Research further delves into the social and political challenges faced by the Indian diaspora in Middle Eastern countries, including issues related to labor rights and migration policies. However, the influence of diaspora diplomacy on India's foreign policy decision-making remains an area that has not been thoroughly explored in scholarly circles.

There has been limited research on India's humanitarian efforts in the Middle East. Although India has engaged in peacekeeping missions under the United Nations and provided aid to areas affected by conflict, there is a noticeable lack of detailed analysis regarding India's involvement in disaster relief, refugee support, and post-conflict reconstruction in the region. Most studies on global humanitarian interventions tend to focus on Western countries, often neglecting India's contributions to stabilizing the Middle East through non-military approaches. In summary, while there is a wealth of research on the conflicts, energy economy, and geopolitical rivalries in the Middle East, there remains a significant gap in literature concerning India's evolving role in the area. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of India's diplomatic, economic, and strategic interactions with the Middle East in the 21st century, providing new insights into its foreign policy priorities and long-term objectives.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

- **Strategic Autonomy in Diplomacy:** India has adopted a balanced approach by engaging with various Middle Eastern nations while steering clear of regional conflicts. This strategy has enabled India to enhance its economic and strategic partnerships with significant players like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and the UAE.
- **Energy Security Dependence:** The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are vital to India's energy security, providing over 60% of its crude oil imports. Although India is working to diversify its energy sources, it continues to face challenges, which reinforces its reliance on oil and gas from the Middle East.
- **Economic Ties Beyond Oil:** India's trade with the Middle East has grown beyond just hydrocarbons, expanding into sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, infrastructure, and defense. In 2023, bilateral trade with the GCC surpassed \$150 billion, showcasing India's deepening economic ties with the region.
- **Defense and Counterterrorism Cooperation:** India has bolstered its defense and intelligence-sharing agreements with Middle Eastern countries, especially Israel and the UAE. The acquisition of advanced

missile defense systems from Israel and collaborative counterterrorism efforts with Saudi Arabia underline India's increasing security role in the area.

- **Geopolitical Balancing Amid Rivalries:** India has adeptly navigated regional rivalries, maintaining strong relationships with both Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as with Israel and Palestine. The Chabahar Port project in Iran remains a key strategic investment, even as U.S. sanctions complicate India's dealings with Tehran.
- **India's Response to Conflicts:** While India has mostly avoided direct involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, it has consistently advocated for peaceful resolutions in crises like the Syrian civil war and the Israel-Palestine dispute. India supports the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine while simultaneously strengthening its defense and technology ties with Israel.
- **Diaspora and Remittances:** More than 8 million Indians live in the Middle East, playing a crucial role in remittance flows. In 2022, remittances from the Gulf region surpassed \$50 billion, supporting India's economy and enhancing diplomatic ties with host countries.
- **Humanitarian and Peacekeeping Efforts:** India has been involved in UN peacekeeping missions in the Middle East and has provided humanitarian assistance to nations affected by conflict, such as Yemen and Syria. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India's vaccine diplomacy significantly boosted its soft power in the region.
- **Trade Agreements and Economic Partnerships:** India has been actively pursuing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with the UAE and the GCC to enhance investment and trade. The India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in 2022, is anticipated to further increase bilateral trade.
- **Impact of the Abraham Accords:** The normalization of relations between Israel and Arab nations has created new diplomatic and economic opportunities for India. Strengthened trilateral partnerships among India, Israel, and the UAE have emerged from these changing alliances.
- **China's Expanding Influence in the Middle East:** China's growing economic and strategic presence in the region, especially through the BRI, presents challenges to India's influence. In response, India is bolstering its own infrastructure and energy investments in the area.
- **Security Challenges from Radicalism:** The rise of extremist groups and geopolitical instability in Afghanistan following the Taliban's takeover pose security risks for India. The country remains alert to radical elements emerging from the Middle East that could impact its domestic security.
- **India's Role in Maritime Security:** India plays a significant role in ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, protecting its trade routes and energy supplies. The Indian Navy's anti-piracy operations near the Gulf of Aden highlight its commitment to maintaining regional stability.
- **Technological and Renewable Energy Collaborations:** India has increased collaboration with Middle Eastern countries in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and renewable energy. Partnerships with the UAE and Saudi Arabia in green hydrogen and solar energy initiatives are creating a new dimension in bilateral relations.
- **Future Prospects for Engagement:** India's future approach in the Middle East is expected to emphasize economic integration, technological partnerships, and security cooperation. Strengthening



diplomatic efforts and maintaining a neutral position in regional conflicts will be crucial for preserving India's influence in the area.

