



India and the Abraham Accords



Context:

- The White House ceremony on 15th September 2020 marking the formal normalisation of Israel's ties with UAE and Bahrain has created a significant inflection point in regional history and geopolitics.
- Under the agreement, the **UAE and Bahrain would normalise ties with Israel**, leading to better economic, political and security engagement.

Some facts:

- Except with Jordan and Egypt, Israel does not have diplomatic relations with Gulf Arab states owing to its long-standing conflict with Palestinians
- Israel had signed peace agreements with **Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994**.

How is the September 15 reconciliation different from previous peace agreements (1979 & 1994)?

- Firstly, UAE and Bahrain **do not have any territorial dispute** with Israel, nor have they ever been at war with it.

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- Although formally committed to an **Arab consensus** (two-state resolution of the Palestine cause) UAE & Bahrain have steadily moved towards having substantive links with Israel in recent years.
- Hence, the 'Abraham Accords' entered with the UAE and Bahrain are 'peace-for-peace' deals without any physical quid pro quo by Israel.

What are the implications of Abraham Accord for India?

- Geopolitically, India has welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel, calling both its strategic partners.
- India has stronger, multifaceted and growing socioeconomic engagements with Israel and the Gulf countries. Therefore, any changes in regional dynamics will impact the India's Strategic interests in the region.
- The new accord widens the moderate constituency for peaceful resolution of the Palestine dispute, easing India's diplomatic balancing act.
- The possibility of the southern Gulf becoming the new arena of the proxy war between Iran and Israel cannot be ruled out, particularly in Shia pockets. India would have to be on its guard to monitor such conflicts.
- The Israel-GCC ties may provoke new polarisations between the Jihadi fringe and the mainstream.
- 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. This position could be challenged by Israel which has niche strength in defence, security, solar power, horticulture etc.
- For decades, one of the main sources of instability in West Asia has been the cold war between Saudi Arabia (Sunni) and Iran (Shia). This accord may make the rift wider and more violent, thus testing India-Iran relations.

Conclusion

- India should use this opportunity to give itself a bigger role in a region which is its strategic backyard.
- The deal opens up new opportunities for India to play a much larger role in the regional security and stability in the Gulf, where New Delhi enjoys special relations with both Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem.
- In the evolving scenario, there may be scope for a profitable trilateral synergy, but India cannot take its preponderance as a given.