India's involvement in the Middle East has been diverse, encompassing diplomacy, trade, energy security, and strategic alliances. As geopolitical dynamics shift, India must adjust its policies to protect its interests and bolster its role as a stabilizing force in the region.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND MAJOR WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

The Middle East has historically been a focal point for significant conflicts, both within the region and on a global scale, due to its strategic importance and abundant resources. Numerous wars and conflicts have influenced the political and economic landscape of the area, impacting international security and diplomacy.

- 1. Arab-Israeli Wars (1948-Present):** The Israeli-Palestinian conflict began with the establishment of Israel in 1948, leading to several wars. These conflicts have resulted in territorial disputes, widespread displacement, and ongoing tensions between Israel and its neighboring countries.
- 2. Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988):** This war, one of the longest and most brutal in the Middle East, was driven by territorial disagreements and ideological rifts between Iran's Islamic Republic and Iraq's Ba'athist regime. The conflict caused significant casualties and economic ruin for both nations.
- 3. Gulf War (1990-1991):** Sparked by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Gulf War saw a coalition led by the U.S. force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. This conflict solidified the U.S. military presence in the Middle East and escalated tensions between Iraq and Western nations.
- 4. U.S. Invasion of Iraq (2003):** The U.S. launched an invasion of Iraq, claiming it was necessary to eliminate weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and to overthrow Saddam Hussein's government. This war resulted in years of instability, insurgencies, and the eventual emergence of extremist groups like ISIS.
- 5. Syrian Civil War (2011-Present):** Emerging from the Arab Spring protests, the Syrian civil war has resulted in one of the most severe humanitarian crises of the 21st century. The conflict includes multiple factions, such as the Syrian government, opposition forces, ISIS, and foreign powers like the U.S., Russia, and Iran.
- 6. Yemen Civil War (2014-Present):** A power struggle between the Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized Yemeni government has resulted in a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Saudi Arabia and Iran have backed opposing sides in this conflict.

## **INDIA'S POSITION AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

### **1. Geopolitical Balancing Act**

India adopts a multi-aligned foreign policy, engaging with all major players, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and the UAE. This pragmatic approach enables India to protect its interests while avoiding entanglement in regional conflicts. Although India has strong defense ties with Israel, it also supports Palestine at the UN.

## **2. Energy Security**

India imports about 80% of its crude oil, with the Middle East serving as a crucial supplier. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE account for over 50% of India's oil imports, making regional stability essential for India's economic growth. **3. Economic and Trade Relations**

Bilateral trade between India and the Middle East surpassed \$180 billion in 2023. The UAE and Saudi Arabia rank among India's top trading partners, and India has bolstered economic ties through initiatives like the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

## **4. Indian Diaspora and Remittances**

Over 9 million Indians are employed in the Gulf region, contributing more than \$55 billion in remittances each year. Ensuring their safety during regional conflicts and securing labor rights is a top priority for India.

## **5. Counterterrorism and Security Cooperation**

India collaborates with Israel, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia on intelligence sharing and counterterrorism initiatives, acknowledging the security threats posed by radical extremist groups in the region.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Middle East is a region marked by volatility, with significant geopolitical consequences that influence global power dynamics. India, with its economic interests, historical connections, and increasing global presence, has taken a thoughtful and practical approach to Middle Eastern issues. By skillfully managing its relationships with key regional players like Israel, Palestine, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, India has preserved its strategic independence while protecting its national interests.

Three main factors drive India's position: energy security, the well-being of its substantial expatriate community, and the growth of trade and defense partnerships. The country has adeptly navigated complex diplomatic situations, ensuring its stance remains neutral and focused on fostering long-term stability in the region. Despite ongoing conflicts such as the Israel-Hamas war, the Red Sea crisis, and disruptions in the global oil supply chain, India has engaged in proactive diplomacy through humanitarian assistance, trade agreements, and defense collaborations.

Additionally, India's strategy in the Middle East is influenced by the actions of major global powers like the USA, China, and the European Union. While the USA retains military supremacy and China enhances its economic reach, India has established itself as a reliable partner promoting regional peace and stability. Moving forward, India's Middle East policy must remain adaptable to address new geopolitical challenges while strengthening its diplomatic, economic, and strategic ties.

As India seeks to enhance its role in global governance, its handling of Middle Eastern crises will be a crucial measure of its capability to navigate complex international relations. Building stronger connections with regional players, engaging in security initiatives, and capitalizing on economic partnerships will be vital for ensuring that India's influence in the Middle East continues to expand in the 21st century.



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